



## PERSONAL STATEMENTS and STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE

Personal statements and statements of purpose are ways for graduate admissions committees (usually made up of program faculty and current graduate students) to learn more about you as an applicant. It is your chance to “sell” your abilities and to tell *your* story.

Like the personal statement you wrote to get into UCLA, the graduate school personal statement allows you to give a more complete picture of yourself than can be gleaned from your transcript and CV or resume. However, unlike your UCLA personal statement, the personal statement or statement of purpose for graduate or professional school should highlight what interests you about the program AND what you will contribute to their program in terms of research, seminar discussions, conferences and other collaborative opportunities.

Central questions you should answer in your graduate school personal statement or statement of purpose:

- What interests and qualifications make you the ideal applicant for this program?
- Why are you pursuing a career in this field?

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. HOW LONG SHOULD MY PERSONAL STATEMENT BE?** Many personal statements for professional schools have a character limit. Personal statements for graduate school, however, are usually between 2-3 pages long 1.5 or double-spaced with regular margins and in easy to read font (Calibri, Times New Roman, etc.).

**2. CAN I USE THE SAME PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR EVERY INSTITUTION I AM APPLYING TO?** The personal statement needs to be targeted to each individual school, relating your experiences and qualifications to each individual institution. Make sure the reader knows why you are choosing their school and their program and that you have read and answering the specific questions they have posed.

**3. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PERSONAL STATEMENT AND THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?**

Personal Statement	Statement of Purpose
storytelling of experiences related to who you are & how they shaped your interest in the field	Focuses on your reasons for applying; include professional & intellectual & research interests and the expertise you have gained

<b>GENERAL GUIDELINES for</b>	
<b>PERSONAL STATEMENTS</b>	<b>STATEMENTS of PURPOSE</b>
<p><b>TELL A STORY:</b> For personal statements, engage the reader, use a writing style that is fresh and active. Don't be afraid to use dialogue and descriptive language. Back up statements with examples and details.</p>	<p><b>SHOW THAT YOU KNOW SOMETHING:</b> The main section explains what you know and who you are. Show knowledge of your field (e.g., a specific research focus) or your profession. Show how you will impact the field, or what has impacted you in the pursuit of your field.</p>
<p><b>HAVE AN ANGLE:</b> Even if your life has been less than dramatic, you still have a story to tell. The best approach to the "angle" is to find a THEME that can unify all your paragraphs.</p>	<p><b>FOCUS ON YOUR SPECIFIC RESEARCH or PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS WITHIN A PARTICULAR FIELD:</b> Detail how your academic and professional experiences have developed those research or professional interests and prepared you to pursue them at a higher academic level. Include courses, experts whose work you admire or aligns with your interests, and factors such as internship opportunities or opportunities provided by the school's location</p>
<p><b>PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO YOUR "LEAD":</b> In the first paragraph, you will either grab attention or you will lose it. Use the lead to set the tone and direction for the statement. Note: the lead can, but does not have to be an attention grabbing story. The goal of the lead is for the readers to know who you are and what your goal is by the end of the first paragraph.</p>	<p><b>YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS &amp; THE PROGRAM:</b> Explain how your research interests can be pursued at this particular institution in this particular program.</p>
<b>GENERAL GUIDELINES for BOTH PERSONAL STATEMENTS and STATEMENTS of PURPOSE</b>	
<p><b>ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE ASKED:</b> Lots of schools may ask for similar information, but not all are the same. Use different statements for different schools, depending on the requirements.</p>	
<p><b>BE VERY WARY OF SOME TOPICS:</b> Accomplishments that happened in high school are generally irrelevant. Do not be controversial. Your content choice speaks volumes about your general judgment.</p>	
<p><b>AVOID CLICHÉS:</b> Statements like, "I like science" or "I want to help people," aren't specific enough reasons to pursue a graduate or professional degree.</p>	

<b>DO YOUR RESEARCH:</b> What sets that particular program apart? Why does that program attract you?
<b>STAY FOCUSED ON WHAT YOU CAN OFFER:</b> What can you offer them?
<b>PERFECTION IS A MUST:</b> Be meticulous and thorough with your editing.
<b>WATCH OUT FOR 'I' STATEMENTS:</b> Be careful that every statement does not begin with 'I'. Vary the sentence beginnings – one way to do this is to focus on the program and the field.
<b>AVOID:</b>
Simply listing or telling stories about all the points that can be found in your resume or CV.
Sounding defensive or self-pitying. Instead, take responsibility for challenging or difficult life circumstances and show how you have grown as a person and as a potential candidate.
Preaching to your reader or telling them information that they already know. E.g., don't summarize the research of a professor in the program you are applying to. They know what they have done.
Talking about money as a motivating factor in your decision making process.

## SAMPLE PERSONAL STATEMENT PROMPTS

Below are some sample prompts for personal statements from common fields of graduate study. These prompts were adapted from actual prompts by programs in these fields. Notice how some are purposefully vague while others are very specific. Do you notice any overarching themes or commonalities in these prompts?

### **Medical School:**

Use this section of the application to compose a personal essay explaining why you want to study the field of medicine.

### **Law School:**

Please provide a separate essay not to exceed two double-spaced typed pages using 12 point font. In this essay you may discuss any attributes, experiences, or interests that would enable you to make a distinctive contribution to the law school and/or the legal profession.

### **Business School:**

Essay #1: In 600 words or less, briefly assess your career progress to date. Elaborate on your future career plans and your motivation for pursuing an MBA.

Essay #2: Complete the following statement, 'people may be surprised to learn that I...'

Essay #3: Tell us about an accomplishment you are proud of and how it relates to the person you are.

### **PhD in Humanities:**

Applicants should describe their research interests and professional objectives and how this program is a good match for their interests. While there is no prescribed length, statements are generally 1-2 pages single spaced.

**SOURCES:**

DePaul University Career Center. (n.d.) Preparing personal statements for graduate school and professional programs.

depaulcareercenterPreparing%20Personal%20Statements%205-31-12.pdf.

Ohio Wesleyan University Writing Center. (2011). Sample scholarship personal essays and research proposals. Sample-Scholarship-Personal-Essays-and-Research-Proposals.pdf.

University of Central Missouri Career Services. (n.d.) The personal statement. PersonalStatementucmo%20(1).pdf

