

# How to Write a Personal Statement

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# Objectives

- ▶ At the end of the workshop the students will be able to:
  - ▶ Define the term personal statement
  - ▶ Mention tips and tricks to do a personal statement
  - ▶ Mention de Do's and Don'ts of personal statements
  - ▶ Know the different components of a personal statement
  - ▶ Construct their own fluidity diagram for a personal statement
  - ▶ Construct their own personal statement

# Personal Statement: Definition

personal statement

*Noun*

The definition of a personal statement is a personal essay written by students applying for scholarships or grant programs.

*An example of a personal statement is an essay written by a law student explaining why she should be granted a scholarship from a law school.*

YourDictionary definition and usage example.

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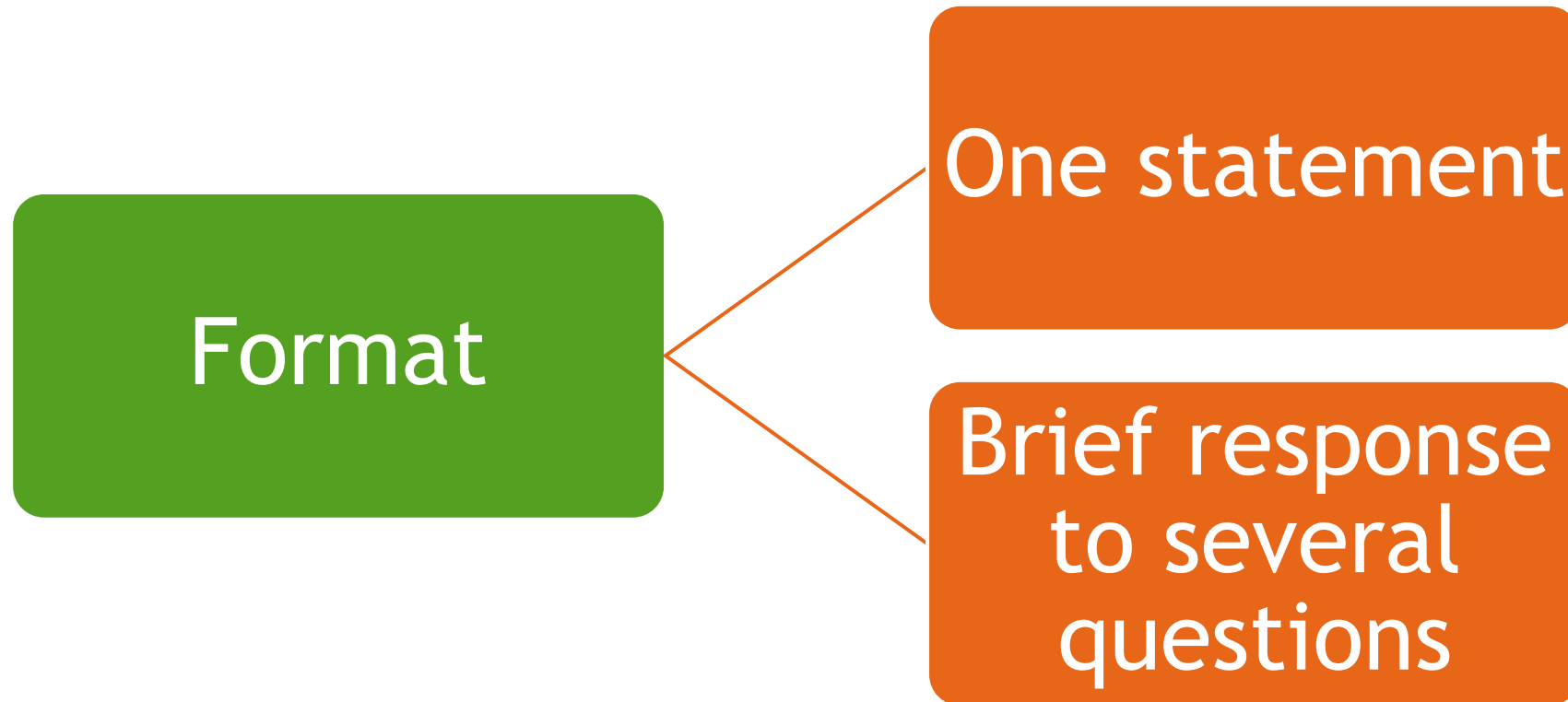
Read more at <http://www.yourdictionary.com/personal-statement#uHZC0jsZxVEYZ8KW.99>

