

Personal Statement Essay Packet

a.k.a. one of the most important pieces of writing you will ever do in high school

The topic of your personal statement will require careful planning on your part. Please refer to the tips and hints below regarding personal essays and use the college-of-your-interest's website as you plan and write your personal statement.

Things to keep in mind:

1. The topic or prompt from a college or scholarship may appear to be easy, but that can be deceiving. You **MUST** spend adequate time writing an essay that distinguishes you from thousands of other applicants who wrote a response to the same prompt. A common problem for these types of essays is that students end up writing a narrative account of what they already addressed in the application. Remember your **AUDIENCE** (a college admission's counselor or scholarship committee) and your **PURPOSE** (to be accepted in their college or win a scholarship).
2. In an essay of this length (500 words is short!) your introductory and concluding paragraphs should be brief and to the point. You must have a strong hook! Your supporting paragraphs should be clear, concise and contain numerous specific details. Strive for word economy, and make certain that each word contributes to the message you wish to deliver. In other words, rambling is not allowed.

Requirements:

- Personal statements are to be no more than 500 words (use your "tools" on Word to do a word count)
- Pay careful attention to the annoying details. Remember that this is your chance to make a good impression in every way.
- This is a work in progress and you may submit 3 or 5 or 10 drafts to a trusted adult/teacher before you have an approved personal statement worthy of being sent to a university or scholarship. Don't procrastinate. This takes work.

Questions to ask yourself before you write:

1. What is special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about me or my life story?
2. What details of my life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped me or influenced my goals) that might help the committee better understand me or help set me apart from other applicants?
3. How have I learned about this field----through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
4. If I have worked a lot during my high school years, what have I learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example) and how has that work contributed to my growth?
5. What are my career goals?
6. Are there any gaps or discrepancies in my academic record that I should explain (great grades, but mediocre SAT scores or a distinct upward pattern in my GPA if it was only average or low in the beginning)?
7. Have I had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
8. What personal characteristics do I possess that would improve my prospects for success in this career field or profession?

Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules

1. Strive for depth rather than breadth. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences
2. Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say
3. Provide the reader with insight into what drives you
4. Be yourself, not the 'ideal' applicant
5. Make sure your opening remarks are something that no one else could write
6. Address the school's or scholarship's unique features that interest you
7. Focus on the affirmative in the personal statement. Explain deficiencies or blemishes
8. Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them.
9. Proofread carefully for grammar, spelling, punctuation, word usage & style)
10. Use readable fonts, typeface and conventional spacing and margins

Personal Statement: Top 10 Pitfalls

1. Do not submit expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application
2. Do not complain or whine about the "system" or circumstances in your life
3. Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme
4. Do not talk about money as a motivator for going to college
5. Do not discuss your minority status or disadvantaged background unless you have a compelling and unique story that relates to it
6. Do not remind the school of its rankings or tell them how good they are
7. Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions such as:
 - "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is....."
 - "This question asks me to discuss....."
 - "I would like to thank the admissions or scholarship committee for considering my application"
 - "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school (or receive your fine scholarship)"
8. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats
9. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
10. Do not get the name of the school or scholarship wrong

General Advice

Answer the questions that are asked

- If you are applying to several schools, you may find questions in each application that are somewhat similar
- Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications. It is important to answer each question being asked and if slightly different answers are needed, you should write separate statements. In every case, be sure your answer fits the question being asked

Tell a story

- Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is to bore the admissions committee. If your statement is fresh, lively and different, you'll be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself memorable

Be specific

- Do not, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, mechanic, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

Find an angle

- If you are like most people, your life story lacks drama (be thankful!), so figuring out a way to make it interesting becomes the big challenge. Finding an angle or a "hook" is vital.

Concentrate on your opening paragraph

- The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement.

Tell what you know

- The middle section of your essay might detail your interest and experience in your particular field, as well as some of your knowledge of the field. Too many people graduate from high school with little or no knowledge of the nuts and bolts of the profession or field they hope to enter. Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field and use the language professionals use in conveying this information. Refer to experiences (work, research, classes, etc.)

Do not include some subjects

- There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in middle school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Don't mention potentially controversial subjects such as political issues unless asked in the application.

Do some research

- If a school what to know why you are applying to it rather than another school, do some research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.

Write well and correctly

- Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many admissions officers and scholarship committees say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.