



**COLORADO  
COLLEGE**

**Career Center**



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# Writing Personal Statements

The admission processes for graduate/professional schools and fellowship programs are highly competitive. In addition to standardized test scores and academic transcripts, you will probably be required to submit a piece of writing called a “personal statement” or “statement of purpose.” The personal statement is a lot of work—a good statement takes many drafts and several weeks to pull off. You have a limited number of words or pages to convey who you are: personal experiences, accomplishments, and characteristics. It is your opportunity to show the admission committee why you are a good fit for their program.

Of course, it would be impossible to tell the admission committee everything about you, and that’s not the goal anyway. **Focus on what they would want to know about you as it relates to this program or position.** You’ll have to do some research on your programs of interest to figure out what you think they would want to know. Remember that committees read hundreds of personal statements each year. Several people will be reading and evaluating it, so illustrate to each of them that you belong in their graduate program.

If your content is the mac, **presentation** is the cheese: many application readers say that good writing skills and correct use of language are as important to them as an individual’s experiences. Personal statements must be well-written and contain no grammatical or spelling errors. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Take your statement to the Writing Center and the Career Center, ask friends to read it, and read it out loud for awkward phrasing until your final product is error-free.

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## Brief Outline

- Engage with a personal story, experience, or observation.
- Describe your experience, academics, and personal traits as they relate to acceptance in their program and the career field.
- Demonstrate with examples how the program fits with your goals and interests.
- Tell them what their program will enable you to achieve.

## Do...

- Follow their directions and guidelines, and answer questions exactly.
- Write an outline and allow time for several drafts.
- Research the program and/or school. What can you say that is relevant to their faculty?
- Create an interesting and strong opening paragraph to engage the reader.
- Use *business* writing style showcasing your best writing ability. This is not a term paper.
- Watch for structure, organization, and flow.
- Write in an active and engaging style that pulls the reader in.
- Stay focused on a central theme.
- Use direct statements—action verbs!
- Use “I” statements (e.g., “My goal in becoming a doctor...” or “I learned...”) and clear, everyday words.
- Tell a relevant story, but remember this is not creative writing.
- Demonstrate who you are and what you’ve done with specific scenarios and examples. Application readers believe that past performance indicates future performance.
- Be concrete and specific.
- Emphasize your strengths; be positive and enthusiastic.
- Use perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Take advantage of the Writing Center, the Career Center, and others for multiple proofreads, but *be careful not to lose your voice*.
- Explain any inconsistencies or discrepancies in your academic record or test scores and take responsibility for them.
- Be distinctive.
- Demonstrate your determination, persistence, confidence (not arrogance), and enthusiasm.
- Carefully and gently persuade rather than use a hard sell approach.
- Paint a picture of yourself that shows the reader you are a great fit for the program.**

## Don't...

- Don't use flamboyant or pedantic words.
- Don't use clichés, jargon, or quotes.
- Don't use cute or multiple fonts.
- Don't elaborate too much, but don't be too brief either. Stay focused.
- Don't discuss anything controversial or that you don't know much about.
- Don't be vague or abstract.
- Don't use the second or third person voice (e.g., “When you do this...” or “It was an interesting experience.”).
- Don't use passive statements.
- Don't repeat your resume.

## Worksheet: Write an Engaging Personal Statement

What moment or series of events confirmed that you want to be a \_\_\_\_\_  
or attend \_\_\_\_\_ school?

What experiences, qualities, accomplishments, or characteristics make for a successful  
\_\_\_\_\_? *You may want to write 2 paragraphs here.*

Tell one or two stories that show that you have these experiences, qualities, accomplishments, or characteristics.

Why are you a great fit for this program/field/career?

How will this degree/program/school help you achieve your goals?

## Personal Statement Proofreader Checklist

- Is there one central theme?
- Does it engage in the reader? Make sure the introduction does not summarize.
- Does it include concrete experiences with relevant, supportive details?
- What does it say about the author? What impression does it give the reader?
- What's the best part?
- What's the worst part?
- Is it memorable?
- Are there parts that are unclear?
- Active voice not passive voice.
- Varied sentences—long and short.
- No clichés or quotes.
- Does it use transitions well? Does it flow?
- Do I go off on any tangents from the theme?
- Were there any problems with typos, grammatical errors, punctuation, verb agreement, run-ons, or unclear sentences? **Please indicate them on my essay.**
- Are all sentences crucial? Does every word/sentence count?
- Do you want to meet this person and help them meet their goals?

Additional Notes: