

# WRITING A GRADUATE SCHOOL

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

*Personal statements are used by graduate admission committees to help establish an applicant's writing ability and potential fit for a program (or scholarship). It also serves to distinguish you from competing candidates by providing a more complete picture than found on your résumé/CV, proves that you can write clearly and coherently, and oftentimes reveals your core values.*

### Getting Started

- Begin working on your statement early to allow ample time for document preparation and editing – this will show in your final product. It is typical to write multiple drafts.
- Tailor each personal statement to a specific program – a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not effective.
- Research the field you are considering to determine the type/style of personal statement needed (see Resources on page 2).
  - Professional associations for your field can be a good first source to find writing guidelines and samples.
- Identify and articulate the top skills, personal characteristics, and experiences (e.g., academic, travel, work, service) that are expected to be part of the personal statement.
  - Give particular attention to those factors that contribute the most to making a candidate a strong applicant or show they are the right “fit” for each particular program.

### Content

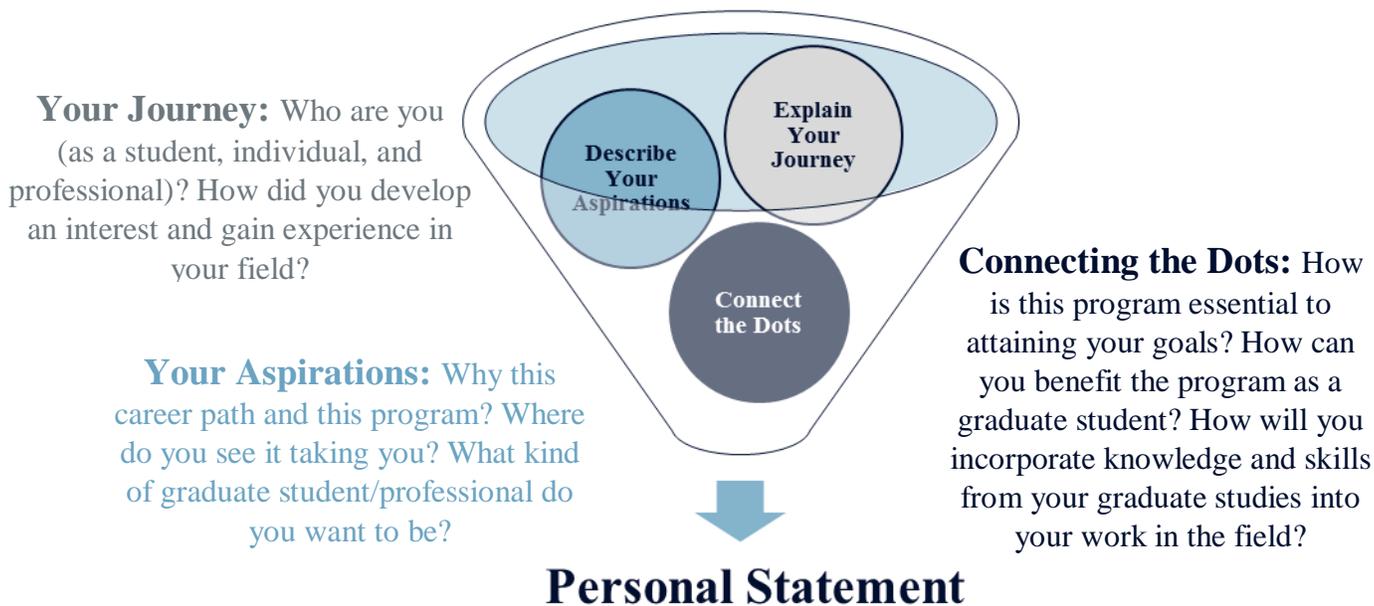
- Programs may require specific responses or provide you with prompt questions, or the application may not include any directions regarding the content. Without a prompt, you can decide which topic(s) to introduce. Topics may include:
  - Reason(s) for pursuing a graduate degree
  - Reason(s) for wanting to pursue a career in this field
  - Area of study in which to specialize
  - Successes enjoyed and obstacles overcome
  - Past experience(s), career goal(s), and plans for the future
  - Reason(s) for having an interest in a specific institution and/or program
  - Preparation (i.e., academics, work experience, service, involvement) for study in a particular field
- Consider developing well thought-out answers to the following questions, which will help you connect your past and current experiences with your future plans:
  - What personal characteristics do you possess and how have you demonstrated them?
  - As a student, how will you contribute to this specific graduate program? How are you prepared to do so?
  - In what ways will you represent this program as an alum and a professional in the field?
  - How will you continue to grow in the field and contribute to it upon becoming a professional?
- Be concise, focused, and on topic while telling your story. It should be compelling; describe what makes you a special, unique, and distinctive applicant; and provide details about what or who shaped and influenced you.
- Provide specific, detailed examples which effectively demonstrate each point– show yourself in action.
  - If your content is not relevant to the theme of your essay, remove it. Delete any unnecessary words.
  - Avoid points that are vague, overly generalized, or incompletely illustrated.
- If a prompt is provided, consider how to distinguish your essay from others which will be written to the same prompt; show why you are uniquely qualified for the program.
- Avoid technical language (remember: this is not a research paper) or academic rhetoric which can sound overly philosophical or poetic.
- Portray genuine enthusiasm without gushing, oversharing, clichés, generalizations, being overly positive/negative, and platitudes (e.g., always, never, love, all, passion).
- Avoid over-sharing, particularly personal information covered by privacy laws (e.g., FERPA, HIPAA).

