



Writing a Personal Statement

Selling Yourself to Your Future College



Why is it Important to Write a Strong Personal Statement?

- It's a chance to
 - Show your **personality**
 - Demonstrate your ability to write
 - Affirm your desire to attend that program of study



Rule One: Know Thy Audience

- Read the personal statement guidelines.
 - What do they want to know about you?
 - What personal qualities do they value?
 - What type of student are they looking for?
- Who am I?
- What do I want you to know?



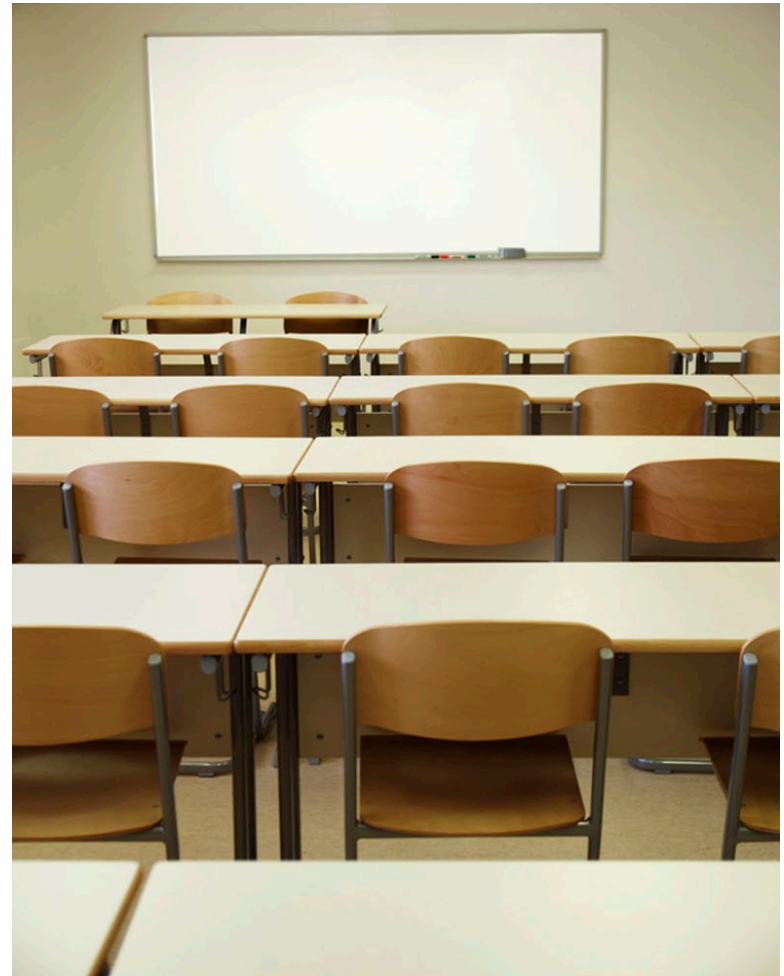
Unspoken Questions

- Have you done your research?
- Can you follow directions?
- Do you really want this opportunity?



Prompts:

- UC:
- Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
- Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?



Other Prompts:

- 1. Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence."
(Common Application)
- 2. If you could choose to be anyone for an entire day, fictional or non-fictional, who would you choose and how would this choice affect who you are as a person?



Personal Elements: What Makes a Great Essay:

- Cultural understanding
- Educational challenges and personal hardships
- Community, Military or Volunteer Service
- Experiential learning
- Stand out by being yourself: tell about a trip, describe a community service project, a political issue or the significance of the sport you like.
- Details: use concrete evidence- show not tell
- Tell a story-use adjectives!
- Think metaphorically



Format

- There may be two different formation options:
 - Online submission options
 - Hard copy submission options
- When you submit online, some formatting may be lost. This may count against you if there's a word count.
- For my class: Minimum 2 pages, typed, MLA format.
- For submission: Follow the directions for your university

Getting Started

- Read the questions
- Generate response
 - Brainstorm
 - Idea Mapping (Clustering)
- Research material that supports your responses
- Create outline organizing this information

Qualities to emphasize:

- Have a sense of humor
- Value diversity
- Notice little things
- Committed to an activity or idea
- Can overcome adversity
- Have initiative

Use a “Theme” to Organize Your Ideas

- Theme = A Unifying Idea
- Examples:
 - Overcoming obstacles
 - Helping others
 - Taking on great challenges
- Creates coherence and unity



Theme example: Show, Don't Tell

Theme:

Overcoming obstacles

Example:

As the first person in my family to attend college, I had to convince my brothers and sisters that higher education was a worthwhile pursuit. Although my brothers made fun of me for attending community college, I never wavered in my dedication to succeed.

Patterns of Organization

- Narrative
 - Tells a story with a beginning, middle & end
 - Can touch on important events over your whole life
 - Can focus on one period of your life that illustrates all the points you want to highlight
- Associative
 - More like a point by point essay
 - Shouldn't laboriously cover their points (i.e. here is my points about diversity, now here comes my over coming an obstacle paragraph)
 - It should address the questions they have about you, but you should make your own unique points

Techniques to Make a Better Letter

- Tie all your examples and life events in with the central theme of your statement
- Find natural connections that bridge each part of your essay to the next
- Hook the reader at the beginning
- Use concrete details, not vague ideas
- Use echoes to reinforce theme
- Check and double check grammar and spelling



Things to Avoid

- Clichés
- Fawning over the school
- Talking about money as a motivator
- Complain about your life
- Spell the school name wrong
- Gimmicks
- Boredom
- Informal tone
- Slang
- Poor grammar and spelling
- Why me stories

- Don't go there!



Be Creative, Be an Individual

- Set yourself apart
- Show off your individuality
- Demonstrate why you're special



Make Them Know You Better

- Yes!

To test whether you have written a good Personal Statement essay, ask yourself the following:

“Will the reader (the admission’s counselor) have a vivid picture of who I am after he/she is done reading the essay?”

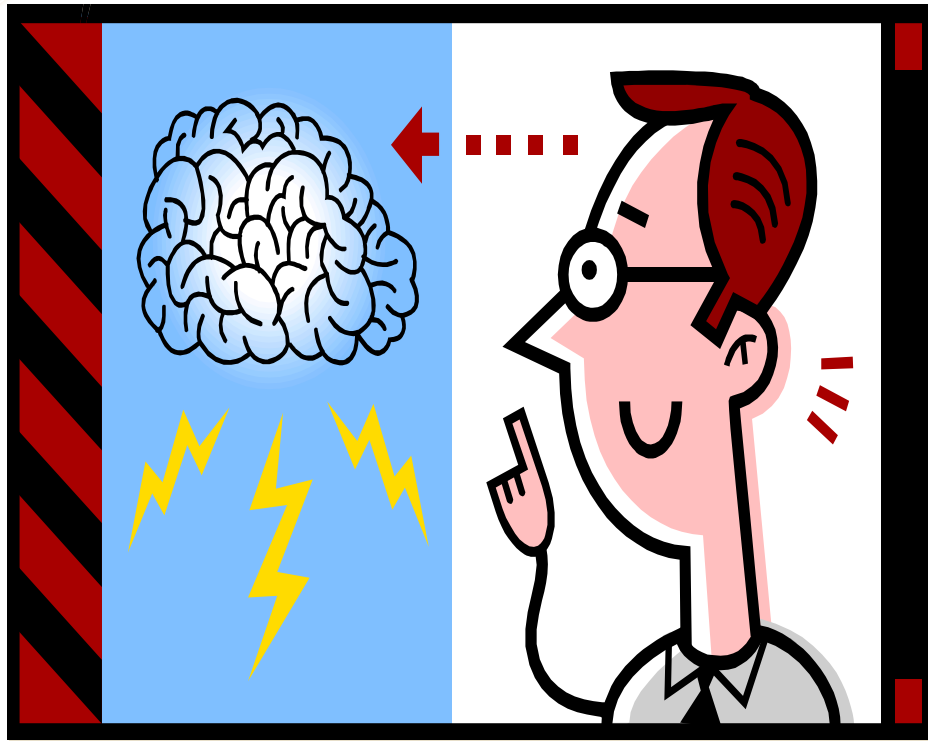
If you answer “yes”, you have succeeded.



