

[Adapted from Yale Writing Center](#)

WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

The personal statement you submit with a graduate school application is your opportunity to convey what you will be like as a student, colleague, and professional within your discipline. It is your chance to express your passion, demonstrate your familiarity with the field and potential research interests.

More importantly, it is critical that you convince the audience you are a match for their program; you will gain most from being a part of this program and they will gain from having you as a student and future alumni. Be confident and clear.

We do not recommend more than 3 pages double-spaced. You are not expected to answer everything mentioned in this sheet. ***Pay specific attention to the bold and italic sentences.***

INITIAL PREPARATION:

- **Thoroughly** research the schools and departments to which you plan to apply
- **Graduate admissions committees want to know why you are the best fit for their program/department. Your statement should reflect your knowledge of the department's research strengths.** ---*Speak to faculty and research you would want to be part of ---or partnerships the program has- articles completed by faculty- news articles they were part of, etc.*
- **Think** about your motivations and goals for pursuing a graduate degree. Graduate school prepares you for a specific profession: **why do you want to join that profession?** << *knowing the answer to this will help you with your personal statement*
- **Consider** *how* your skills and experience have prepared you for success in this field and in this program << *write this down. This is important to note in your statement. These thoughts will help you provide concrete examples*

GOALS FOR THE PERSONAL STATEMENT:

- **Demonstrate** your intellectual passion for the field—what thrills or excites you about the research you've done or you would like to do? *Do not spend more than 3 sentences on this. Otherwise, this becomes "fluff." It fills the page space and says little about YOU.*

- **Provide concrete examples** of your skills, interests, and previous research in the field, and how they might inform the research you would like to pursue in your graduate studies- *Spend a good 2 paragraphs MINIMUM on this information*
- Indicate your familiarity with the procedures and expectations of scholarship and professional training in your field- *if you are aware of it, **it is ok to not know** and indicate your interest in certain organizations, journals, etc.*
- Graduate school is extremely **challenging**—intellectually, emotionally, and financially. *Convey your awareness of this and give examples of challenges you've faced and how you've overcome them.*

WHAT TO AVOID:

- Cliché: Statements like, “I’ve always wanted to be a scientist,” “I have always loved making things,” etc., are both overused and say little to graduate admissions committees. *Using vague, clichéd phrases to explain your interest in the field limits the committee’s ability to have a clear sense of YOUR abilities, experiences, and potential. Instead, try to provide a specific anecdote that illustrates what sparked and sustains your passion OR anecdotes that are transferrable to graduate school.*
- Lists of accomplishments: This is what the rest of the application is for. Avoid writing your resume/CV in the statement. Instead, *focus on experiences, skills, and identities that illustrate the qualities and interests that will make you a good potential scholar.*

DRAFTING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Questions to prompt your writing:

What event, experience, or identity inspired your decision to seriously pursue studies in your field?

What research, scholarship, or experience in the last few years reflects your future scholarly interests? How does it show your knowledge, skills, and passion about the field?

What specific line of inquiry or areas of research would you like to pursue as a graduate student/future scholar? Why are those issues of particular interest to you? Why might they be important to the field as a whole?

What experience illustrates your ability to meet the rigors and challenges of graduate study?

What makes you the ideal student in this program? Experiences, identities, exposure to diversity, leadership, community/volunteer work?

General suggestions for organization:

Begin with a story: Use the first paragraph to tell a narrative that illustrates your intellectual passion and personal commitment to the field.

Use the **middle** section of your essay to focus on your intellectual experience with the field and your goals for future research.

Conclude with why you would excel in your studies, especially at the particular institution to which you are applying.

Other things to keep in mind:

Tailor each statement to the question asked by each graduate school.

Tailor each statement to reflect your knowledge of that particular program.

Consider the faculty, program partnerships (if any), and surrounding community opportunities related to the field (if any). For example, is there an archive at the university or in the city that you would like to take advantage of?

Are there particular laboratories or specialties among the graduate faculty that would give you an opportunity to pursue your interests?

Please note...Your personal statement is not a contract. It is very common to have a research topic in your personal statement and end up doing something different within the field. The committee will not hold you to only researching what is in your statement.