



EssayEdge

How to write a personal statement for grad school

A person with dark hair, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, is holding a large stack of books in front of their face. The books are of various sizes and colors, including white, grey, and dark blue. The background is a brick wall with reddish-brown bricks.

Welcome to EssayEdge's Graduate School Statements!

Our experts have assembled the most comprehensive course on the Internet to help you compose successful graduate school essays. A graduate school personal statement or autobiographical essay represents a graduate school's first qualitative introduction to the way you think and to the way you express yourself. The personal statement must serve as a reflection of your personality and intellect. You must sell yourself through this statement, just as you would through a successful job interview. Preparation and personal reflection are essential.

The purpose of this guide is not to teach formulas, but rather to give the necessary direction for you to create an original and effective personal statement.

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Personal Statement

A **personal statement essay** is your chance to state your achievements and qualifications in a manner that will be compelling to the admissions committee. Other components of your application are mostly numbers (test scores, GPA, etc.) or out of your control (letters of recommendation). Your admissions essay is your one chance to set yourself apart from all other applicants with the same grades and the same test scores. You need to think very carefully about what information in your essay will make the committee take notice and say:

"This person should attend our school!"



What is Personal Statement?

The role of personal statement is to make one candidate stand out from other applicants. Countless applications list many similar qualifications, experiences, and goals. Creating a personal statement that is notable for its content requires a great deal of preparation and planning. Personal statements need to be meticulously organized, well-written and focused on setting the applicant apart from the larger group. Whether a personal statement includes an effort to disclose or explain a misstep along the way or to communicate the applicant's all-encompassing passion for the degree program or specialty, the content must be clear, the ideas must flow well, and it must be in the applicant's own voice and words.

Things You Should Know Before Writing Your Personal Statement

01.

It can make or break your chance of admission. The role of a personal statement is to provide the admissions committee a reason to offer you a seat in the class or degree program. If you can convince the committee of your great passion for the field or your longtime desire for this degree, then your personal statement will accomplish its purpose.

02.

A personal statement should include a specific story or anecdote that “shows” the reader your commitment and abilities, rather than just “telling” them. A creative or moving story will be remembered by the reader if it tells the story in a way that explains the applicant’s desire to pursue a degree in the field to which he is applying. The story could be personal, based on family experience, or it could be an account of a significant encounter with a friend, acquaintance or stranger. The personal statement’s story should reveal a candidate’s inspiration to pursue the degree program.

03.

The principal role of personal statement is to provide the admissions committee with a personal representation of the candidate. The committee wants to learn about an applicant beyond the standard details of application materials. A personal statement provides insight into an applicant’s reasons for pursuing a degree program, including long term goals, motivation, and commitment.

Brainstorming

Graduate School Personal Statement

Writing an effective personal statement requires a bit of soul searching and reflection. The schools want to gain from your essay some insight into your character and personality. It's difficult for most people to write about themselves, especially something personal or introspective. If thoughtfully observed and answered, the following suggestions and questions will yield material from which you can draw upon in writing your essay. Although the questions are presented in categories, your responses will inevitably straddle the various groupings. This is as it should be, since brainstorming is a very lateral process. Most important while completing these questions is that you be sincere and enjoy yourself.

1. Perform a Self-Inventory of Your Unique Experiences, Major Influences, and Abilities









Long- and Short-Term Goals

1. What attracts you to this particular school?
2. Are there any specific faculty members at this academic institution whose work interests you? With whom would you most like to study?
3. What specifically do you hope to gain from the academic program to which you are applying?
4. What are your career aspirations, and how can this academic program help you to reach them?
5. What is your dream job? What would you ideally like to be doing in 5 years? 10? 20?



Skills and Characteristics

6. What personal characteristics (integrity, compassion, persistence, for example) do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics? This is an area where it is far better to “show” the reader how you embody these qualities, rather than simply “tell” him or her that you possess them. You need to make strong connections between your experiences and the qualities you wish to convey. The ideal is to recount personal experiences in such a way that your “compassion” or “persistence” or whatever else is fully evident without your having to mention those qualities by name. ***Here is a list of the qualities that admissions committees find most desirable in applicants:***

-  Seriousness of Purpose (to pursue graduate education)
-  Intellectual Ability (to handle graduate study)
-  Intellectual Curiosity (about the field you wish to enter)
-  Creativity (as reflected in the way your mind addresses issues in the field of your choice)
-  Open-Mindedness (to ideas, people, and circumstances different from your own)
-  Maturity (as demonstrated by being responsible and trustworthy)
-  Concern for Others (either by devoting time to social service activities such as tutoring or by being considerate and empathetic to others' feelings; the latter is more difficult to pull off in an application essay)
-  Initiative (as in the ability to start a project or take on a responsibility on your own)

- ✔ Enthusiasm (as demonstrated by your eagerness to engage in activities)
Confidence (in your ability to handle difficult situations and novel challenges)
- ✔ Being Organized (as in the ability to stay on top of multiple tasks)
Sense of Humor (as in your ability to find humor in difficult situations; in many ways this is an index of maturity)
- ✔ Diligence/Persistence (as demonstrated by your ability to stay with a task until you complete it; this is particularly relevant for programs requiring a dissertation)
- ✔ Leadership (as shown in your ability to inspire others to work together to reach a mutual goal)
- ✔ Risk Taking (as shown in your ability to deal with uncertainty in order to reach your goal)
- ✔ Insight (as reflected in your ability to use introspection to understand aspects of yourself, such as your preferences and your motivations)
- ✔ Optimism (as reflected in your ability to find positive aspects in seemingly negative situations)
- ✔ Compromise (as in your ability to be flexible in negotiating with others; at a more abstract level this can mean the ability to reconcile ideological opposites or dialectical pairs among others or within yourself)
- ✔ Overcoming Adversity (as demonstrated by your resourcefulness in dealing with serious problems such as divorce, death, illness, etc.)

7. What skills (leadership, communicative, analytical, for example) do you possess? As in the previous question, strive to “show” rather than “tell.” However, you can invoke these qualities by name with less chance of appearing insincere or conceited than if you attribute to yourself more personal, subjective qualities such as compassion and integrity.
8. Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field—than other applicants?
9. What do you have to offer the school—to your fellow students, to the faculty, to the broader community?
10. Why do you think you will succeed in this academic program?
11. What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
12. Why do you think you will be successful in your chosen career?



Strive to **“show”**
rather than **“tell.”**

Background/Accomplishments: Personal

13. What's special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story? What details of your life (personal or family problems/history; any genuinely notable accomplishments, 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?

14. Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (e.g., economic, familial, physical) in your life?

15. Have you borne significant care-giving responsibilities for family members? For an ailing parent, a sibling, a disabled or aging relative, a child? How has this impacted your academics? Your professional life? Your goals and values?

16. (If you live in the U.S. but are not a native-born American) How did you deal with the challenges of moving to the U.S. from your home? Did you experience culture shock? How did you adapt? What was most difficult for you? What aspects of your new home did you enjoy the most?

17. If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has the work contributed to your personal growth?





Background/Accomplishments: Academic

18. When did you originally become interested in this field? What have you since 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?

19. How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?

xx. Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?

20. Can you recall a specific incident that convinced you that you had chosen the right career path?

2. Consult Friends, Relatives, Colleagues, or Professors for Ideas

Others see us differently from the way we see ourselves. You may be overlooking some theme, angle, or aspect of your personality that might be obvious to others who know you well. Good ideas are good ideas, whatever their source. Here is a questionnaire that will give these people a structured format in which to help you come up with ideas:

Preparatory Questionnaire

I am applying to _____ and must prepare a personal statement as a part of that process. I want to be sure to include all relevant data about myself and my background, so I am soliciting information from various individuals who know me and whose judgment I value. Thank you for your help.

1. What do you think is most important for the admissions committee to know about me?

2. What do you regard as most unusual, distinctive, unique, and/or impressive about me (based on our association)?

3. Are you aware of any events or experiences in my background that might be of particular interest to those considering my application to graduate school?

4. Are there any special qualities or skills that I possess that tend to make you think I would be successful in graduate school and in my chosen field?

3. Write An Experimental Creative Essay In Which You Are the Main Character

Pretend that you are enrolled in a creative writing class and that your assignment is to write a moving and inspiring short story (a couple of pages) about some experience in your life and its impact on you. Pretend you will be reading the story aloud during class and that your goal is to have your classmates approach you afterwards with the following sorts of reactions: “I feel as if I know you, even though I’ve never talked to you before,” or “I was really moved; thanks for taking a risk and giving us a glimpse into what makes you tick.” Although you will not be submitting your personal statement in the form of a short story, this exercise will help you to achieve a level of sincerity, even vulnerability, in your writing that might prove elusive if you plunge directly into a first draft of your application essay.



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to polished personal statement
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How to Write a Grad School Personal Statement: 3 Tips for your success



**BE CREATIVE
AND UNIQUE.**

**SHOW THEM,
DON'T JUST
TELL THEM.**

DREAM BIG!

These tips may seem simple or silly at first glance, but they are definitely worth a second look and an explanation.

Tip 1.
Be creative and unique.

In order to be unique, that is, different from the rest of the crowd, you must be creative. Imagination will make you stand out from the other candidates. Be creative in your writing style or your choice of topics. Being creative does not mean being outrageous, using shock value for attention. Creativity requires extra work and planning. Innovation in your approach to your topic when you are writing a personal statement for grad school can be as easy as thinking about how you are different from other applicants. Celebrate your difference and capture the attention of the admissions committee.

Tip 2.
Show them, don't just tell them.

This is good advice for any essay-writing situation, but especially when you want to know how to write a personal statement for grad school. Instead of making a long list of your attributes, consider sharing a story which demonstrates those traits. The members of the admissions committee will probably remember an interesting story longer than a repetitive listing of personal characteristics. Be selective in your choice of stories and consider telling the story to friends or family members to see what kind of reaction you receive. You will want a story that relates to the program you hope to study or that exemplifies qualities you will need to have to succeed in the field.

Tip 3.
Dream big!

When you are thinking about your future, it is perfectly fine to dream big! Consider your options and then compare them against your wishes. If you think it is too late to go to grad school, remember that it is never too late to accomplish your goals. When writing your personal statement for grad school, incorporate the three tips above to be successful in your quest. It may take a little more time to think about these options, but the finished product should definitely be worth it.

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