



Graduate school personal statement

A personal statement helps the graduate school see another side of you, besides test scores and undergraduate GPA. Therefore, it's a document worth spending time on, so that the graduate school sees this extra side as a positive and not a detriment. Some graduate schools will leave the personal statement open ended (i.e. you choose the topic) and some will offer you specific questions to address.

Before writing the personal statement

Just as with any essay you may have written for a composition class, you'll need to organize your thoughts before you start writing. Some questions to consider:

- Why do you want to pursue this specialty area in graduate school?
- What's special or unique about your experiences?
- How do your experiences relate to your graduate interests?
- What skills/abilities/strengths do you have that will make you an asset to the graduate classroom?
- Are there any inconsistencies on your academic record (e.g. high GPA, lower GRE scores or vice versa) that you want to explain?

Writing the personal statement

You may want to use the reflections from the prompts above to shape the themes of your essay. No matter if you're asked to address specific questions or not, you want to make sure that the themes of your essay always relate back to the underlying theme of why you're going to be an asset to the program. Every paragraph should support that sentiment.

- Focus on the first paragraph. It will set the tone for your entire essay. Make sure that you capture the reader's attention. Your first paragraph highlights your strengths and helps orientate the reader to the rest of the statement.
- Be direct. This is a time to show commitment to the specialty area of choice.
- Tell a story. It is, after all, a personal statement. However, make sure that you're the central character of the story. It's appropriate to write about experiences you've had and they probably will include other characters. But, always make sure you're focused on you. You're the protagonist of this story.
- Identify themes. Each paragraph will have a theme. Try not to mix two themes in one paragraph. This can feel sloppy or crowded to the reader.
- Once you write the essay, go back through those paragraph themes and make sure they make sense in that order. One strategy is to take a separate paper and just list the themes in order. Do they still work? If you can't figure out what the theme is, then that section may not impact the reader very much.
- Your statement could be chronological, based on qualities about you, or a mixture of both. Either way, the structure should flow from section to section.
- Back up your statements with experiences (remember that you're the main character).
- Have someone read it. This can be CON Career Services or other people you trust to offer you good feedback. Often times it's difficult to critique your own personal statement since it's so close to you. Utilize resources to help you sell yourself in the most effective way.