



PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Personal Statements are hard to write because you're asked to boil down who you are and why you're worthy into two pages. The key is to engage your audience with a brief, clear statement about how you will enrich their particular program.

DON'T	DO
List all of the good grades you've gotten – they will see your transcript	Show how your academic interests have extended outside of the classroom
Create a prose resume – there are other sections of the application more appropriate for resume-like entries	Include details and narrative that a resume can't provide – use the statement to create a full portrait of who you are
Focus on the negative – even if there is something in your application that you need to explain, don't spend too much time on it	Briefly touch on weaknesses and spin them as quickly as possible – i.e. if you had a difficult semester, show how you've learned from it in one sentence and move on
Lie or write what you think that they want you to write – insincerity comes through pretty clearly in writing	Be yourself – consider your audience and craft your essay accordingly, but ensure that your essay reflects sincere reasons for pursuing the degree
Overdo it with the thesaurus and academese – ten dollar words are not worth much if your overall message is unclear	Write in your own voice. Use a vocabulary that is intelligent and true to your writing. Elevating your word choice to a place that is not comfortable for you will also feel uncomfortable for your reader.
Say that you are going to graduate school because you don't know what else to do or because you want to please your parents...	Take the time during your writing process to truly identify why you want to go to this particular school – if you're not sure why, think about it...

THE FIRST DRAFT

- Carefully read the question, taking note of the length and types of question words used
- Silence your editor – since you will be writing multiple drafts of this essay, don't worry about perfection first time around – just get ideas down on the page

REVISING AND EDITING

Once you are in the polishing stage - be merciless! Cross out paragraphs that don't work; rearrange ideas so that they make logical sense; watch out for redundancy and delete any sentences that seem to be restating earlier ideas; make sure that your essay is entirely free of mechanical or grammar errors. In addition,

- Consider your audience – put yourself in the shoes of the admissions committee – is your essay engaging and unique without being gimmicky?
- Cross off ideas that are too general, common, or cliché
- Stay positive – Turn your struggles into learning experiences.
- Show don't *just* tell, i.e. instead of writing, "I have always wanted to be a doctor," give more, as in: "one of my favorite, least embarrassing childhood photos is of me at four, wearing scrubs six sizes too big and holding a stethoscope fashioned from cardboard and Barbie clothes."
- Don't waste time or limited space by repeating information.
- Pay attention to the prompt and word count. Pick out any objectives or traits that the program or scholarship has specified.
- Neither showing off or groveling will get you anywhere.

WRITE ABOUT YOURSELF WITHOUT SOUNDING CONCEITED

Self-confidence vs. conceit—this is a fine line. The best way to avoid conceit is to be specific to *your* situation and goals. It is impossible to not talk about yourself in the personal essay. If you find yourself avoiding the *I*, return to it, but don't simply list all the amazing things you've done. A list of your accomplishments will be both exhausting and boring for your reader. Instead, share a specific detail about an event. For example, if you worked at an orphanage in India, take a moment to reflect on your experience with one child; or if you won a prestigious science award, fill your reader in on your research and what you learned from the experience.

- Avoid teaching about a subject in your writing.
- Show yourself at different stages of your life.

Reflection is a key player in diffusing the ego. Consider how you have been changed by some of your experiences. Consider how you hope to grow from opportunities. Make it personal and relevant.

Consider the people and opportunities that helped you become who you are today. Know that you did not get here alone. Consider where you want to go, know that you will also need to learn from people and experiences in order to get there. *Important Note: Each discipline emphasizes different elements in the application essay. To make sure that you are crafting an appropriate essay, meet with an advisor or professor in your discipline. Good luck!*

For more information, please visit the USF
Writing Center website

