



Career Connection

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The Keys to Creating an Effective Professional School Application Personal Statement



Purpose of the Personal Statement

The personal statement is a required part of an application to professional school (such as medicine, dentistry, other health programs, law, business, education, social work, public policy, international affairs, counseling and most other professional degree programs). It is your opportunity to present your qualifications and reasons for choosing a professional education and career. You should discuss how your interest in the program and career developed and how you have pursued that interest while in college. Your statement should persuade the admissions committee that you will be a successful student and that you have the potential to contribute to the profession. This essay should *not* be confused with the statement of intent for academic master's degree and Ph.D. applications. Statements for those programs should focus on academic and research experience, rather than personal history.

Preparing to Write Your Statement

What do you want the admissions committee to know about you? Imagine the statement as a discussion with an admissions officer. Before you begin to write, spend time reflecting on what you know about yourself. It may be useful to develop lists or an outline of what you want to convey. You might list qualities and skills you believe you possess. Is there evidence of these in your record of experiences? These might include your experiences working with people, significant work experience, research experience, independent study, internships, community service or volunteer experience, student government or organizations, leadership, teaching experience, special emphasis within your major and/or minor and education abroad. You should think about how family members, professionals or others have influenced your decision. Planning on what unique aspects of yourself you want to share with the admissions committee is an important step in the process of creating an effective statement, and should not be overlooked.

If you present your experiences in a one-dimensional manner, by merely *describing* them rather than *explaining* their significance to you, your essay will not distinguish you from others or define your individual character. It is *critical* that you reflect on the meaning of your values, skills and interests so that you can write an essay that will reveal to the reader who you are, and not just what you have done. Write about your experiences in a way that conveys how they sharpened your perceptions, taught you important lessons, or clarified your goals. Developing various themes (of community involvement, the role of teamwork, the power of persistence, etc.) might provide a framework within which you can discuss your various experiences and how they reflect concepts you have come to value. Attempt to unify those ideas as you discuss your decision to pursue a professional education.

Suggested Content

Address your comments to the questions or directions stated on the application form. If no direction is given, write your essay so that after reading it, the admissions committee will know about you as a person and be able to make a judgment about you as a candidate for their program. You may want to include the following:

Personal background - What distinguishes you as an individual? Which are the most significant experiences, events or relationships that reveal something about your value system, or about the types of challenges you like to meet?

Development of your interest - How did your interest in this type of professional degree program and career develop, and when did you make your decision to pursue an advanced education? If there were significant role models or other individuals who have encouraged your career goals, describe how they influenced you.

Related experiences - Describe experiences that helped you explore your career interests and confirm your desire to attend professional school. Such experiences may be special research or academic work, employment, internship or volunteer experience related to your career goal (e.g., tutoring a child with a disability, hospital operating room, political campaign, biology teaching assistant, part time work in a retail export company or social service agency, etc.). Convey the insight you have gained from these experiences about yourself and the way you relate to the profession.

Future goals - What are your future goals, ideals, or objectives within the profession? In what type of setting do you imagine yourself working? If applicable, what area of concentration within the program would you like to pursue, and why?

Obstacles and inconsistencies - Be open about any obstacles you may have encountered and overcome to arrive at this point of application (illness, family tragedy, unusually large workload, refugee experience, etc.). If there are any inconsistencies in your academic record (markedly low grades one term) or admission test scores, explain those in a brief, factual, positive, non-apologetic, non-defensive manner.

Program appeal - If you are asked why you want to attend a particular school, research the program and explain its appeal for you. Make references to specific aspects of the program (its philosophy, curriculum, etc.) that match with your interests.

Special expertise - Describe any skills (e.g., artistic, computer, or language skills) or knowledge that demonstrates the depth of your experience in the field. Explain *how* these skills and/or knowledge are applicable.

Conclusion - Summarize by uniting key elements of your statement (e.g., goals, strengths, motivation).



Style

Applicants often worry that their essay will not be interesting to the admissions committee. If you strive to make your essay readable using a *clear, simple and precise writing style*, your essay will have more impact.

Set a professional tone Avoid slang and "gimmicky" writing. Focus on informing, not entertaining. Do not use the essay as psychological self-exploration or catharsis. Avoid using emotional language, repetitive metaphors or imagery, and conversational dialogue.

Organize effectively Feature early in the essay what is most important. Put the least important idea or information in the middle. End with what you want the reader most to remember about you. Develop major ideas in an orderly fashion, using examples where appropriate. Brief essays of this type do not require introductory paragraphs. Launch right into what you want to say. Begin and conclude on a positive note.

Be concise Use words economically. Avoid redundancies. Look at each sentence you have written and ask yourself why it is important. What does it say about you? Choose simple, clear words.

Be clear Think about the person reading your essay. Will they understand any references you make to individuals, institutions or programs? Avoid using jargon and obscure acronyms. Watch you use of proper names. For example, saying that you were a tutor for "OMA" won't be understandable by anyone not familiar with The Ohio State University, but writing that you worked for the "Office of Minority Affairs" would make sense to most individuals outside of the university.

Keep it simple Use active, not passive voice. Put the "doer" (you) in charge. Use "I completed" rather than "I was given the opportunity to complete". Also, use easy-to-read font or typeface (usually either 10 or 12 point font and Times New Roman font style are safe bets).

Be honest Do not inflate your achievements and do not underestimate your potential. Your statement should reflect maturity and be written with sincerity. Keep in mind that if you are interviewed for admission, it is likely that you may be asked to discuss what you have written.

Be specific Choose specific nouns and action verbs. Avoid general and abstract terms.

Be personal Avoid clichés, quotes and philosophizing about a profession or about life. Take advantage of the opportunity to tell the reader about you!

Review and revise Good writing is re-writing. Refine your key points so that they are as succinct and direct as possible. Proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, and make it a point to not only read your essay aloud to check the flow of sentences, but have at least one other person read over it as well in the proofing process.



Good Luck !

