

# WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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## At A Glance

- A personal statement is your chance for the reader to get to know you beyond what they have read in your application
- Prepare to write several drafts, and solicit as much feedback as you can
- Your goal is to be memorable

## A Personal Statement is:

### An Impression

Your personal statement should produce a picture of you as a person, student, and potential scholarship or assistantship recipient.

### An Invitation

The reader must be invited to get to know you personally. Bridge the distance and make your reader feel welcome.

### An Indication of Your Priorities

What you choose to say in your statement tells the committee what your priorities are. What you say, and how you say it, is crucial.

### Your Story

Not all of us are natural storytellers. Before you write, spend some time in self-reflective conversation with friends, family, and mentors.

## A Personal Statement is Not:

### An Academic Paper.

In class, we are taught academic writing by interpreting data, reflecting research, or analyzing events. Personal Statements are different. In a personal statement you must engage on a different, more personal level than you have been trained.

### A Resume in Narrative Form.

An essay that reads like a resume of accomplishments and goals tells the reader nothing that could not be gleaned from your application, and is a wasted opportunity.

## Writing Tips

- Plan on devoting a significant amount of time to writing this essay.
- Look for prompts or guidelines provided by the program. Some have specific requirements around, length, format, word/character count, and topics (if length is not mentioned, stick to one to two pages, single-spaced).
- Use professional language; carefully consider word choice.

## Avoid:

- Starting too many sentences with "I"; when used excessively, your essay feels repetitive.
- Using the word "that" when that isn't that necessary to use that.
- Vague, cliché phrases like "I am so passionate about this as everyone knows, and I work hard, and I want to help people and make a difference to improve the world around me."
- Repeating unique words in the same paragraph; use synonyms instead.
- Exclamation points.
- Inspiring or funny quotations.
- Plagiarizing (remember to paraphrase).

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## Where to Begin:

### Step 1: The "Hook"

The first line/paragraph is critical and should spark a person's curiosity:

- Hooks can be written in the form of an interesting question, strong statement or declaration, fact or statistic, story, or vivid description.
- What can you say that will cause the reader to distinctly remember you?

### Step 2: The Personal Brand - Does your work have a theme?

Create an impression based on your experience, expertise, competencies, actions, and achievements:

- What is distinctive and impressive about you or your life?
- Consider taking a CliftonStrengths assessment (<https://careers.byu.edu>) to articulate your unique characteristics, competencies, and traits.
- What personal characteristics would improve your prospects for success in the field?
- How do others describe you?

### Step 3: The Questions

Address key questions of interest:

- What details of your life (personal/family, history, people/events) will help the committee understand you and set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in this field and what reinforced your conviction to this field?
- What have you done to prepare for the field through research with professors, work/internship/volunteer experiences, conversations with professionals, or involvement in student clubs/associations?
- Why do you want to go to grad school, in this field, in this program, at this university? Identify a specific faculty member you might like to work with and why.

- What are your future career goals and how will this program help you attain them?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the selection committee to be interested in you?

### Step 4: The Story

Share transformational experiences:

- What are your milestones (choosing major, internship, job, research, overcoming obstacles)?
- When have you influenced others or organizations you have been a part of (leadership, volunteer/service, community engagement)?
- How have work/internship experiences contributed to your growth in leadership and/or teamwork skills?
- Address discrepancies in your academic record requiring explanation (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE scores or a distinct upward pattern to your recent GPA)?

### Step 5: The Review

As this is a review heavy process, plan on others looking at it along the way:

- Proofread by reading it out loud several times.
- Check for punctuation or grammatical errors.
- Solicit feedback from your Career Director, professors, peers, and other individuals you trust.

### Step 6: The Application

Before you bravely hit that submit button, consider these tips:

- If you have time, take Student Development 318 to get feedback from your peers and professor.
- Visit the Writing Center (3340 HBLL).
- Consider how what you've written can be used for scholarship applications too!

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During my freshman and sophomore years at University A, I worked as a physical therapy assistant on a voluntary, part-time basis at Medical Center B in Hometown, State. During this experience, the most important conversation I had relevant to my career goal as a physician was with a nurse. I had observed that she was exceptionally intelligent, knowledgeable, and competent, and I asked her why she had elected to become a nurse rather than a doctor. "A physician has to make a lifetime commitment to medicine; his profession must be his first priority. I am not prepared to have a profession dominate my life." Her response did not surprise me; it only served to reinforce my commitment to a profession in which I had become actively involved.

For the summer of 20xx, while I could have continued my work in physical therapy, I chose to seek a position which I felt would provide a new perspective from which to view medicine. Upon returning to Big town, I began working at the Department of Radiology at Medical Center C. My activities were concentrated in the Special Procedures Division where one of my duties involved assisting the nurses in preparing the patients and the rooms for the scheduled test. I observed the procedures which usually were angiograms, venograms or percutaneous nephrostomies. I was usually provided with a detailed explanation in the course of the procedure which was informative and educational. At the conclusion of the procedure, I listened to the radiologist read the X-rays and learned about the patient's problems and the appropriate treatment(s). The staff, after getting to know me, encouraged my spending time with many of the apprehensive patients to try and alleviate some of their anxieties and to be generally supportive. In addition, for one hour each day, I attended classes with the interns where I learned how to interpret some of the nuances of complicated X-rays and listened to a discussion of some of the interesting cases that occurred weekly. My experiences at Medical Center C were so stimulating that I immediately applied for placement for the following summer and was accepted.

In June of 20xx I began to work as a research assistant for Dr. Teacher, a surgeon at Medical Center C. The research concerned the reliability of the criteria for the diagnosis of appendicitis. The justification for the research is the problematic nature of diagnoses as evidenced by the significant negative laparotomy rate. The aim of this study was to assess the feasibility of increasing the diagnostic accuracy. A large part of my activities involved using the hospital computer to retrieve, study, and evaluate appropriate patient charts in order to enlarge the statistical sample. My activities have not only made me more aware of the importance of medical research, but it has also shown me how some physicians combine their practice with clinical research.

After reading the article "The Ordeal: Life as a Medical Resident" in The New York Times Magazine, my understanding of the strong commitment a physician must make was strengthened. Unlike the nurse in Hometown, I have been impressed by the many doctors who lead rich and rewarding home lives, as well as being totally dedicated to their profession.

Besides a sense of dedication, I am aware that appropriate academic ability is needed to meet the demands of medical school and postgraduate training. I elected to attend University A because it is an excellent institution of higher education, and I wanted to be on my own so as to develop the self-confidence necessary to manage my life. My high academic performance and my science MCAT scores confirm my ability to handle the anticipated demands of the medical sciences. In light of both my clinical exposure and medical educational preparation, I feel confident that I will be prepared for the demands of medical education, training, and practice. I look forward to beginning this exciting and challenging adventure