



Preparing a Personal Statement that Pops!

Dr. Vicky Elias

Associate Professor, Texas A&M University-San Antonio

Maureen Elias

Assistant Director of Research, Veterans Health Council

Executive Director, Valkyries of Valor

What We Are Going to Do

1. Introduction
2. Three-stage method for writing personal statements
3. Conclusion
4. Questions and answers

Introduction

What is a Personal Statement and why does it matter?

Who uses Personal Statements?

Is there a method for writing an effective Personal Statement?

Introduction:

What Is a Personal Statement?

Personal statements are opportunities to:

- Introduce yourself to future colleagues;
- Convince them that they want to work with you;
- Make sure you will be happy there

Introduction:

What Is a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is not designed to prove that you are qualified for the position.

Introduction:

What Is a Personal Statement?

Committees and employers are really seeking two people:

- Someone who can do the job;
- Someone they want to work with.

Introduction:

What Is a Personal Statement?

Personal Statement

Tells them who you are in addition to telling them what you want to do

Statement of Purpose

Tells them what you want to do

Introduction:

Who Uses Personal Statements?

- Universities
- Scholarship and grant committees
- Faculty seeking teaching or research assistants
- National recruiters

Introduction: Is There a Method for Writing Effective Personal Statements?

Yes, there is!





Step 1: Think

Who are you?

What do you want?

Where do you want to go?



Think

Write

Revise

Wait! Do Not Skip Step 1

You may be tempted to make this stage really short or to skip it altogether.

- It can be painful
- It can be confusing
- It is hard to “brag”
- You have deadlines



Think

Write

Revise

Wait! Do Not Skip Step 1

Committees read and immediately dismiss a lot of applications with Personal Statements that are cliché, predictable, and vapid.

Stand out: be authentic

Think

Write

Revise

Question 1: Who Are You?

Carefully think through:

- Who you really are;
- What you really want;
- What you really need;
- What your strengths and weaknesses are;
- What programs can get you there.

Think

Write

Revise

Question 1: Who Are You?

Carefully think through:

- Who you really are;
- What you really want;
- What you really need;
- What your strengths and weaknesses are;
- What programs can get you there.

Think

Write

Revise

Question 2: Who Is Your Audience?

What are they trying to accomplish?

- Scholarship committees want success stories
- Professors are focused on research
- Graduate departments want to build reputation

Think

Write

Revise

Question 2: Who Is Your Audience?

Why should they be interested in you?

- What are your values?
- What are your valuable experiences?
- What makes you unique?

Think

Write

Revise

Question 2: Who Is Your Audience?

How can giving you what you're asking for move them closer to their goal?

- Will you set an example?
- Will you use them as a mentor?
- Will they be proud to say that you are one of theirs?

Think

Write

Revise

Question 2: Who Is Your Audience?

What will make them glad they chose you?

What will make you glad they chose you?

Think

Write

Revise

Strategies:

1. Do not write until you are ready.
2. Think. Muse. Daydream. Let these questions tumble around in your head.
3. Journal by hand. Do this over a period of days or weeks, not just in one setting.

Think

Write

Revise

Strategies:

4. Talk to the people who know you best.
Don't be defensive: listen.
5. Make a list of things that need to be in your paper.
6. Stay focused on your goal.

Think

Write

Revise

Strategies:

7. Decide how you are going to deal with special challenges or circumstances that might affect your performance. This might be the time to allude to them professionally. But not necessarily.

Think

Write

Revise

From the Experts:

“The ideal student, seen through the eyes of graduate faculty, is gifted and creative, very bright and extremely motivated to learn, perfectly suited to the program, eager to actively pursue the lines of inquiry valued by the faculty, pleasant, responsible, and devoid of serious personal problems.”

Keith-Spiegal & Wiederman, 200, p. 32



Step 2: Write

What should be in your Personal Statement?

How should you structure your Personal Statement?

How do you write about yourself?

Think

Write

Revise

Step 1: Pre-write

Begin with a list or an outline – not text – that includes:

- Research interests (be specific)
- Previous research experience or academic success
- Relevant experience
- Career goals
- Other items that cannot be worked into the above items

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Use the skills you developed in previous classes:

- Have an introduction, body, and conclusion;
- Your thesis is: I'm the person you're looking for!
- Your job is to give evidence that proves your thesis

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Tailor your statement to the program:

- Refer to specific opportunities the program offers;
- Refer to the work of specific faculty members you want to work with and why;
- Mention legacies or other ties to the university or institute.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Keep these tips in mind:

- Tell a story;
- Be direct;
- Answer the questions they ask;
- Be specific;

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Keep these tips in mind:

- Find an angle / hook – but don't overdo it;
- Tell what you want to learn more than telling them what you know, but tell them both.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Things to avoid:

- Clichés;
- High school accomplishments;
- Political or religious background (unless in specific fields);
- Hobbies, etc. that might be seen as aberrant;
- Personal problems or mental health issues;

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Things to avoid:

- Statements about how other people see you;
- Excessive self-disclosure;
- Inappropriate humor;
- Attempts to appear cute or clever;
- References to God or beliefs, including a strong desire to help others;

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: Write

Things to avoid:

- Flattery or blame;
- Generic approaches;
- Statements that you are perfect for their program unless corroborated with specific evidence.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Proofread and edit

Proofreading and editing are two different things.

Proofread

Then edit

Then proofread it again.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Proofread and edit

Proofread using the following methods:

1. Use spell and grammar check and correct everything indicated.
2. Stand up (better yet, walk) as you read your Personal Statement aloud.
3. Any time you slow down or stumble, make a mark. Don't do anything more. Keep reading.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Proofread and edit

Proofread using the following methods:

4. Now sit down and look at where your marks are. Are those sentences confusing? Too long? Out of place?
5. Look at the first paragraph. Does it sell you?
6. Look at the last paragraph. Does it sell you?

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Proofread and edit

Proofread using the following methods:

7. Look at the body. Does it support your thesis? Is there one single point for each paragraph? Are they in order of importance? Do they flow easily from one to the next?

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Proofread and edit

Proofread using the following methods:

8. Have someone you can trust read it.
 - If you have access to a writing center or career counseling center, ask them to look at it.
 - Ask a professor to look at it.
 - Do not go to friends or family members, unless they are in similar jobs and will be honest with you.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 4: Wait

Now put that statement away. Put it in an envelope, seal the envelope, and do not look at again for at least 48 hours. A week is even better.



Step 3: Revise

Is everything there?

Is everything in the right order?

What are the subtle messages?

Think

Write

Revise

Step 1: Get ready

- Get a cup of coffee
- Find a secluded place where you can spend an hour without interruption
- Open the envelope

Think

Write

Revise

Step 2: First reading

Read the statement.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Third Reading

Breathe.

When you're ready, read it carefully again just as you did in the writing phase. Stand up and read it out loud. Mark any place where you hiccup.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 3: Final Revision

- Make the final revisions.
- Print it on a quality printer. If yours is streaky, pay for a clean print.
- Sign the print. If you have to submit electronically, scan the clean print.
- If sending a printed copy, pay for slightly heavier paper.

Think

Write

Revise

Step 4: Mail It

Congratulations and Good Luck



Conclusion

What do you need to take from this presentation?

What do you need to do next?

Think

Write

Revise

Conclusion

- A good personal statement is crucial;
- A good personal statement is the result of thought;
- Your goal is a good fit;
- Your strongest selling point is a great match between your individual abilities and experiences and the research interests of a specific mentor.

Think

Write

Revise

Conclusion

Questions?