# Personal Statement

- ▶ It is an opportunity
  - ▶ To present yourself to the Admission Committee.
  - ▶ To let them know
    - ▶ Your background.
    - ▶ Your experiences.
    - ▶ Your knowledge of the field.
    - ▶ Your goals.
    - ▶ Your personality.
  - ▶ It gives you the opportunity to explain any irregularity or shortcomings in your application.

# Research Personal Statement: Format

- ▶ The format varies among institutions.



# Personal Statements: Hints

- ▶ They read between lines.
  - ▶ Motivation
  - ▶ Competence
  - ▶ Potential as a graduate student
  - ▶ Knowledge
  - ▶ Fit into the program and or department
- ▶ Use a Positive perspective – **always**
- ▶ Write in active voice
  - ▶ It is more assertive

# Research Personal Statement: Hints

- ▶ Adapt your response to the specific question asked.
- ▶ Do not use generic statements.
- ▶ Evidence your qualities and accomplishments.
- ▶ Explain discrepancies but do not make excuses.
- ▶ Write with authority.
- ▶ Comply with the grammar guidelines.
- ▶ Use single space unless otherwise specify.
- ▶ Remember
  - ▶ **Writing a good personal statement take time and several drafts.**

# Personal Statement: Components

## Introduction

- Who you are?
- Your goals
- How you know that you have a vocation for this profession?

## Academic accomplishments

- How are you building your academic record to achieve your goal

## Personal qualities and achievements

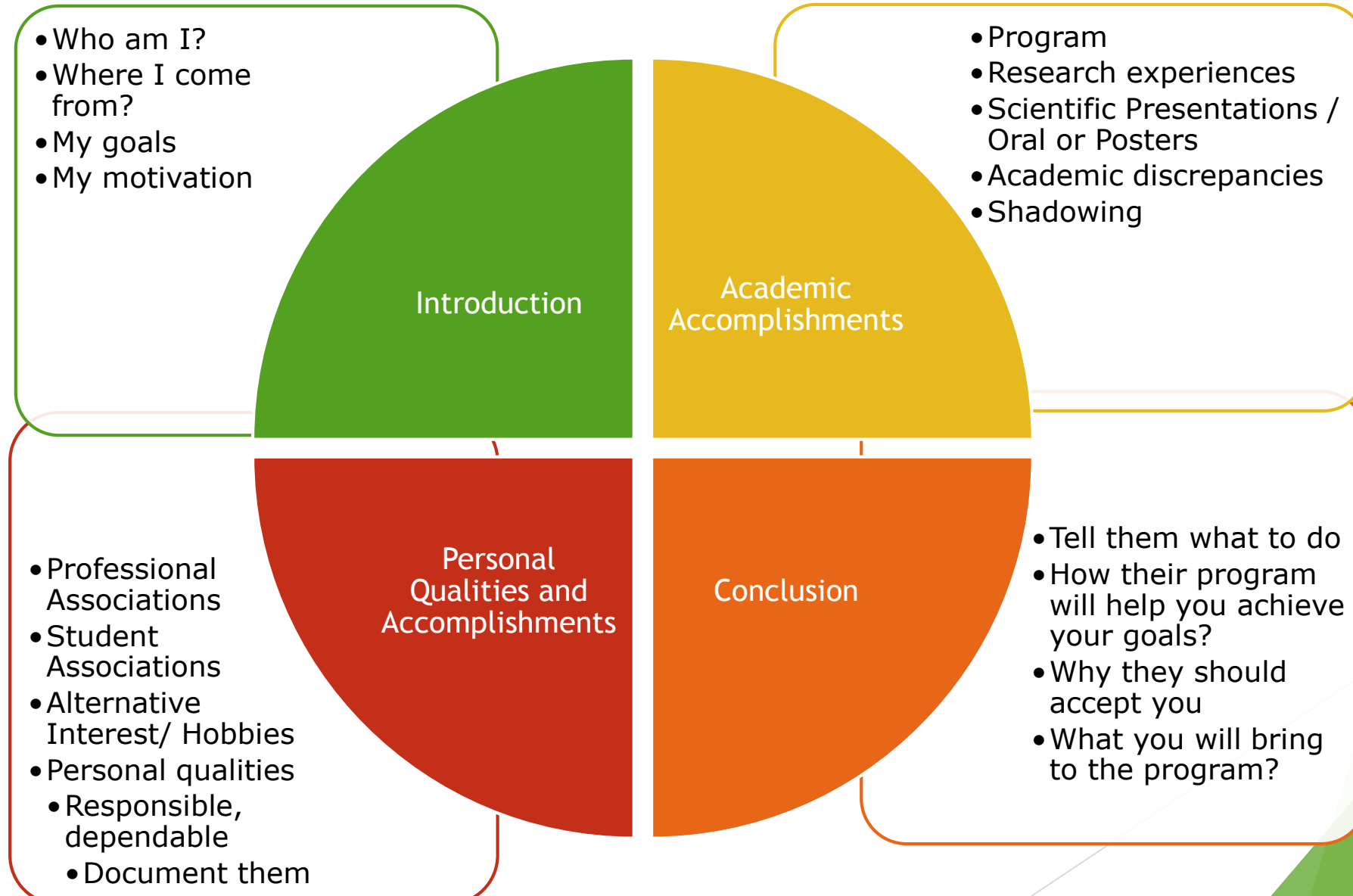
- What are your qualities/achievements that make you suitable for the program?