Analyzing a Personal Statement

- Form groups of 3-4 people
- Read the Personal Statements Provided
- Discuss the Strengths and Weaknesses of each Statement



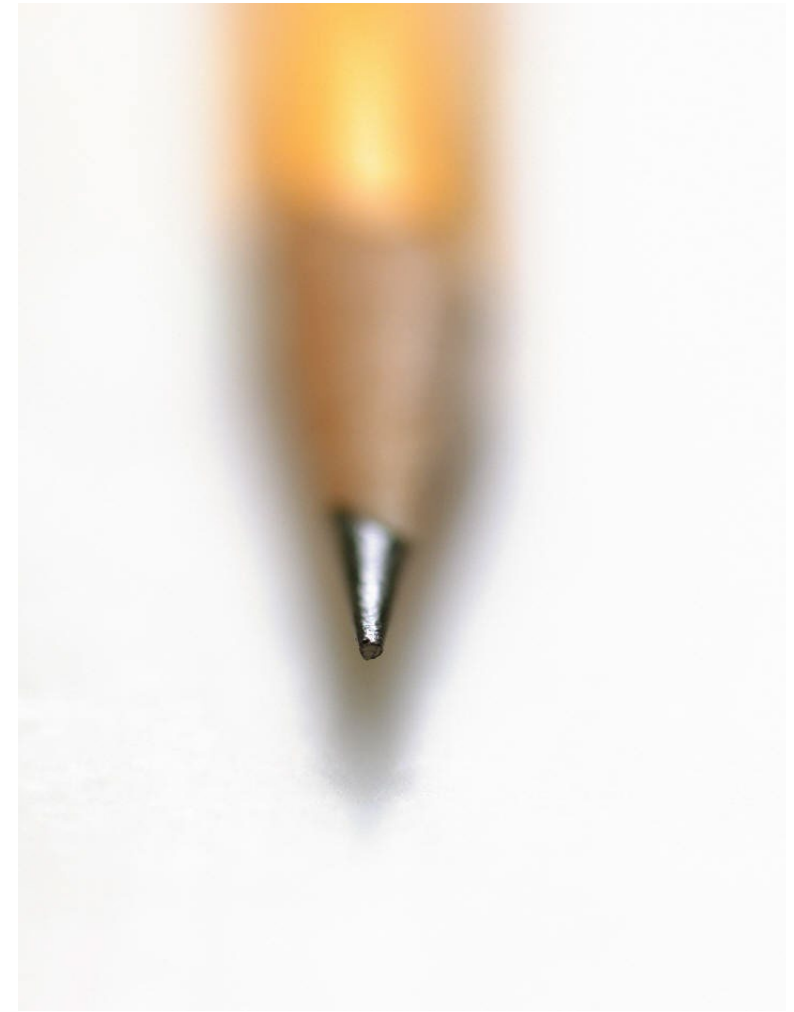


Brainstorming for Your Personal Theme

Individualizing Your Story

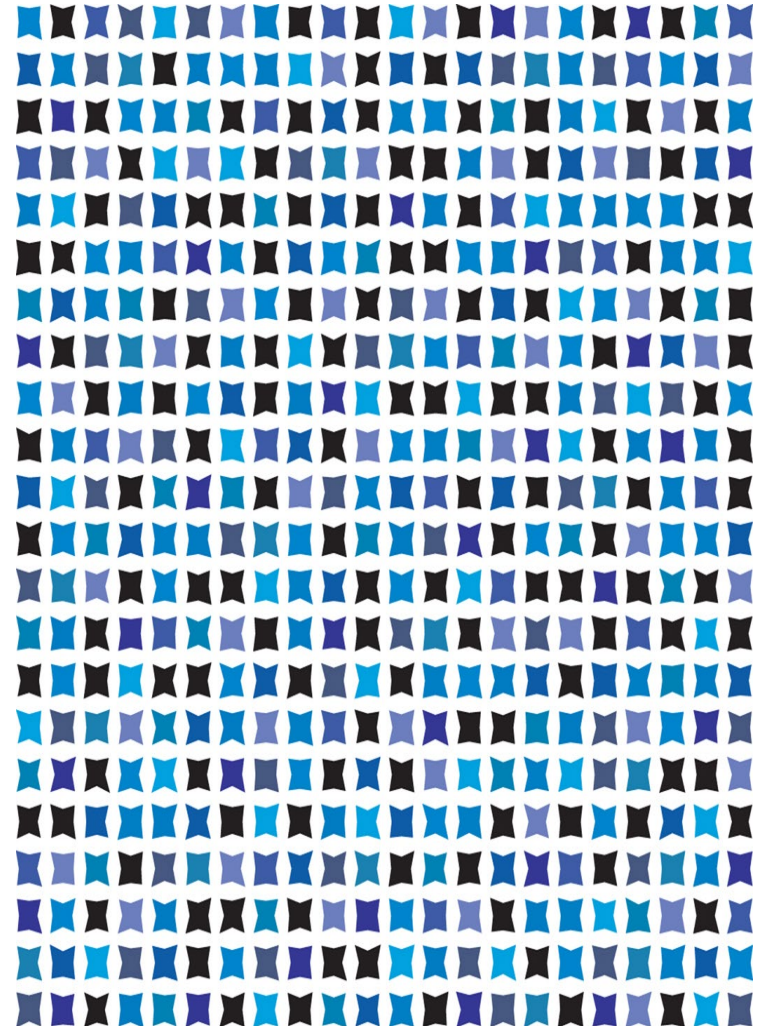
Step One: Defining Events

- At the top of a piece of paper, write :
Defining Events in My Life that Led Me to This Point
- Take a few minutes to brainstorm a list of these defining events
- Don't edit yourself!
- Write down any event, no matter how trivial



Step Two: Identify a Pattern

- Read over your list.
- Is there a pattern or theme to your story?
 - Is there one type of event or personality trait that pops up again and again?
 - What kind of path led you here? Was it a straight shot or a treacherous climb?
 - Have certain motivators influenced your decisions throughout your life?
- Write down your theme on the paper.



Step Three: Brainstorm, Round Two

