

Writing a Personal Statement

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Important Considerations When Writing a Personal Statement

- **Purpose:**
 - Gain acceptance into a program
 - Create a positive impression
 - Distinguish yourself from other applicants
- **Audience:**
 - Selection Committee members—faculty members, professionals, admissions personnel
 - Busy readers

Considerations continued

- Guidelines:
 - Content—essay questions/desired information:
 - Describe your motivation for pursuing an MBA degree. How does it fit with your short- and long-term goals?
 - How will your academic background, personal characteristics, and overall experiences contribute to the MPA program?
 - Length
 - Limit your essay response to 500 words.
 - Present your response in two double-spaced pages.

Planning the Personal Statement

Evaluate how you can distinguish yourself from other applicants:

- What is unique, unusual, or distinctive about you and your background?
- What experience in your life really showcases who you are?
- What in your background has significantly affected your choices?
- What do you bring to a program that is different from what other applicants bring?
- What makes you a stronger candidate than other applicants?
- Have you had to deal with unusual circumstances or hardships?
- What has inspired or motivated you to select a certain profession?
- What academic/professional/personal achievement(s) are you most proud of and how do they qualify you for a program?
- What could you include in your personal statement to help explain some deficiencies in your application (GPA, test scores, experience) ?

Basic Format for Personal Statement

- **Introduction**
 - Start with an attention grabber (story), and prepare readers for what follows.
- **Body**
 - Provide details and explanation related to your overall response.
 - Respond to all questions or provide all requested information.
- **Conclusion**
 - Connect the closing to the opening; provide a unity to the statement and a positive closing.

Introduction

- Attention grabber—start with an opening that separates you from other applicants.
- Original
 - Allow me to introduce myself and my qualifications.
- Revision
 - Duìbùqǐ 對不起 (excuse me), xièxiè 謝謝 (thank you), and ní hǎo 您好 (hello) were the only Chinese words that I knew when I first landed in Beijing as a study abroad student. When I returned home six months later, I had not only learned conversational Chinese, but I knew that I wanted to major in international business and pursue an MBA degree to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for such a career.

Examples of Opening Sentences

- **Original**

- I am a compilation of many years gained from overcoming the relentless struggles of life.

- **Revision**

- I was six years old, the eldest of six children living in a small two-bedroom apartment in the Bronx, when my father was murdered.

Examples

- **Original**
 - If it were not for a strong support system which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.
- **Revision**
 - Although my grandmother and I did not have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than many other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.

Body

- Fit all ideas together into a unified statement, not just a series of unrelated paragraphs.
- Answer all parts of the questions or requests.
- Provide specifics about your background and experience. Depending on the question, consider including:
 - Academic achievements
 - Publications and/or presentations
 - Jobs
 - Honors and awards
 - Volunteer experiences
 - Extra-curricular activities
 - Leadership

Body Examples

- **Original**
 - I want to be a sport psychologist because I am interested in sports and in psychology. I also like to help people with problems they may be having.
- **Revision**
 - My motivation to become a sport psychologist began in my senior year in college when I was a member of the tennis team and suddenly could not serve. Although I had no physical injury, I had no “feel” on my serve and never knew if my serve would hit the bottom of the net or the back of the fence. I dreaded having to serve and had no idea what to do. My coach tried to overhaul my serving technique and my teammates gave me constant advice, but the problem continued and no one really knew what was happening or how to help. Only later, was I able to put a name on what I had experienced—the yips—and to learn about causes and treatments. From this firsthand experience, I became determined to learn as much as possible about the yips and other performance issues that athletes face. I am applying to your PhD program in sport psychology to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to work with athletes and coaches on performance issues. I want to do all that I can to prepare myself for a career as a sport psychologist and help athletes and coaches alike to better understand and deal with such issues.

Body Examples

- **Original**
 - I always wanted to be a doctor because I have always been interested in science and in helping people. My favorite subject in school was always science because I am fascinated by how and why things work. I also think I have always liked to help people.
- **Revision**
 - What specifics and details could be used in the revision?

Conclusion

- Tie the conclusion to the opening to create a unified statement.
- Do **NOT** close with overused statements:
 - “I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application.”
 - “It is my sincere hope that the committee will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school.”

Things To Avoid

- Clichés
- Generalizations with no specifics
- Complaints about your life
- Any grammatical and spelling mistakes
- Slang or informal language
- Irrelevant material
- Information you think the readers want to hear from the “ideal” candidate

Techniques To Improve Your Personal Statement

- Personalize your statement.
- Be yourself, not the “ideal” applicant.
- Use concrete details, not vague ideas.
- Tie all details, examples, and life events together into a unified statement.
- Emphasize positives; avoid negatives.
- Get feedback from multiple readers. Go to the Writing Center for feedback as well.
- Revise and edit carefully.
- Check and double check grammar and spelling.