## Final Remarks

- Why they should pick up you?
- Why their program?
- How you will enrich the program?



# Personal Statement: Fluidity Diagram



# Personal Statements: Drafts

- ▶ First draft
  - ▶ Make sure you conceive and convey the ideas.
  - ▶ Forget about character limits and/or word limits.
    - ▶ We will tailor it down later on.
  - ▶ Forget about grammar.
- ▶ Second draft
  - ▶ Tailor down the sentences without altering the main idea.
    - ▶ What I want to say with this sentence?
    - ▶ Could I say it in less words?
- ▶ Third draft
  - ▶ Verify grammar.
    - ▶ Agreement between subject and verbs.
    - ▶ Verb tenses
    - ▶ Syntax's
- ▶ Fourth draft
  - ▶ Verify fluidity of the story.
  - ▶ Verify if it response to what they are asking you.
    - ▶ Give it to an external editor.

# Personal Statement: Task

## ▶ Generalities

- ▶ Using the diagram provided, generate your own fluidity diagram. Each quarter circle represents a paragraph in your statement.
- ▶ The bullets in the squares associated to each quarter circle corresponds to the sentences that will comprise your paragraph.
- ▶ The numbers on the quarter circles corresponds to the order of the paragraph in the personal statement.
- ▶ The numbers in the bullets corresponds to the order of the sentences in the paragraph.

## ▶ **Task:**

- ▶ First, in the quarter circles write the general topic of the paragraph
  - ▶ Assign a number to each quarter circle
  - ▶ Write the topics of the sentences in the squares associated to each quarter circle
  - ▶ Assign a letter or number to each bullet in the squares
- 
- ▶ **You are ready to start writing the first draft of your personal statement**

# Personal Statements: Examples

▶ Examples:

- ▶ <http://blog.owu.edu/writingcenter/files/2012/07/Sample-Scholarship-Personal-Essays-and-Research-Proposals.pdf>
- ▶ <https://www.studential.com/personal-statement-examples/biomedical-science-personal-statement>

# PERSONAL STATEMENT SAMPLE #1

My interest in science dates back to my years in high school, where I excelled in physics, chemistry, and math. When I was a senior, I took a first-year calculus course at a local college (such an advanced-level class was not available in high school) and earned an A. It seemed only logical that I pursue a career in electrical engineering.

When I began my undergraduate career, I had the opportunity to be exposed to the full range of engineering courses, all of which tended to reinforce and solidify my intense interest in engineering. I've also had the opportunity to study a number of subjects in the humanities and they have been both enjoyable and enlightening, providing me with a new and different perspective on the world in which we live.

In the realm of engineering, I have developed a special interest in the field of laser technology and have even been taking a graduate course in quantum electronics. Among the 25 or so students in the course, I am the sole undergraduate. Another particular interest of mine is electromagnetics, and last summer, when I was a technical assistant at a world-famous local lab, I learned about its many practical applications, especially in relation to microstrip and antenna design. Management at this lab was sufficiently impressed with my work to ask that I return when I graduate. Of course, my plans following completion of my current studies are to move directly into graduate work toward my master's in science. After I earn my master's degree, I intend to start work on my Ph.D. in electrical engineering. Later I would like to work in the area of research and development for private industry. It is in R & D that I believe I can make the greatest contribution, utilizing my theoretical background and creativity as a scientist.

I am highly aware of the superb reputation of your school, and my conversations with several of your alumni have served to deepen my interest in attending. I know that, in addition to your excellent faculty, your computer facilities are among the best in the state. I hope you will give me the privilege of continuing my studies at your fine institution.

# PERSONAL STATEMENT SAMPLE #2

Having majored in literary studies (world literature) as an undergraduate, I would now like to concentrate on English and American literature.

I am especially interested in nineteenth-century literature, women's literature, Anglo-Saxon poetry, and folklore and folk literature. My personal literary projects have involved some combination of these subjects. For the oral section of my comprehensive exams, I specialized in nineteenth century novels by and about women. The relationship between "high" and folk literature became the subject for my honors essay, which examined Toni Morrison's use of classical, biblical, African, and Afro-American folk tradition in her novel. I plan to work further on this essay, treating Morrison's other novels and perhaps preparing a paper suitable for publication.

In my studies toward a doctoral degree, I hope to examine more closely the relationship between high and folk literature. My junior year and private studies of Anglo-Saxon language and literature have caused me to consider the question of where the divisions between folklore, folk literature, and high literature lie. Should I attend your school, I would like to resume my studies of Anglo-Saxon poetry, with special attention to its folk elements.

Writing poetry also figures prominently in my academic and professional goals. I have just begun submitting to the smaller journals with some success and am gradually building a working manuscript for a collection. The dominant theme of this collection relies on poems that draw from classical, biblical, and folk traditions, as well as everyday experience, in order to celebrate the process of giving and taking life, whether literal or figurative. My poetry draws from and influences my academic studies. Much of what I read and study finds a place in my creative work as subject. At the same time, I study the art of literature by taking part in the creative process, experimenting with the tools used by other authors in the past.

In terms of a career, I see myself teaching literature, writing criticism, and going into editing or publishing poetry. Doctoral studies would be valuable to me in several ways. First, your teaching assistantship program would provide me with the practical teaching experience I am eager to acquire. Further, earning a Ph.D. in English and American literature would advance my other two career goals by adding to my skills, both critical and creative, in working with language. Ultimately, however, I see the Ph.D. as an end in itself, as well as a professional stepping stone; I enjoy studying literature for its own sake and would like to continue my studies on the level demanded by the Ph.D. program.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/02/>

# PERSONAL STATEMENT SAMPLE #3

As a single mother who has confronted homelessness and poverty, I am committed to reforming public education. I have a particular interest in improving the accessibility of schooling to homeless individuals, single mothers, and disadvantaged women of color. As a result of my own experiences, I am familiar with the despair and frustration endemic to individuals struggling to survive. I am convinced that increasing individuals' access to education can make the difference between despondency and hope. I am applying for my doctorate in educational leadership so that I can pursue my life-mission: to make education accessible to all.

I began preparing for this mission by volunteering as an intake coordinator at the Christian Assistance Ministry (CAM). Although I had many responsibilities, the role that consumed most of my time and energy was interviewing clients and assessing their physical and emotional needs. One of my greatest contributions was streamlining and updating the paperwork associated with CAM's intake process. I also generated an updated resource list that included many service agencies in the Houston area. By personally contacting each agency to acquire contact information and to learn about its services, I facilitated greater communication between service organizations and ensured that my clients had access to necessary aid.

In my present position as Research Analyst at SeaNet, my primary role is ascertaining the needs of client networks. As an umbrella group, SeaNet has only limited contact with small business development centers, and my job is to ensure that our organization meets these centers' needs. When I took the initiative to send out surveys asking agencies to rate our group's effectiveness, I received an overwhelming response. The information I compiled was so revealing that it was published in the quarterly report that is sent to our funding agency in Washington, D.C. In addition, I have been involved in a number of special, innovative projects. Recently, I analyzed the availability of renewable energy resources in Southern Texas in tandem with The Economic Development Center, Solar Energy, Brooks Air Force Base, and research universities in Texas.

As part of my master's thesis, I collaborated with Upward Bound, Peace Center, and the Davis Education Foundation to underline the importance of community cooperation in public schools. I also provided informational brochures and handouts detailing other such organizations that could assist with the individualized needs of schools. I was gratified when my efforts resulted in teachers and administrators contacting several of the organizations I had mentioned so that the organizations could start outreach in their educational districts.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT SAMPLE #3

Although I have not yet been employed in the educational sector, my master's work, as well as my life experiences, has given me a nuanced and sophisticated knowledge of the educational field. I have acted as a mentor at Davis Middle School for many years and have tutored a number of home-schooled children. When my own children attended school, I was involved in their schools' organizations and often took on a leadership role on educational committees. I served on many boards and was active in assisting both instructors and administrators. Fifteen years of experience has familiarized me with the diverse needs of Houston's students, and it has prepared me to act on their behalf.

My short-term goals include advancing my knowledge of quantitative research using programs such as SPSS and Microcas, and acquiring a sophisticated understanding of how to become a leader in the educational field. I wish to use these skills to promote empirical studies in education that can help direct educational reform.

I am attracted to the doctoral program at Texas A&M for precisely this reason. Only Texas A&M offers the kind of collaborative experience that suits my personal needs and professional goals. Over the past four years, I have seen the department blossom into a challenging and innovative program. I am excited about the program's direction and its emphasis on practical application. I appreciate that every course offers the opportunity for independent research, and that the faculty is open to student suggestions for improvement. The flexibility and patience of the faculty and the talent of the students makes Texas A&M a singular choice for my doctoral degree.

My long-term goal is to use my past experience and Texas A&M training to help make education accessible to all, particularly the underprivileged. Whether I am working in the public or private sector, I look forward to addressing the nation's urgent need to educate its citizens efficiently and comprehensively.



# Closing Remarks

- ▶ Be yourself
- ▶ Tell a story
- ▶ Show diversity
- ▶ Tailor to each institution
- ▶ Be assertive
- ▶ Always reflect yourself
- ▶ Always add an anchor sentence
  - ▶ which define the story

# Appendix

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the page, creating a modern, layered effect. The rest of the page is a plain white background.

## ▶ *Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules*

- ▶ Strive for depth rather than breadth. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences
- ▶ Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say
- ▶ Provide the reader with insight into what drives you
- ▶ Be yourself, not the 'ideal' applicant
- ▶ Get creative and imaginative in the opening remarks, but make sure it's something that no one else could write
- ▶ Address the school's unique features that interest you
- ▶ Focus on the affirmative in the personal statement; consider an addendum to explain deficiencies or blemishes
- ▶ Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them
- ▶ Proofread carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style
- ▶ Use readable fonts, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins

- ▶ Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Pitfalls
- ▶ 1. Do not submit an 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
- ▶ 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
  - ▶ o "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is..."
  - ▶ o "This question asks me to discuss..."
  - ▶ o "I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application."
  - ▶ o "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school."
  - ▶ o "In sum, there are three reasons why you should admit me..."
- ▶ 8. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages
- ▶ 9. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
- ▶ 10. Do not get the name of the school wrong
- ▶ 11. Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words

