

# Personal Statement Essay Criteria

## What's the Purpose?

A review committee wants to get to know you. They will determine if you are worth the investment. Do you have a realistic plan? Will you finish? What proof do you have that supports your goals, dreams, etc.? This is an opportunity for you to highlight your future interests and why others should invest and/or select you.

## Reflective Questions Before You Write:

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
- What are your career goals?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the review committee to be interested in you?

## General Advice

### **BE YOURSELF!**

- Your essay should be original, focused, genuine, and express confidence

### **Follow the application rules**

- Font size? Spacing? Length? Etc.

### **Write a first draft, edit, revise**

- Start early and put quality time and energy into drafting your personal statement. It is the foundation to many applications.
- Ask others who are experts to read, edit, and assist.

### **Answer the questions that are asked**

- The questions may be similar in different applications, but will be worded differently with specific criteria.
- Don't use the same general essay for every application. Know your audience and question details.
- Keep the question in front of you as you write, and refer to it often.

### **Tell a story**

- Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is to bore a review committee. If your statement is fresh, lively, and different, you'll be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself memorable.

### **Be specific**

- Don't, for example, state that you would make an excellent teacher unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, lineman, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

### **Find an angle ~ Make it distinctive/memorable**

- If you're like most people, your life story lacks drama, so figuring out a way to make it interesting becomes the big challenge. Finding an angle or a "hook" is vital.

### **Concentrate on your opening paragraph**

- The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement.

### **Write well and correctly**

- Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many review committees say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.

### **Avoid clichés**

- A medical school applicant who writes that he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought. Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements.

### **Write in First Person**

- Remember that you and your experiences are the subject of the essay.
- Do not start every sentence with "I".

### **Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Pitfalls**

1. Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application
2. Do not complain or whine about the "system" or circumstances in your life
3. Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme
4. Do not talk about money as a motivator
5. Do not discuss your minority status or disadvantaged background unless you have a compelling and unique story that relates to it
6. Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions
  - "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is..."
  - "This question asks me to discuss..."
  - "I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application."
  - "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school."
  - "In sum, there are three reasons why you should admit me..."
7. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages
8. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
9. Do not get the name of the school/program/scholarship wrong
10. Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words

*(Stewart, Mark Alan. Perfect Personal Statements. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996)*

### **Possible Personal Essay Starters:**

If I \_\_\_\_\_  
In \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_  
My passion \_\_\_\_\_  
My wish \_\_\_\_\_  
Elma High School has shaped me \_\_\_\_\_  
I am who I am because \_\_\_\_\_  
When I \_\_\_\_\_  
My dream \_\_\_\_\_  
(Your Name) is defined \_\_\_\_\_  
Who is \_\_\_\_\_?  
My quest/goal \_\_\_\_\_  
The quote I live by \_\_\_\_\_  
I am a proud Grays Harbor resident because \_\_\_\_\_

### **Reference/Resources:**

<https://wts.indiana.edu/writing-guides/personal-statements-and-application-letters.html>

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job\\_search\\_writing/preparing\\_an\\_application/writing\\_the\\_personal\\_statement/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/preparing_an_application/writing_the_personal_statement/index.html)