

Personal Statements

The admission process for graduate and professional school is more competitive today than ever before. Undergraduate grades and entrance-exam scores don't tell the entire story. Graduate and professional schools are also looking for applicants who are interesting, articulate, and distinctive, with different points of view, ambitions, backgrounds and career interests. So, how do the decision makers look at students beyond the application? The answer: through essay questions on the application, commonly referred to as *personal statements*, as well as through *letters of recommendation* and *in-person interviews*.

The "personal statement" portion of a school's admissions application presents a great opportunity for you to sell yourself to the school/program. Lets start by looking at the questions posed on admissions applications.

THE QUESTIONS

Personal statement questions (or essay questions) can vary among the schools, some provide very little guidance on what to write while others ask specific questions. Some schools require a specific word, character or page limit, while others do not. Some schools require one personal statement, while others may require several essay questions.

For *Medical School Applicants*, the standard AMCAS application requires a very open-ended "Personal Comments" essay. Supplemental applications from the schools tend to ask very pointed questions about past activities.

For *Non-Professional Graduate Programs*, applications typically require a "Statement of Purpose" in which the applicant is asked to discuss his or her areas of academic/research interest as well as long-term plans.

PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR ESSAYS

- Consult friends and relatives for ideas: others may see us differently than 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.
- Determine what makes you unique (what is your story?). What experiences have most influenced your career decision? What inspiring stories could you share about experiences in your life and the impact it had on you?
- Identify a "theme" for your personal statement: outline your approach to what content should be included relevant to your theme. For example, say your theme is "social change". Identify what experiences or stories in your life that have proven your commitment to social change or have influenced your interest in social change.
- Assemble your applications and determine how many different essays you must write. The schools are concerned you address their specific questions. However, this does not mean that you should write entirely different essays for each school to which you apply—you will probably be able to submit essentially the same essay to multiple schools.
- Get feedback from others before completing your final draft: friends, relatives, faculty, and the career center can all be good resources for obtaining feedback on your personal statement.

THE TOP 5 DO'S FOR WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

1. DO strive for depth rather than breadth: narrow your focus to one or two themes, ideas or experiences.
2. DO be yourself rather than pretending to be the "ideal" applicant.
3. DO get creative and imaginative, particularly in your opening remarks.
4. DO address the particular school's unique features that attract you.
5. DO enlist others to proofread your essay for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, flow and style.

THE TOP 5 DON'TS FOR WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

1. DON'T submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information already provided in your application.
2. DON'T get on a soapbox and preach to the reader when expressing your values and/or opinions.
3. DON'T waste your personal statement opportunity with a poor introduction or conclusion.
4. DON'T submit supplemental materials with your personal statement unless the school requests them.
5. DON'T get the name of the school and/or program wrong.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- CCSE Career Resource Library has several resources to assist you with writing your personal statement.
- <http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx>