



4 Steps to Writing a Personal Statement

Step 1: Research

- Look up the school *and* program mission, vision, and values statements.
- Read up on the faculty in each program and their research specialties.
- Talk to people in the field you are interested in pursuing.

Step 2: Brainstorm: pre-writing/freewriting.

- Get it all out on the page. Everything you can think of, the editing will come later.
- Use prompts that each school/program has and make an outline of the questions.
- Read example personal statements.
- Answer the questions on pages 3 and 4 of this handout.

Step 3: Rough draft(s)

- What is your hook? Settle on an attention grabbing opening statement.
- Start assembling your paper from the questions you answered in the prompt.
- Find your story and keep the reader engaged.
- Get feedback. Have a few people look it over and assess its strengths and weaknesses.

Step 4: Final edits

- Polish your essay for grammar, spelling, and overall conciseness.
- Review the below checklist. Can you mark off all of the boxes?

Checklist

- I have **followed the prompt**: I answered every question and stayed within the word/page limit.
- I have an **attention grabbing** opening statement/sentence.
- I described how I got **interested in the field**.
- I conveyed **why** I am interested in **the program**, why I want to go to **that school**, and why I am a **good candidate**.
- I explained what **I want to do with this degree** and what my **personal/career aspirations** are.
- My writing is **professional, vivid, and interesting**.
- I have **no** spelling or grammar errors.



Personal Statements: Do...

- Write in first-person—your statement should be about you!
- Be specific—depth over breadth should be your general rule.
- Follow the school’s instructions regarding length and subject matter. Stick to their questions.
- Establish (with clarity) your career goals and how this degree will help you get there.
- Discuss the most important experiences that have prepared you for graduate school.
- Keep your tone positive; focus on the affirmative, rather than the negative.
- Tell what you know about your field. Do research if necessary. Use the language of your field.
- Address the school/program’s unique qualities and opportunities that are of interest to you.
- Use strong, vivid verbs whenever possible; avoid passive voice and "to be" verbs (be, is, am, was, were, been, being).

Personal Statements: Don’t...

- Don’t wait until the last minute to write it!
- Don’t think of it as a list to put down everything you have accomplished. Stick to the important details that engage the reader in your story.
- Don’t just repeat what is in your resume. If you want to talk about an experience on your resume, be sure to go in depth.
- Don’t forget to show some self-awareness. Avoid topics that could make you seem arrogant or insensitive.
- Don’t make unsupported claims. Back everything with evidence and support.
- Don’t use quotations from other sources or people.
- Don't use clichés or gimmicks.



SAN FRANCISCO
STATE UNIVERSITY

Division of Graduate Studies Personal Statement Worksheet

Brainstorming Questions

Why are you applying to this program? Why this school?

Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study in this program.

What are your future career goals? What do you intend to do with this degree?



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What kind of experience do you have? Include details of job or volunteer experience, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen field. Try to link any experience to skills or qualities related to the program.

Make a list of your hobbies and interests. Then think about how they demonstrate your personality, skills and abilities. Try to link them to the skills and experience required for the program.

Why do you think you are a top candidate for the program? Do you have any particular skills and experience that will help you to succeed? What makes you stand out from other applicants?