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- Format**
- Personal statements are short essays - often 2-3 pages or about 750-1000 words - unless otherwise stated in the application instructions.
    - If there is a word and/or page limit, adhere to it. Committees may stop reading statements at that cutoff.
    - Answer the question(s) provided – no more, no less.
    - Stay on topic and avoid tangents.
  - If a prompt is provided, be sure to answer each question completely.
    - Choose whether you prefer to answer each question separately, or synthesize your answers into a single, longer response. Prompts may provide cues as to style, but if not, choose a technique that makes sense.
  - Typically, the statement should take a broad-to-narrow approach to telling your story (see diagram below).
  - Your essay should be enjoyable and develop momentum for the reader, building to the most important details.
  - The opening sentence must catch the reader’s attention – be certain that the first sentence of each paragraph introduces a compelling theme that is then developed and illustrated.
    - This tells the reader what to expect and helps them to follow your argument.
    - This opening sentence sets the tone for your statement, identifying key points that are elaborated later.
  - The intent of the last sentence is to pull everything together. Use specifics to share your vision of your future, rather than concluding with a summary.
  - Admissions committees are looking to accept applicants who demonstrate careful work and a polished final document that leaves a strong impression and demonstrates academic aptitude.
- Revising and Refining**
- Proofread, proofread, *proofread!* This is the best way to catch typos, grammatical mistakes, and other errors.
  - Revise, edit, and request feedback multiple times.
    - Share with people who have strong writing and grammatical skills and who know both you and the field.
    - Use the UConn Writing (W) Center and Center for Career Development for help with writing and revising.

## The Broad-to-Narrow Personal Statement Structure



### Resources

<b>CCD Resources</b>	<a href="https://career.uconn.edu/considering-graduate-school/">https://career.uconn.edu/considering-graduate-school/</a>
<b>UConn Writing Center</b>	<a href="https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/personal-statements/">https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/personal-statements/</a>
<b>Yale University</b>	<a href="https://ocs.yale.edu/yale-college/application-process-grad-school">https://ocs.yale.edu/yale-college/application-process-grad-school</a>
<b>DePauw University</b>	<a href="https://www.depauw.edu/files/resources/writing-a-personal-statement.pdf">https://www.depauw.edu/files/resources/writing-a-personal-statement.pdf</a>
<b>Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL)</b>	<a href="https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/969/1/">https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/969/1/</a>