PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Why a Personal Statement is Important
Personal statements are used as part of the application process for many Ph.D. programs, medical schools, fellowship programs, and even, in some cases, hiring new employees. They help assess an individual’s commitment to their chosen area of study or work. In addition to strong writing skills, the admissions committee is also looking for something that standardized tests and GPAs cannot quantify — the writer’s personal story or sense of purpose as it relates to the program or position he or she is seeking (hence the name “Personal Statement” or “Statement of Purpose”). While the weight of the statement in terms of the overall application may vary from place to place, it is undoubtedly a key factor in the decision-making process.

The more you can engage your reader with a personal story of why your chosen field is important to you, as well as your long-range career goals and purpose for pursuing further study or work in that field, the more compelling your statement will be. In writing your essay it is important to keep two goals in mind: 1) To persuade the admissions or hiring committee that they want to admit you to their program or to hire you; and 2) That you are far more than a GPA or test score. You are a real person who would be an asset to the school or to the organization.

The Three-Step Process to Writing a Personal Statement:

1. **Brainstorming**
   In this step you engage in self-reflection, research and the development of ideas for your personal statement. Allow yourself plenty of time to perform this step, and consider the following questions:
   - What events, personal experiences, or difficult situations shaped my character?
   - What experiences were most influential in choosing my career path?
   - What skills, knowledge, and experiences distinguish me from other candidates?
   - What do I find meaningful or purposeful (passion)?
   - What are my goals or hopes for my future career?
   - What are my hobbies?

2. **Selecting Your Statement Topic**
   As you begin Step Two, ask yourself: “What impression do I hope to create through my statement?” Select a topic that will allow you to synthesize the information from Step One into a well written document that will leave a positive and memorable impression. Consider some of the following tips as you make your selection:
   - Avoid using gimmicks, but select a topic that grabs the readers’ attention in the first paragraph
   - Provide vivid supporting experiences to your topic
   - Avoid repeating information that can be found elsewhere in your application (such as GPA)
   - Seek feedback from your professors, advisors, and career counselor about the topic

3. **Tips for Writing Your Personal Statement**
   As you write your statement, keep in mind that your goal is to convince admissions or the hiring committee that you are the candidate they want.
   - Start by creating an outline and journaling your first draft of your statement
   - Be original - make it interesting
   - Be yourself - your readers want to learn about who you are as a person
3. **Tips for Writing Your Personal Statement (continued)**

- Less is more - don’t try to impress the readers with your vocabulary and “big words”
- Use imagery and clear, vivid prose – describe your life experiences using graphic images
- Determine if there is a theme to your statement – a common thread.
- Spend the most time on your introduction—it is essential that you grab the reader’s attention immediately. Often experts recommend that you rewrite your introduction after you have the body of the essay written.
  - *Don’t summarize in your introduction—the reader may not continue reading*
  - *Create curiosity or intrigue in the reader’s mind by raising questions*
  - *If there is a theme to your statement, introduce your theme at the beginning*

- Relate all paragraphs in the body of essay to the introduction; or to your theme
- Make smooth transitions to preserve the flow of your essay
- Conclusions are crucial; this is your last chance to convince the reader of your qualifications. Do not use phrases such as “in conclusion” “in summary.” Consider the following suggestions:
  - *Link your conclusion to you introduction to create a sense of balance by restating the introduction’s phrases*
  - *Focus on your career goals – where do you see yourself in 5/10 years*
  - *Discuss the broader implications of your discussion*
  - *Redefine a term previously used in the body of your essay*
  - *End with a famous quote that is relevant to your argument (caution: quotes are overused, so be certain it really fits)*
  - *It may be appropriate to leave the reader with unanswered questions or ambiguity rather than to try to answer large philosophical questions*

- Take a break from a draft of your statement – then come back to it with a fresh pair of eyes
- Ask someone else to read a draft of your statement and request feedback. In addition to reading for content and flow, others may spot grammatical errors or typos that you overlooked.

**Additional tips:**

- Research the organization or institution where you are applying. Learn as much as you can about it and integrate that information into your essay as appropriate
- Read examples of personal statements (online and in books); contact career services
- Talk to other professionals in your field, alumni, friends and family who know you well, to generate thoughts and ideas for the topic matter
- Remember - if there are specific questions asked on the application or by the admissions or hiring committee.

**References & Resources:**

- Career Services Online Workshop, [https://umconnect.umn.edu/personalstatement](https://umconnect.umn.edu/personalstatement)