

## **Structure of a personal statement**

### **Opening**

*Present a clear summary of your background, academic interests, and future goals as justification for applying to this graduate school/program. Explain your specific field of interest.*

### **Body**

*Establish your academic preparation specific to the program you're applying to. Call attention to your strengths or improvements over time in science courses, mention relevant experiences such as research and your scholarship. Be very clear what you did in your research project, the skills you developed, the outcomes from the research.*

*Describe your professional goals, your motivations for these goals and how you intend to get there. Provide evidence for your progress...presentations, leadership positions, outreach to younger students, publications, other experiences. Include your motivations and influences on your career interests and direction. What skills and knowledge would you like to obtain through this grad program?*

*Tailor your future career goals and ensure that they match the program you're applying to. Possibly propose faculty you would like to work with and why.*

### **Conclusion**

*Summarize your goals and reaffirm your preparation and confidence that this program is right for you.*

***Describing your Research/Scholarship***

***If you've worked on a project:***

- *Describe the project's focus and specific question*
- *Explain and contextualize why the research is important*
- *Summarize the methods and resulting data collected*
- *Summarize the conclusions and future directions resulting from this work*
- *Clearly indicate your role in the project and what you learned from this experience*

***For other types of projects/jobs/internship you've been involved with in your discipline:***

- *Describe the purpose of the project/job/internship and what goals were being achieved*
  - *Describe HOW these goals were achieved*
  - *What was the outcome of the project/experience?*
  - *Clearly indicate your role in the project and what you learned from this experience*
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***Following the guidelines above, describe your current project***

### Examples of Personal Statement Prompts

1) *Submit a Personal Goals Statement (Psychology, UNC)*

2) *Your statement of purpose should provide readers of your application with a strong sense of your skill in, and commitment to, advanced graduate study in English. Your statement should not offer general biographical details; instead, include relevant details about your academic experience, background, qualifications, or goals not already evident in other portions of your application. If you have had the opportunity to pursue independent research at an advanced level, either inside or outside of an academic setting, you should describe the nature of this work as well as its relation to future scholarly and professional aims. (English, UNC Chapel Hill)*

3) *A brief statement describing your background, career goals, and research interests. These should be no longer than four pages for doctoral applicants. Ph.D. applicants should also include a **SEPARATE** statement that details a problem that they would like to solve during their time as a doctoral student. This statement should deal with a narrow topic, something that could be addressed in a semester's research project, for example. (Journalism, UNC Chapel Hill)*

4) *A personal statement, of approximately 400-500 words, highlighting information (such as training, areas of particular interest in graduate study, and career objectives) that will help provide the Admissions Committee with a descriptive picture of the total student. (Political Science, UNC Chapel Hill)*

5) *Tell us about your academic background and future goals. What have been your major achievements in the past? What do you hope to accomplish in the future? How do you see this program helping you achieve these goals?*

6) *In your statement, please discuss:*

- *Your background: how your experiences (education, work, volunteer, and/or personal) have prepared you for graduate study;*
- *Your objectives for graduate study: your career goals, possible faculty mentors, and (for doctoral students) initial research interests;*
- *Your decision to apply to [dept]: why you think there is a good fit between your objectives and our program;*

7) *The statement should be single-spaced and should not be more than two or three pages long. A clear statement of your intended research interests is the central part of this statement. Discuss:(a) past experience or research training relevant to your doctoral research interests ;*

*(b) papers, publications, or relevant courses taken ;*

*(c) awareness of the current literature on your field of interest [though citations should be used selectively];*

*(d) how or why you feel this area is of special intellectual and/or practical importance.*

8) *Respond to the following questions in a three to five page typed narrative; add any additional information that may be helpful to the admissions committee.*

- *What are your reasons for applying to this program?*
- *Discuss your personal values, philosophy, knowledge of discipline X, and the professional and community experiences that have influenced your decision to enter the profession.*
- *Comment on your skills, strengths and weaknesses.*
- *Describe your reasons for choosing a particular focus in the field of X.*

**Do's**

- *Tell a story*
- *Write about yourself*
- *Use the first person point of view*
- *Let the facts speak for you*
- *Emphasize your uniqueness*
- *Describe your skills and knowledge*
- *Use active words*
- *Be clear and PERSUASIVE*
- *Type your essay*
- *Check grammar, punctuation, word usage, etc.*
- *Ask at least 3 people to review and critique*
- *Write and rewrite and write again*
- *Say what the program will gain by accepting you*

**Don'ts**

- *Don't make general statements saying you want to "solve social problems" or "increase understanding" or to "help people." Instead, name specific goals addressed to specific interests.*
  - *Don't make up experiences you never had*
  - *Don't send in a first draft*
  - *Don't start writing the night before the due date*
  - *Don't plagiarize from others*
  - *Don't make it too long (or too short)*
  - *Don't forget to address specific questions asked by the program you're applying to*
  - *Avoid overuse of "to be"*
  - *Avoid clichés, don't be cute, this is a professional communication*
  - *Don't repeat your resume*
  - *Avoid abbreviations*
  - *Avoid negatives and long personal stories*
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**BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS**

*What are your professional goals?*

*What skills and knowledge make you qualified and how will this program support your career goals?*

*What are your areas of interest and why, why not other areas?*

*Experiences/influences helped guide your path – mentors/family/friends*

**Additional questions to think about...**

- *What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?*
- *What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?*
- *When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?*
- *How have you learned about this field--through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?*
- *If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?*
- *What are your career goals?*
- *Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre MCAT/GRE scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?*
- *Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example: economic, familial, or physical) in your life?*
- *What personal characteristics (for example: integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?*
- *What other skills (for example: leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?*
- *Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school--and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?*
- *What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?*

**Select one of these additional questions above and provide your response below**