- On a separate piece of paper, brainstorm responses to these topics. Ask yourself how they fit into your overall theme.
 - Academic history
 - Your major and career goals
 - Are you prepared? (What makes you so?)
 - How will this university help you achieve your goals?
 - Cultural understanding
 - Educational challenges and hardships
 - Experiential learning

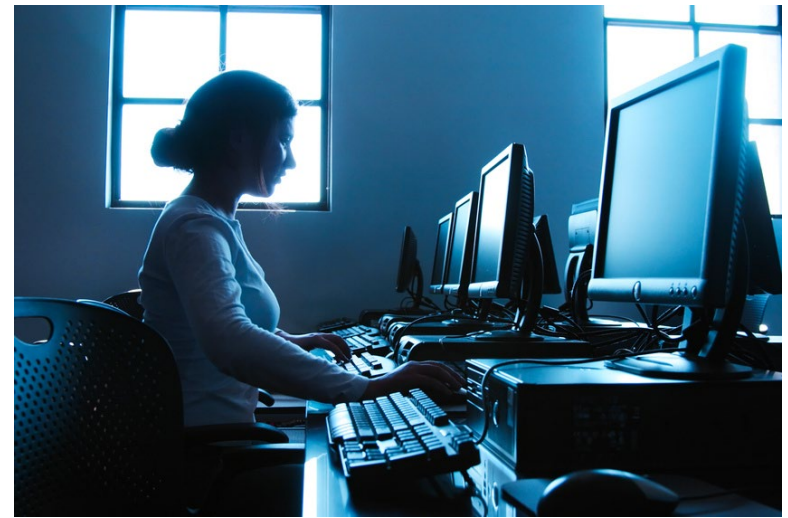


Step Four: Outline

- Now write a working outline.
- Will the structure be:
 - Narrative
 - Associative
 - Narrative/associative

More Help Online

- <http://www.californiacolleges.edu/admissions/university-of-california-uc/personal-statement.asp>
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- http://www.uwc.ucf.edu/Grad%20Gateway/getting_in_to_gradschool/statement_sample.htm



Step Five: Write and Revise

- Write the rough draft of your essay
- Come visit the Loft Writing Center to get help with revisions
- You can also review this PowerPoint online at:
<http://facweb.northseattle.edu/dtarker/>

