

8 Steps to a Well-Crafted Personal Statement

1. ANALYZE THE QUESTION(S)

Carefully read and analyze the question(s) or prompt for your personal statement. Some prompts may be more general (ex: Describe your personal experiences and goals), while others tend to be very program specific (ex: Why is this program a good fit for you? What do you hope to research as a graduate student in our department?). Determine key words or phrases that you think are the focal points of the prompt. Base the rest of your preparation around this key theme(s), but make sure that you are answering the prompt in its entirety. Pay attention to word count/page length requirements. If none are given, a standard personal statement is 1-2 pages in length.

2. RESEARCH THE SCHOOL/PROGRAM AND ITS VALUES

Hopefully you have already done ample research on the school and/or program to which you are applying, but it is always a good idea to make sure the values of the program align with your own personal values. Not only will this help you to determine if the program is a good fit for you, but it will also allow you to use some shared language in your personal statement. For example, if you are applying to a Franciscan medical school, it may be appropriate to discuss the Franciscan value of dignity of the individual and how it can be practiced in the medical field.

3. PERSONAL INVENTORY

If you're not sure where to start with incorporating your own personal experiences, characteristics, or goals, completing a personal inventory may help you get started. Consider the following questions:

What makes me unique?

What do I expect to gain out of this program/career?

What are my intellectual influences?

Is there a short anecdote that speaks to my passion and/or experience?

Have I conducted any applicable research?

What sparked my interest in this particular career path?

Have any of my undergraduate experiences prepared me for this program?

If the reader of my essay had only one take away from my personal statement, what would I want it to be?

Ask yourself:

What makes me unique?

What do I expect to gain out of this program/career?

4. OUTLINE

Once you have completed a personal inventory and considered the responses to the above questions, begin creating an outline. How will you arrange the pertinent information? Keep in mind you usually have only limited words/pages, so do not try to cover too much information. Stick to one basic theme, but be sure to answer all parts of the prompt.

5. DRAFT

From your outline, begin writing your first draft. Know that your first draft may not feel like a good start sometimes. It is not important that your first draft is perfect, but it is important that you get words on paper to have a starting point.



6. REVISE

After writing your personal statement, have someone you trust and who knows you well read it. Ask them for any and all feedback. Having someone else read over your work will allow you to see places you need to explain more clearly, aspects that may not be relevant, etc. Allow this first round of revision to focus on global revisions (i.e. bigger, overarching comments like organization or needing more detail, rather than grammatical/formatting changes). It is okay if your essay changes majorly after this first round of revision, as it will make your final draft stronger. Have at least one other person read your statement, but having more than that may be beneficial as well.

7. EDIT

After you have made global revisions to your first draft (and sometimes gone through a second, third, and fourth draft of global revisions, too), then you can focus in on grammar, polish, line-by-line editing, and professional tone. Again, it is always helpful to have another set of eyes go over your statement, as they will likely catch mistakes you did not see on your own.

8. SUBMIT

Once you are happy with your final product, submit your essay and be proud of all the work you have put into it.

SOURCES:

<https://careercenter.depaul.edu/documents/Preparing%20Personal%20Statements%205-31-12.pdf>
<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/personalstatement/>