# Personal Statement: Do

- ▶ •Aim for depth, not breadth.
- ▶ •Write why an event is significant to you and what you learned from it.
- ▶ •Focus on one or two specific themes and discuss related experiences.
- ▶ •Concentrate on capturing the reader's interest in the opening paragraph.
- ▶ •Have specific reasons for applying to each program.
- ▶ •Mention specific faculty with whom you are interested in working.
- ▶ •Strive to make the essay unique by using concrete examples from your life experience. This allows you to stand out from other applicants.
- ▶ •Select people who you trust to read and provide feedback on your personal statement, especially if English is not your primary language.
- ▶ •Create a conclusion that refers back to your introduction and ties your points together.
- ▶ •Connect life experiences to your professional goals and career motivation.
- ▶ •Articulate short- and long-term career goals clearly.
- ▶ •Be selective when choosing supplemental materials to submit (only submit materials requested by school).
- ▶ •Comment (briefly) on irregular grade trends, discrepancies on transcripts, or circumstances that affected test scores.

# Personal Statement: Don'ts

- ▶ • Submit the same essay to multiple schools. Write a clichéd introduction or conclusion. Preach to the reader.
- ▶ • Repeat information elsewhere in your application. Discuss money as a motivating factor.
- ▶ • Cram too much information into the essay. Exceed word and/or page limits.
- ▶ • Exaggerate your qualifications or experience. Discuss potentially controversial topics (e.g.,
  - ▶ • politics or religion).
- ▶ • Include extraneous materials (e.g., addendums to applications, videotapes, or audiotapes) unless specifically asked.

- ▶ Be prepared to write and revise and write and revise and edit and revise and rewrite and edit and...
- ▶ Seek advice; talk with different people, listen to what they say, and then follow what feels right for you.
- ▶ Every person is unique. What makes you unique? What can you share from your life that will help a stranger understand why you are different from anyone else that has ever applied to this school or business?
- ▶ We are defined by the stories we tell; writing a personal statement is an exercise in story-telling.
- ▶ Think details, details, details.
- ▶ Better to focus on one or two primary issues/experiences rather than briefly cover many.
- ▶ Avoid self-promotions (e.g., it does not help to claim: "I am an intelligent, compassionate, and caring person.")
- ▶ Keep your guard up and avoid cliches "like the plague." Cliches obscure your unique message.
- ▶ Always avoid phrasing like "I've always wanted to be a \_\_\_\_\_."
- ▶ Always avoid "always."
- ▶ Avoid the flippant, glib, or cute.
- ▶ Be wary of humor. If you are compelled to be funny, try for the subtle or ironic: attempts at humor often come across as evidence of immaturity (evidence of that quality in this handout?).
- ▶ No whining.
- ▶ Avoid writing on personal problems or excuses for failure.
- ▶ Do not criticize past teachers, other programs, other businesses, or KoCom's CEO.

- ▶ Avoid emphasis on monetary reasons for your motivations.
- ▶ Be wary of egocentricity; commend yourself without bragging about yourself.
- ▶ If asked to describe weaknesses, discuss ones that can be seen as strengths.
- ▶ Eliminate sexist language (predicting your future contributions to "the brotherhood of man" will probably not help your cause).
- ▶ Avoid unnecessary Capitalizations of Nouns.
- ▶ Use language that feels right for you. Look up questionable words in a good dictionary.
- ▶ No handwritten submissions.
- ▶ Use conventional font choices and sizes: emphasize clarity and readability.
- ▶ No spelling, grammatical--or typographical errors.
- ▶ Look up any questionable grammatical or stylistic constructions in a good reference book (the most widely accepted authority is the *Chicago Manual of Style*).
- ▶ If appropriate, reveal you know something about the company or school to which you are applying.
- ▶ Ask at least one skilled, demanding reader to proofread your "final" document. Be prepared to revise your "final" document.
- ▶ Perfect personal statement: not too short; not too long.

**<http://www.public.coe.edu/wac/28tipspersonalstatement.htm>**



# References

- ▶ <http://www.augsburg.edu/urgo/grad/personal-statement/>
- ▶ <http://www.public.coe.edu/wac/28tipspersonalstatement.htm>
- ▶ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- ▶ [http://www.essayedge.com/sample-essay\\_graduate3-after.html](http://www.essayedge.com/sample-essay_graduate3-after.html)
- ▶ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/02/>

# ¿Preguntas?

