

LUC WRITING CENTER – “HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT”

The **personal statement** (also sometimes called the “statement of purpose”) is a common feature of graduate and professional school applications. Below, you will find responses to some commonly asked questions about the writing process. Remember, though, that no set of guidelines or recommendations is a replacement for hands-on help. Consider the information below and look at some sample essays online, but also bring your personal statement to the LUC Writing Center and, most importantly, ask a professor in your field to review it. This is a difficult genre to master, and you should use all the resources at your disposal.

What is a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is usually a brief 2-3 pg. essay describing your reasons for applying to a graduate or professional school program. Requirements and expectations for the statement can vary widely between programs, institutions, and disciplines, but in most cases, the purpose of the statement is to distill your application down to a short essay explaining why you want to enter the program, why it should admit you, and what you intend to do there.

What should it include?

The content of your personal statement will depend on the prompt you are responding to. Most prompts will ask you to discuss your qualifications, plans, goals, and relevant experiences, but it is important to be attentive to the special requirements of each school. The most important rule of personal statement writing is simply to respond to the prompt. Prompts can be structured many ways: one might consist of a few short sentences, another might be a list of several questions, and yet another might ask you to write two or three distinct essays.

- **If a prompt includes multiple questions or topics, make sure you address all of them.** The admissions committee reading your essay might be sifting through dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of these documents. To be competitive in this context, your statement needs to provide the information the program asks for.
- **Make sure that you personalize your statement** for the school you’re sending it to. Do some research on the school and its faculty, and list a professor who you might want to work with.
- **Explain why you are a good fit for the program,** and why the program is a good fit for you. Pay attention to detail, and if you’re juggling multiple distinct statements, each tailored to a different program, make sure to keep them carefully organized (this seems like common sense, but it’s not uncommon for admissions committees to receive personal statements written for other programs).
- **Use some creative elements:** There is some room for creativity in the personal statement, but you need to be cautious. If you want your statement to stand out among the many being evaluated by your readers, it needs to be unique and memorable. However, it must also respond to the prompt and provide the information required by the admissions committee. If it is within the scope of the prompt, feel free to relate a personal story that provides insight into your motivations, but make sure that it’s relevant, concise, and framed by practical information.

What about style and tone?

Here, too, the key is to **balance creativity and professionalism.** Identifying a style that feels both formal and personal can be difficult. Keep in mind, though, that it can be better to use

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language that feels natural to you than it is to force a professional or sophisticated tone into your writing.

Varied word choice is important, but it should never come at the expense of accuracy and coherence – the personal statement shouldn’t be a dump for GRE vocabulary words. If you attempt to mimic an elevated and complex academic discourse with which you have limited experience, you risk producing writing that feels awkward and forced, but if you stray too far in the opposite direction, towards an informal, colloquial, or overly personal tone, you risk coming across as unprofessional. Try to find an appropriate middle ground between these extremes, and seek out the opinions of writers who have experience with this genre.

How long should it be?

Length requirements will vary somewhat depending on the prompt, and you should be sure to make note of the requirements and strictly adhere to them. Again, the people reading your personal statement could be reading hundreds of these documents, and they will not appreciate essays that are longer than the word limit. A concise, carefully-written essay can say more than a long, wordy one, and can simultaneously demonstrate that you are confident and experienced enough to privilege quality over quantity.

Some tips:

- **Have a plan.** Expressing what career/specific academic area you currently wish to pursue (i.e. pediatric or geriatric medicine) and what you plan to do with the degree you seek demonstrates your motivational skills and shows the application committee that you will easily find a job (boosting their program’s job placement statistics).
- **Keep your career expectations moderate,** even if you secretly plan to be a brain surgeon or astronaut. Currently, you only need to show that you are a student, have reasonable career ambitions, and are willing to work hard to accomplish them.
- **Be aware of the personal statement clichés of your chosen discipline.** Even though they relate real events, many medical personal statements describe how a grandmother’s inability to be a surgeon due to gender constraints, the illness of a family member, or a brief internship with a wonderful physician led this individual to want to become a doctor “to help people.” Saying the same things as other applicants won’t help you stand out. Instead, brainstorm and list all the different factors that have inspired you to pursue your chosen profession, and use these influences to craft your personal statement. LUC’s Writing Center can help you write an original, completely unique piece of writing.

Resources/Model Statements:

You can find a wide variety of model/sample personal statements online through a Google search. **Models found on college/university websites are generally more reliable.**

Further Reading (Personal Statements):

- [University of California at Berkeley](#)
- [University of Chicago](#)
- [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#)
- [Purdue OWL](#)

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