

## Writing a Personal Statement

A vital part of the application process for nearly every job, scholarship, or school application is the submission of a résumé and personal statement. The personal statement is an opportunity to tell the recipient about yourself, your qualifications, and why you're interested in the opportunity they are offering. The following suggestions should help you produce a personal statement that is engaging and appealing to your audience.

### Personal Statements Are

- **Difficult and Frustrating**
  - These statements are often the hardest thing anyone ever has to write. You are not alone in feeling irritated and overwhelmed: everyone does.
- **Revealing**
  - The committees who will read your essay really do want to get to know you.
- **Paths to success**
  - Good personal statements are a sure path to the things you want in your education, your career, and your life.

### Personal Statements Are Not

- **Résumés**
  - Listing your accomplishments is not the point of a personal statement. Do not just repeat information from the résumé.
- **Journal entries**
  - While it is important to be personally revealing, the personal statement is not the place for intimate details.
- **Formal essays**
  - Personal tone and voice are very important tools to establish sincerity.

### Guidelines for Writing a Personal Statement

- **Start Early:** Plan to write several drafts and have time to revise.
- **Collect Yourself:** Have transcripts, resumes, and other useful information on hand.
- **Start with the Prompt:** Answer their questions before adding other information.
- **Be Specific:** mention the school, award, or scholarship for which you are applying.
- **Tell a Story:** Use detailed narratives to show reviewers who you really are.
- **Sell Yourself:** Set yourself apart from other applicants.
- **Consider the Audience:** Write for multiple reviewers. It is guaranteed that someone who will read your statement has no knowledge of your discipline.
- **Watch the Word Count:** These statements will be much shorter than academic papers. Write as much as you want in your first draft and then cut back.

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## Generating Content

- **Reasons** you are applying for the school, award, or scholarship
- Work **experience**, coursework, internships, or fieldwork
- Future educational or career **goals**
- **Personal anecdotes** related to the essay topic
- Why you are a **unique candidate**
- **Mentors** in the field and what they have taught you (especially those who are prominent in your field)
- **Setbacks or obstacles** that you have overcome
- **Lessons learned** that relate to your topic
- **Family obligations** or involvement that impacted your performance
- **Volunteer work**, hobbies, and activities that are relevant to your topic

## Mistakes to Avoid

- **Not Answering the Question**
  - Use your statement as a way to showcase those specific talents and achievements that apply to the question.
- **Wrong Voice/Tone**
  - Write from your experience, not your extended vocabulary. Use the terminology that you would use when speaking to a colleague, not when writing for a journal.
- **Listing Accomplishments**
  - Talk about the lessons learned or the ways that your activities have shaped you, not just what you did.
- **Hedging**
  - Don't understate or downplay your accomplishments
- **Repeating Information**
  - You do not need to repeat things found elsewhere in the application.
- **Sharing intimate details**
  - Strike a balance between personal story and professional tone.
- **False Modesty**
  - Be confident. Tell reviewers why you are the best choice.
- **Using Passive Voice**

## Points to Remember:

- **Answer the Question:** Discuss all of the requested information.
- **Be Honest:** Speak from your own experience in your own voice.
- **Tell Stories:** Involve your senses and bring your essay to life.
- **Be Tactful:** If you wouldn't say it to a complete stranger, don't say it in your statement.
- **Take Credit:** State your achievements proudly.