

Graduate School Personal Statements

Samford University Career Development Center

The Graduate School “Personal Statement” is an opportunity for you to showcase yourself in a unique way while also communicating the experiences and skills you have that would make you a fit for a program or school. Here are a few tips and ways to make your personal statement informative and compelling to set you up for success:

1. Know what is required for the statement.

- Is there a specific question being asked, or is it more general?
- What is the length requirement? Is it a word count, or character count? Does the count include spaces?

2. Know what kind of information the school is looking for.

Even if addressing a specific question, in general a personal statement should contain five types of information: Who you are, what area you are interested in, what your experience is, why you are interested in this area/program, and what your future plans are.

- **Who You Are:** In a statement of purpose you need to concisely and directly let the reader know who you are, including what makes you and your skills and interests stand out.
- **What You Are Interested In:** You need to communicate what area of research or field you are interested in.
- **Why:** You need to communicate why you are interested in a specific research area, or specific graduate program/university.
- **Experience:** You need to communicate what kind of experience you have in the area such as research experience, shadowing experience or work experience.
- **Future Plans:** You need to communicate where and in what ways you see yourself using the graduate degree.

3. Use the opening paragraph to grab the reader’s attention.

The opening paragraph can be one of the most important paragraphs in a personal statement. Use that paragraph to tell a compelling story, or talk about the area of research you are interested in, so that it will capture the reader’s attention.

3. Be specific, and back it up.

Communicate specifically why you think that you would be an excellent {insert profession}, but make sure that you back it up with specific examples/skills. Be specific with how your experience gave you skills. For example: “I had the opportunity to volunteer at a physical therapy clinic, where I was able to assist the PT with stretches and treatments and build those skills.”

4. Make logical connections.

From your experience, lead the reader to logical conclusions about how it impacted you or would lead to you being a good doctor, researcher, etc. Make connections from your experience to what you learned about yourself, what you learned about the field, or your future goals.

5. Balance storytelling with being straightforward.

You want to be informative and tell a story, but you don’t want to get caught up in unnecessary details. Make sure your storytelling is relevant to your goals and conclusions.

6. Avoid the cliché.

Stay away from clichés in your writing. Stay away from the “I have always” statements like, “I have always wanted to help people” or “I have always loved...”. Use specific anecdotes to demonstrate passion and interest instead.

7. Avoid just having a list of accomplishments.

Pick one or two accomplishments to really focus on and use those to tell a story that shows your passions, interests, and skills. Choose quality over quantity.

8. Have a structure to your essay.

You can tell a great story, but make sure that you also have a solid structure to your essay that leads the reader to conclude that you would be a good candidate. Consider using the following structure:

- **1st Paragraph:** Capture the reader’s attention with a story or interesting information related to the field of study/work and communicate why you want to be a part of that field.
- **Middle Section:** Use the middle section, which may be more than one paragraph, to focus on your intellectual or work experience in the field, and connect that to your future goals. “This experience will help me with...”
- **Conclusion:** Finish with why you would excel in your studies/research/work and connect it back to the experiences you talked about.

9. Get feedback from those who know you.

Get feedback from friends and family who know you and can help you portray the best and most accurate version of yourself in the essay.

10. Get feedback and have the statement proofread by an objective source.

Get feedback from your career center or writing center. An objective source can help you see where the story doesn’t track or connect to your goals, and can proofread your essay for grammatical/structural errors. You want to double and triple check to ensure there are no mistakes!

*For more information, stop by or call the Career Development Center
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