

Personal Statement 101

Stephen F. Austin State University | Center for Career and Professional Development

Why is a personal statement important?

Your personal statement is an opportunity to show the graduate school admissions committee who you are! Through your personal statement you want to show that you are eager and knowledgeable about your prospective field, and that you are a suitable match for the program you are applying to.

What should be included in your statement?

Pay close attention to the prompt you are given for your personal statement. While some personal statements are fairly generic, others will be seeking specific information or answers to specific questions. Some schools will use your statement as your opportunity to explain discrepancies in test scores or explain any extenuating circumstances you may have faced that affected your undergraduate GPA or preparation for the LSAT/GMAT, etc. The statement will also be used to gauge your writing abilities.

Personal statement format

Name
Personal Statement
School and Program

Convey your eagerness: This is your opportunity to show the admissions committee who you are. What makes you different from other applicants? Use language that demonstrates both your enthusiasm and motivation to join the program you have selected.

Exemplify knowledge of your field or occupational path: Demonstrate an understanding of your field and reflect on your related experience. Consider the relevant opportunities you have had and articulate the experience you have through clear examples. Do more than explain the program- connect your skills and experiences to showcase why you are a good fit for the specific program you are applying to, and explain how this program will help you meet your career goals.

Market yourself: Use this opportunity to talk about how great you are! Describe your past skills with confidence and discuss your future plans with assuredness. You want to arouse interest in the reader and excite them about you as a candidate.

Show that you are a good "fit": Express your genuine interest in the program. You should be able to clearly identify what drove you to the field and why you are interested in this program, specifically. Do research into the program to identify what differentiates it from similar programs, and articulate why this program is the right "fit" for you.

Helpful Tips:

Start early and review often. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to compose your statement, and consider reaching out to trusted faculty, staff, or mentors to review the document for you.

Often times, your personal statement will be read by multiple people. This makes it especially important to avoid errors or grammatical mistakes of any kind. We recommend you read your statement aloud to yourself to help with sentence structure. You do not want to ruin a great statement with avoidable errors.

Make sure you follow directions! The admissions committee will provide a prompt. If the prompt is specific with multiple questions, be sure to thoroughly answer all questions asked. Be sure to note, and follow, the word or length guidelines given.

The CCPD encourages you to utilize the Academic Assistance and Resource Center (AARC) when completing your personal statement. The AARC offers assistance through both walk-in tables and the Online Writing Lab (OWL).