

# Writing Personal Statements<sup>1</sup>

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This publication about writing personal statements is the fourth of a four-part publications series on developing effective business communication practices. The series also covers business communication writing, proper telephone communication techniques, and resume and application letter writing.

A personal statement is not a resume or application letter; a *personal statement* is a statement about how your personal, familial, academic, and professional experiences and background qualify you for a particular job, scholarship, or college program. Personal statements are also called “application essays” or “statements of purpose.”

Writing personal statements is becoming more common for students applying for college, scholarships, and even some jobs. A personal statement explains why you are applying for a particular job, scholarship, or college program, and it also tells a little about you. A personal statement may well be one of the toughest writing assignments because it is entirely about *you*. Selection committees use personal statements to help make a decision about you.

There are two types of personal statements. A *general statement* is when the topic is relatively open, with few guidelines, and you write about yourself. A *specific essay* is when the topic is assigned for you. Examples of a specific essay include such topics as “describe an ethical dilemma you once faced,” “assess your oral and written communication skills,” and “identify the strengths and weaknesses of the college major you want to earn.”

When writing a personal statement, be sure to answer all parts of the question being asked. Do not answer a question that is not asked. To help you along, you may want to think about these general questions and include them in your personal statement:

- What is unique about your background or life story?
- Which details in your story influenced your growth?
- When did you become interested in this field? What specific experiences furthered this interest?
- What are your career goals?
- Which personal characteristics or skills would enhance your prospects for success in the professional world (or in college)?

When writing a personal statement, find an idea that ties your essay together. This can be a brief story or a particular quality you have. Be positive and upbeat throughout; do not make excuses for any shortcomings you think you have. Be honest in all of your answers. Write in the first person because you are writing about yourself. Pick two to four main points or topics for a one-page, single-spaced essay.

A personal statement is not your life history, so do not try to outline everything you have done since childhood. Proofread extensively to ensure that your personal statement is absolutely free of spelling, grammatical, and punctuation mistakes. Do not try to be funny; your humor may be missed by the selection committee. Do not use vague, empty terms, such as “meaningful,” “beautiful,” “challenging,” “invaluable,” or “rewarding.”

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Lastly, when you are editing your personal statement for content, ask yourself these questions:

- Are my goals well articulated?
- Do I explain why I selected this school (or program) in particular?
- Do I include interesting details that prove my claims about myself?
- Is my tone confident?

Show your friends or relatives the final draft and ask them, “Does this sound like me?” If it does not, revise your personal statement. Examples of successful personal statements can be found in Richard Steitzer’s book *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School*.

## Additional Information

Colorado College. (n.d.). *Guide to writing personal statements*. <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/dotAsset/b8fa9824-b507-4360-8f44-f6ab1b706652.pdf> [22 October 2012].

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University of Delaware. (2006). *Writing personal statements*. [http://www1.udel.edu/CSC/pdf/Writing\\_Personal\\_Statements.pdf](http://www1.udel.edu/CSC/pdf/Writing_Personal_Statements.pdf) (November 2016)