



BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Writing a Personal Statement

Ideally, a statement of purpose or a personal statement should distinguish you from other program or scholarship applicants who have approximately the same grade point average, comparable accomplishments, awards and/or work experience.

STRATEGY

Admissions boards read hundreds of statements. You want yours to be distinctive, to capture the attention of the reader, but not be overdone. The best way to illustrate your individuality is to define your goals in specific terms.

Familiarize yourself with the program to which you are applying. Do some research. Read the catalogue. Check the library for books and articles published by faculty members. Then mention details in your statement; describe how the courses, the field work, the facilities, etc., meet your goals.

The following is an example of a specific opening: "While pursuing my studies in American Literature at the CUNY Graduate Center, I will seek a position teaching within the CUNY system. I feel the diverse student population at a public college provides an environment which is academically inspiring as well as politically enlightening. I look forward to studying under the professors of the English Department who have shown a commitment to multiculturalism."

Avoid using general opening statements such as: "I have always wanted to help others, and I feel teaching is right for me."

In addition to stating your goals in specific terms, describe your values and talents that recommend you to the program. To illustrate your best traits without seeming to boast, you can relate a short anecdote. Rather than say you are industrious, describe an incident that shows this quality.

Note: It may not be necessary to label this particular characteristic as applicable to your field of study. The reader, a specialist, is aware of the demands of his/her field.

Your statement is an essay with an implicit thesis: that you would be a successful graduate student (and/or a worthy scholarship recipient) and that the program to which you are applying fits your academic needs and professional goals. The body of the essay should illustrate and validate your thesis.

CONTENT

Most institutions provide guidelines for writing the statement. These will appear at the top of the statement form or within the application booklet. Some institutions may be more interested in specifics as to what you plan to do with your degree professionally, and others might encourage you to be honest if your plans are tentative.

Read the guidelines carefully. Some applications ask a number of questions requiring a series of short written responses. In such cases, keep your thesis in mind and remember to be as specific as you can in the space allowed.

Generally you will be asked to complete your statement in one to two pages. Therefore, do not duplicate the list of qualifications if this appears on your application. However, you may need to highlight or explain sections of your record, noting, for example, how many research-related courses appear on your transcript, your grade point average in your major, a gap or hiatus in your college career.

Utilize the statement to inform the college of your presentation skills and philosophical commitment behind your goals. While the statement of purpose illustrates your personality, it is not personal writing—you should not mention family matters or hobbies that do not directly relate to your studies.

STRUCTURE

Your first paragraph should state your goal. You may want to begin with an anecdote in order to capture the attention of the reader. Your body paragraphs could list the events and experiences in chronological order or in order of importance or relevance to the program. The final paragraph should end on a positive note and restate your goal in terms of its anticipated fulfillment at the institution to which you are applying. These are only suggestions. Individual personal statements should be as varied as the individuals writing them.

Note: Each application requires an individual statement. No generic essay can provide an adequate response to every—or any—application question.

REVISION

This is perhaps one of the most important essays you will ever write, so do not send in a first draft. Read it over, judge its effectiveness, then revise it. When you are satisfied with your statement, proofread it carefully. It should be sent on time, so it arrives on or before the due date. Therefore, do not delay getting started.