Why do you need a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is a chance for the admissions committees to get to know you. The personal statement is a good chance to highlight significant things about you that don’t appear elsewhere on your application. This is your chance to tell the “why behind the degree. Why are you pursuing your particular degree? Why will you be successful at your chosen profession? Perhaps the most important why of all is: with all of the candidates who are applying with very similar or maybe even better academic histories, why should we choose to admit you above other applicants?

Know what the admissions officers are seeking

Don’t make assumptions about your graduate school personal statements. Many programs simply ask you to submit a personal statement without any further guidance. Other programs will tell you exactly how they want the essay structured along with word count limits and formatting requirements. Review the prompt thoroughly and plan your essay before you begin writing to ensure that you create an essay that will be an effective and persuasive addition to your application package.

Know your program and make connections

Securing acceptance into a graduate program is more about being the best match than about being the most highly qualified. Among applicants who meet the program’s minimum requirements, they’ll choose an enthusiastic and informed applicant over one with higher test scores and a better GPA who doesn’t seem to know much about their program.

During your graduate studies, you’ll likely do research, and graduate programs want to know that you can both participate in ongoing research as well as find a mentor for your own project. In your essay, write about professors in the programs whose work interests you and why. Also, there is life outside of the classroom. Does the school have a close-knit traditional college campus? Is it located in the heart of the city? Especially if you will be moving with your family, show the admissions officers that you will thrive in their environment.

Finish with a strong statement about why the school is your top pick

This doesn’t necessarily mean that the school is your only pick. However, generic essays have no place in the graduate school application process. Form letters aren’t persuasive, and generic essays won’t help your application package. If you can’t sincerely write that the school is a top pick, then why are you applying there? Instead, focus on creating stellar essays for the ones that actually interest you. Help the admissions officers understand your overarching vision for your future career and how your time at the school will prepare you to realize these goals.

Personal Statement Key Points: (Should be “creative writing style” NOT research style)

- Begin your Personal Statement with a hook. Grab the reader’s attention. Discovering your personal reason for wanting to pursue the degree can oftentimes be used for the hook statement.
- SHOW the reader the story, don’t tell them
- You should have strong transitions between ideas
Personal statements should describe the applicants’:

- Motivation to pursue this program (WHY they want to be a .......)
- Personal background (why they are unique, things they have overcome)
- Past experiences (why based on these experiences they are the BEST candidate for this graduate program)

Edit for grammar / spelling

- Watch for active vs. passive voice
- Avoid gendered words
- Avoid the use of “I” all the time
- Grammar and spelling must be perfect on these

Outline to help you organize your Personal Statement:

1. Passionate hook
2. Transition to your background in the field
3. Specific classes by title and professors you have had (especially if well-known in the field
4. Related extracurricular activities (especially if they hint at some personal quality you want to convey
5. Any publications or other professional accomplishments in the field (perhaps conference presentations or public readings)
6. Explanations about problems in your background (if needed)
7. Why you have chosen this graduate school (name one or two professors and what you know of their specific areas or some feature of the program which specifically attracts you.)

Bad Example: Opener

*I am honored to apply for the Master of Library Science program at the University of Okoboji because as long as I can remember I have had a love affair with books. Since I was eleven I have known I wanted to be a librarian.

Good Example: Opener

*When I was eleven, my great-aunt Gretchen passed away and left me something that changed my life: a library of about five thousand books. Some of my best days were spent arranging and reading her books. Since then, I have wanted to be a librarian.

Feedback:

You have to really dig. Be introspective. Don’t settle for “I love this field.” Why do you love this field? Why do you want to work in this field for the rest of your life? Why does it complete you? Cut through the bull you tell your parents and relatives and friends. What is your truth? Find it and then find a memorable way to say it.; Grad schools require the personal statement not only because they want to find out about you as an applicant, they want you to really think about why you are taking such a life-changing step – truly and profoundly why.

Good Example: Opener

*The area was deserted except for a few makeshift shelters. I waded through mud and puddles, shining my flashlight into overgrown brush by rusted railroad tracks. It was three o’clock on a frozen February morning in Salt Lake City, and I was looking for people sleeping on the street. As a volunteer for agencies that provide services to the homeless, I helped conduct the annual Homeless Street Count, a census that aids the federal government in allocating funds annually.