Your Personal Statement is your opportunity to shine—sell yourself!

The personal statement, also called an essay, statement of purpose, or admission statement, is used by the admissions committee to evaluate your writing and thinking skills and should communicate to them how your mind works. Your essay will be one of many read by the admissions committee so you should strive for originality while at the same time maintaining your own voice. Your personal statement should be grounded in your intellectual pursuits. If you feel the position you take on a certain issue will be shared by many of the other applicants, you should be very persuasive in your essay and incorporate your unique background and history. Your essay must be personable. When you’re happy with your statement, it’s a good idea to let someone who doesn’t know you very well read it over. They will be in a similar position to those on the admissions committee and can evaluate how effective you are.

Admissions committees are looking for applicants who are committed to a particular field—not applicants who are trying to clarify their career interests. Begin to clarify your career goals before you determine whether or not to apply to graduate school. If you aren’t able to do this, it is extremely difficult to be convincing in your graduate school application materials.

For more help with graduate study decisions and application, see the Career Center’s “Graduate Study” handout—or stop in!
Personal Statement Guidelines

- **Quality:** A personal statement should not be prepared in one or two sittings. It should be well thought-out and well written. It will be used to assess both how well you think about issues and how well you write.
- **Careful Writing:** A personal statement should be grammatically flawless. Be judicious on the frequencies of sentences beginning with “I.” Be diligent in guarding against overuse of the passive voice.
- **Read the Directions:** Follow the directions exactly in terms of length. If there is no stipulated length, use whatever length you need to convey your message.
- **Knowledge of Field:** The essay should indicate that you have a good understanding of the central concerns of the field of study or profession to which you are applying.
- **Your Unique Professional Interests:** Your essay should demonstrate that you have some idea of the issues in the field/profession you want to focus on while pursuing graduate or professional studies, and why you’ve become interested in those issues.
- **Do Your Homework:** Demonstrate your understanding of the orientation of the department of program to which you are applying—know who is on the faculty, what they’ve published, recent research that’s been in journals, etc. Show how the department strengths fit with your interests. Do your research on each program and write unique essays for each one.
- **Career Goals:** You will want to discuss clearly your career goals and how they are related to your present academic interests.
- **How your activities relate to your professional goals:** The personal statement should contain some discussion of extra-curricular activities, especially as they relate to your current academic or career pursuits.
- **Why Will You Make it in Grad School?** Be certain to describe what in your personal history makes you particularly dedicated to this field or determined to succeed on your chosen path.
- **Explain the Obvious Weaknesses:** If there was a particularly weak term for you during college which was caused by an external factor explain it succinctly.

Visit with a Career Advisor to review your personal statement in the Career Center (Mon-Fri 11:00am-5:30pm) or on 4th Libe (Sun-Thurs 8:00pm-10:00pm). Appointments with Career Counselors are available also. Call x4293 to schedule one today!