

Writing the Statement of Purpose

Personal statements generally fall into one of two categories:

General, comprehensive personal statement – allows maximum freedom in terms of what you write. This should be structured like a narrative essay.

Responses to specific questions – Many schools ask several (3-5) specific questions and your answers must respond specifically to the questions being asked.

Evaluate, Then Write

Your statement should answer three main questions for the admissions committee: Why should they accept you? Why are you interested in this field of study? Why are you interested specifically in their program? Use the questions below to evaluate your answers to these questions.

Why Should They Accept You?

- What details of your life help set you apart from other applicants? This can include your personal background, the people or events that have shaped your development, and/or the challenges that you have overcome.
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?

Why Are You Interested in This Field of Study?

- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it 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 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?

Why Are You Interested Specifically in Their Program?

- What are your career goals? How does this specific program help you to reach those goals?
- What specific features of the program are you interested in? This can include coursework, research facilities, internship/practica, and faculty.
- What does this program allow you to do that no other program can? Think through unique features such as faculty, international experiences, location, relationship with the community or industry, and institutional or program mission.

General Tips

1. *Answer the questions that are asked*

If you are applying to many schools, you may be tempted to reuse statements. However, each school asks for a statement in a different way. Write separate statements for each school and tailor your answers to their questions.

EAS

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Career Works

Adapted from Purdue Owl

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2. *Tell a story*
Graduate school is the next step in your professional story. Lay the framework for this conclusion by telling the story of your interest in the profession and how graduate school will help you deepen that interest.
3. *Concentrate on your opening paragraph*
The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. Make sure that your opening includes a “hook” for the reader.
4. *Don't include some subjects*
There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Don't mention potentially controversial subjects, unless they are central to your work in the discipline.
5. *Tell what you know*
The middle section of your essay might detail your interest and experience in your particular field, as well as some of your knowledge of the field. Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field and use the language professionals use in conveying this information. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you're suited to it.
6. *Write well and correctly*
Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.
7. *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.
8. *Talk with your professors*
Use the professors you have gotten to know as a resource. Talk with them about which grad schools they recommend and ask them to be honest about your chances of being accepted. Also have them review your personal statement to make sure you are using the correct professional language.
9. *Use campus resources*
Both the Writing Center and Career Works can help you brainstorm ideas and review drafts. Consult with us regularly throughout the process.