

Personal Statement Guide

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement is a written description of your achievements, interests, motivations, etc. as part of an application to a graduate program. Personal statements are sometimes used in other applications, but for the purpose of this document, we will focus on applications to graduate school.

Why do I need to write a personal statement?

A personal statement is a powerful part of your application to a graduate program. This is your chance to answer some important questions like, “Why did I choose this profession?” “What motivates me?” “What should schools know about me that wasn’t in any other part of my application?” and more. This is your opportunity to really give people an insight into who you are, and let yourself stand out from other applicants.

What should I include in my personal statement?

Your statement should include some insight into how you ended up applying for whatever program you are looking into. How did you reach the point where you are applying to medical school or dental school or any other program you might be writing this statement for?

Some of the best personal statements include an anecdote that illustrates how you ended up here, and why you ended up here. You want to make sure to show and not tell. They likely have list of your achievements, your transcripts, etc. You want to give them more insight than your resume does. Using an anecdote ensures that you are not just listing off other parts of your application, but truly illustrating why you deserve a spot in their program and why you deserve to continue your journey in health care.

Your beginning statement should pull the readers into your statement and engage them. First impressions are important, even in a relatively short personal statement. Your concluding statement is also important. This could summarize your intent, and look forward to your future. As silly as it sounds, if you cannot imagine yourself dropping a mic after your concluding statement, it could use some improvement.

Make sure you are using correct grammar and punctuation throughout your personal statement. There are character limits on most personal statements, so ensuring that each character has purpose is important. Being meticulous will allow you to share more of the important information, and demonstrate attention to detail and sincere effort.

One of the most important things to remember is this is *your* personal statement. It should include content that means something to you, written in a way that sounds like you. You shouldn’t write in a different style than normal, or include something that doesn’t feel genuine. Make sure you are not just writing what you think an admissions committee wants to hear. Even if you think it sounds better, authenticity is going to shine through more than anything else. Regardless of advice and revisions from other people, you should always be the one calling the shots. This is your spotlight, make the most of it.

When should I write my personal statement?

You need to give yourself plenty of time to write your personal statement. We recommend starting your statement at least three to six months before your application process begins. This will give you time to focus on writing, as well as finding others to help you look over, revise, and finalize your essay. One way you can approach your personal statement is with your first rough draft, ignore all the grammar, character limits, formatting, etc. and just free write. Put your heart on paper, try different stories, really explore the reasons that you decided to pursue this. Afterwards, decide which parts stand out the most, and best illustrate you and your story. Once you lock down content, you can add in grammar, formatting, and make sure your character count is correct.

You can draft your personal statement multiple times, in fact we recommend doing this. You should also continue to edit and revise the drafts until you feel really confident and sure in your personal statement. At this point, continue to have people look it over.

You can even ask your pre-health advisor what they think! If you decide to send your personal statement to your pre-health advisor, make sure you send them your most polished draft. This means that you should check thoroughly for grammar and spelling mistakes. It should also be a draft you are seriously considering submitting. We recommend such a polished draft so that the time your advisor spends reviewing your statement contributes the most that it can. It is a good idea to take your statement to the writing center before bringing it to your advisor. Another important thing to remember is to give your advisor ample time to review your statement. They will need time to find open space in their schedule to review and discuss your statement. Asking them a few days before submission is not enough time for them to review your statement.

Other tips and tricks

Make sure you are revising and asking as many people as you feel comfortable to review your personal statement. People you know and trust are likely to have important insight that could help bolster your draft. Just remember, it is still your statement, and no one should change anything without your say-so.

Some components you might think to include in your essay are: motivation, fit, capacity, and vision. *Motivation* refers to a student's ongoing preparation for the health profession and can include the initial inspiration. *Fit* is determined through self-assessment of relevant values and personal qualities as they relate to the profession. *Capacity* is demonstrated through holistically aligning with the competencies expected in the profession. *Vision* relates to the impact you wish to make in the field.

Be confident! You have worked so hard to get to where you're at today. This effort speaks to the kind of person you are, and the kind of applicant you are. Be confident in yourself and in your journey. You are doing wonderful things!

Resources

ISU Writing Center: <https://www.isu.edu/tutoring/writing-center/>

ISU Career Center: <https://isu.edu/career/>