

# PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDE

## PURPOSE

A personal statement lets graduate school admissions panels learn more about you and your potential fit for their program. It is used to introduce yourself and demonstrate how your past experiences along with your personal and professional goals align with the graduate program you are applying to.

## FORMATTING GUIDELINES

- Essay format
- Double spaced
- Indented paragraphs
- Page length/word count varies by program, but typically between 2-3 pages in length

## WHAT TO WRITE

### CONTENT

Personal statements introduce the reader to your passions and goals, so they should supplement your resume, not reiterate it. Think about what you have learned from your experiences, why you are passionate about continuing your studies in this field, and how you hope to use this graduate degree. Consider these prompting questions to get you started:

- What school/program are you pursuing and why?
- Why is this field/research important? What do you know already about this field, and how has your personal history influenced you to want to pursue this?
- What past experiences and skills are you coming in with?
- What are you hoping to gain by getting this education?
- What excites you about this program?
- What do you want to do after graduate school? What impact do you want to make and how can this program help you get there?

### DEDUCTIVE STRUCTURE

Your personal statement should reflect your journey to graduate school, but keep in mind that it does not need to be a chronological retelling of your life story. When writing chronologically, graduate school applicants often make the mistake of waiting until the very end of the essay to talk about their future goals. Your reasons for pursuing graduate education should be the main focus of your essay, so you will want to use a deductive writing structure instead of inductive structure:

**✗ Inductive structure** presents facts/story and then wraps it up with a conclusion. Your personal statement reads chronologically and doesn't mention your interest in pursuing graduate education until the very end.

**✓ Deductive structure** presents a thesis statement and then provides supportive examples. Your personal statement hooks the reader in the first paragraph by telling them what program you are applying to and why. The rest of your essay describes your personal experiences that led you to pursuing further study.

### OUTLINING

Having a well-organized personal statement that reiterates your main points throughout helps ensure they stick with the reader. A strong thesis statement in your introduction and well-organized supporting paragraphs help make the most important information stand out to the reader. It may be helpful for you to outline your main points and organize your thoughts before writing.

### TAILORING

If you are applying to multiple graduate programs, each personal statement you write should be tailored to that specific graduate program. Do your research and make sure you discuss what attracts you to that program/school specifically.

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## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

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Your introductory paragraph serves to outline your personal statement for the reader and pique their interest. Your introduction should include the following pieces of information:

**1. What school/program are you applying to and why?**

Your personal statement is about your interest in pursuing graduate education, so the program and your purpose for applying should be the very first thing mentioned. See the note on deductive structure in previous section.

**2. Briefly describe your personal and professional goals**

You should address this in just a few sentences; you can go into more depth in your body paragraphs. What are you hoping to do with a graduate education? How will this graduate degree help you achieve your personal and professional goals? What kind of impact do you want to make in this field?

**3. Briefly outline the main points that you are going to address in your body paragraph(s)**

The last few sentences of your introductory paragraph should serve as a thesis statement, or a mini outline for the rest of your essay. For example, if you are going to have a few body paragraphs that emphasize your past academic achievements and a few that discuss your past internship experiences, the last sentence of your introductory paragraph should address both of those points. E.g. “Through my academic coursework in cultural and historic preservation and the hands on experience I gained through past internships, I have developed a passion for...”

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## BODY PARAGRAPHS

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Your body paragraphs should each be distinct and well organized. Each body paragraph should start with a topic sentence, elaborate on the brief points you made in your introduction, and provide specific examples and support as to why you are a good candidate for this program. See the prompting questions in the “What to Write” section on the previous page to help you frame out the content of your body paragraphs. Once you have these outlined, be sure to include the following pieces of information in each body paragraph:

**1. Begin with a topic sentence that summarizes the main point of that paragraph**

If the reader only reads the first sentence of each paragraph, they should know what that paragraph is about. For example, if you start a paragraph with, “During my internship at the Newport Art Museum, I...,” the reader knows that you will be discussing your internship in this paragraph. If you want to discuss something other than this specific internship (like academic coursework, research interests, professional goals, etc.), you should do so in a new paragraph, or change your topic sentence to address the multiple items.

**2. Each main point you address should be tied back into graduate school**

Remember that graduate school is the focus of this essay. Even if it seems obvious, tie everything you write back to the graduate program you are applying to. For example, if you have written a paragraph about your internship experiences, you should include a sentence about how the experiences and skills you gained in that internship influenced you to want to pursue graduate study.

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## CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

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The conclusion of your personal statement should reiterate your main points to make sure they stick with the reader. Be sure to include the following in your conclusion:

**1. Restate the graduate program you are applying to**

This affirms your interest in that specific program and shows the reader that this is not a generic personal statement you’ve sent to multiple schools.

**2. Briefly restate your main points**

In a few sentences, summarize the main points in your body paragraphs. This ensures that they stick with the reader and leave a lasting impression.