

The Personal Statement

Graduate admissions committees use personal statements to learn more about an applicant, what interests them about the program, and what they can contribute in terms of research, conferences and other collaborative opportunities.

Remember: The personal statement is a way to sell your abilities. Ask yourself, what interests and qualifications make you the right applicant for this program? Why are you pursuing a career in this field?

General: May have a word or character count, with a generic prompt such as “Write a personal statement describing your experiences and goals.”

Specific: This prompt often includes several questions such as, “Explain why this program is the best fit for you” or “Tell us about an accomplishment that is important to you.”

PREP WORK

Before you begin, gather information such as transcripts, resume and application. Brainstorm information to include in your essay: names of past supervisors, applicable job titles, experiences, past successes, job skills and personal traits you want to specifically communicate. Having this at your fingertips will make the overall writing process easier.

WRITING TIPS

Answer the Question: If the application asks you to discuss the reason you are applying to a particular academic program or company, do not spend the entire letter talking about your qualifications. Instead, talk about what attracted you to the company or program.

Consider The “I” Problem: This letter is about you. It is okay to use first person, plus it keeps your writing more active and succinct. However, do not start every sentence with “I.”

Avoid Duplication: Do not reiterate information that is already seen elsewhere in your application, resume or transcript. You can be more general in mentioning these topics. For example: “I was on the Dean’s List” and then move on to discuss other experiences in more detail.

Make Your Statement Standout: To make your letter unique include at least one detailed example specific to your own experience. For example, describe how a family member or personal moment influenced your career or degree decisions.

Keep It Brief: Essays are typically limited to 250–500 words or one typed page. Statements should be concise, clear and detailed. Focus each paragraph on a single idea. Use a thesaurus word variation and to avoid repetition but avoid vocabulary that you are unfamiliar with.

FORMAT

Personal statements generally include request some standard information and you can use this as a guide to begin.

Introduction: Grab the reviewer's attention with a catchy opening, such as a distinctive personal example. Then, connect the example to the program/position for which you are applying. Mention the specific name of the program or company, as well as the title of the position or degree you are seeking.

Supporting Paragraphs: Paragraphs should address specific questions from the application. Each paragraph should be focused and support a topic sentence. Keep your examples relevant to your qualifications.

Conclusion: In the last paragraph tie together any examples you cited, and restate your interest in the program or position. Finishing statement can tie-in how this position is a step towards a long-term goal.

EDITING

Allow for several edits and ample proofreading. Check for proper content and for technical errors. Read through the essay yourself (out-loud helps) and have others (Career Services, professors, parents, etc.) review it as well.

STATEMENT CHECKLIST

- Spelling and grammar have been checked
- Single-spaced and printed on one side of paper
- Two spaces between each paragraph and the content is positioned on the page well
- All lines start on the left-hand side of the page
- The opening paragraph is engaging
- Reflects genuine interest and enthusiasm in the kind of work to be done
- Overall positive tone

DO...

- Allow plenty of time to brainstorm and rewrite your essays
- Take time to think about who you are and the experiences that have shaped your life
- Look at this as an opportunity to tell admissions committees about you, and go beyond the facts that are conveyed by other parts in the application
- Tailor and adapt an essay for each specific program you are applying to, unless it is to be submitted to multiple schools via a centralized application service
- Mention possible career paths, interests, professional goals, and explain why you are ready for an advanced degree in this field
- Be specific; be sure to back up all statements with examples and concrete evidence
- Research your programs and schools. Ask yourself if there are certain values expressed in the program or aspects, such as a thesis, that intrigue you
- Answer all parts of the prompt
- Stay within the word or character count
- Frequently save your document in multiple locations

DON'T...

- Try to be funny or make jokes
- Start every sentence with I
- Include your hobbies/interests unless relevant
- Use vocabulary you don't normally use and just looked up in a dictionary
- Use famous quotes
- Repeat things in your application
- Write a list of all your hobbies and interests without explaining them
- Lie or embellish the truth
- Say you are going to do something before you come to university
- Take any political or religious viewpoints unless relevant
- Sound defensive or arrogant- Tone is key
- Be cliché or use generalizations
- Write in the third person. First person is always best
- Make lists of accomplishments. Instead elaborate on them with examples and stories highlighting your skills and experience

SAMPLE STATEMENT

As a child I often accompanied my father to his small coin shop and spent hours watching him work. When I was older, I sometimes set up displays, waited on customers, and even balanced the books. This experience instilled in me the desire to own and manage my own business someday, yet I understand that the business world today is more complex. This complexity requires more education, and with that in mind, I am applying to the Master's of Business Administration program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB).

In addition to my helping out in my father's business, I have had numerous other work experiences that further enhance my qualifications for this program. My resume enumerates the various positions I have held at Kerasotes Theaters, Chili's restaurants, and Indiana University's new Student Recreational Sports Center (SRSC), and what all of these positions have in common is an emphasis on serving the public effectively. Further, as an assistant manager at the Showplace 11 and a staff coordinator at the SRSC, I have gained valuable expertise in managing employees and creating work schedules. Both of these positions have allowed me to develop my sales and people skills, which are extremely important in an increasingly service-driven marketplace.

Not all of my work experience has been as a paid employee. Part of my volunteering experience at Middleway House, the local battered women's shelter, involved extensive work on computers, including word processing, organizing databases and creating spreadsheets. Also, I recently participated in an internship program for academic credit with the Eli Lilly Corporation in the personnel division. As a management intern, I was able to watch the workings of a major corporation up close and would like the opportunity to combine my experiences with the theoretical background available in the MBA program at IUB, with its emphasis on computers, marketing and human resources.

My successful internship is one element of my overall academic success as an undergraduate here at IUB, yet I have also made time for a variety of extracurricular activities, including working for my sorority and competing in intramural basketball. My positive experiences here have resulted in my desire to stay in Bloomington to continue my academic endeavors; furthermore, continuing my education here would allow me to make important business contacts, with the career goal of opening my own computer consulting firm in the Midwest.

Resource: indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/personal_statement.shtml