

# WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is one of the hardest parts of any kind of application. For some reason, it's difficult to write (or talk) about yourself. Sometimes just figuring out where to start can take forever. Here are some tips on how to write a personal statement, to make sure you consider before starting, and when writing your personal statement.

## 1. What are the requirements?

Most of the time a personal statement will come with a set of requirements. There's a very good chance that the school, scholarship, or position you are applying for will request that you answer a question or discuss something specific in your personal statement or essay. The number one piece of advice for personal statement writing is to **answer the question!** It may seem like common sense, but if you're given a topic, stick to it as best you can.

Another requirement might include a page or word cap for the essay word counts (e.g., 1000 words max.). Depending on the limit, you might have to be quite concise when writing. Having said that, even if there is not a length requirement, be sure to **keep your writing to the point.**

## 2. Talk to others

Before you start writing, talk to your close friends and family. Find out what they see as unique about you. Sometimes it is really difficult to come up with a list of your own strengths, so have others do it for you! Ask them if they have any stories that would be helpful, or what they think sets you apart from other applicants. You might be surprised to hear what they have to say.

## 3. Organize your thoughts BEFORE you start writing

Sit down and outline your scholarship or college essay to structure what you want to say before you start writing. Not only will this help keep your thoughts organized, but it will also ensure that your essay flows nicely. Make sure your first paragraph includes a good hook, you want to make sure they keep reading.

Using an outline will also help keep you on track if there's a page or word limit. You'll be able to gauge how much "space" you still have left to get out everything you want to say. Or, if you find yourself rambling about one topic for too long, you will know where to shave words/sentences to fit the rest of your points. Remember, be specific and tell a story—be memorable.

## 4. Why should they choose you?

Even if the topic you're given, or question you're asked to answer is a bit abstract, make sure you're presenting yourself in a positive light and letting the reader(s) know why you should be chosen.

If you need to do a bit of research, by all means, go for it. You want to know your stuff if you're going to be writing about it. Don't make things up—the reader(s) will know. For

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essays or scholarships that ask you questions like “why do you want to go to our college” or “why do you deserve this scholarship,” stick to what you know and be yourself.

## **5. Address gaps/discrepancies that may appear**

If you are writing a personal statement for a scholarship or college admissions, explain the things that may not match up or make sense when paired together. For example, if you really struggled freshman and sophomore year and failed a few classes, you probably don't have a 4.0 GPA. But, you might have a high ACT/SAT score. So, when someone is looking through your materials (e.g., transcript, test scores, etc.) they might be confused by the discrepant data. Use your personal statement to explain what was going on in your life, your mistakes, or how your attitude towards school has changed over the years.

While there are somethings that are good to explain in a personal statement, there are also topics you should avoid. Don't include things that aren't relevant to the question or prompt. If you aren't sure whether or not something should be included, it never hurts to ask. Now, when I say ask, I don't mean turn to your locker partner and say, “hey, should I write about that time that Susie dumped her strawberry milk on me in 10th grade and ruined my white jeans—that was embarrassing...”. Try talking to a teacher or your school counselor instead.

## **6. Have someone else proofread your writing**

Poor grammar and spelling mistakes are a surefire way to have your application tossed away without a second glance. It doesn't matter if you're competing against 3 or 3,000 other students—incorrect English always looks bad.

If you don't have anyone around to proofread for you, and the application is due in 15 minutes, try reading it out loud. Reading your writing aloud helps identify places where you might need commas or where you skipped or misused a word.

## **7. Seek feedback**

Before submitting your final draft, ask your school counselor, teacher(s), or someone else you trust to not only read over your work but also to provide feedback. This can be a good way to find those tidbits that you maybe shouldn't have included, or where you need to further explain a few details. You know what you're trying to say or explain, but it might not always come across the best in writing.

Receiving and working with feedback is something you'll be doing the rest of your life, so this is good practice now. Constructive critiquing will always benefit you. It isn't an attack against you, and it isn't saying that your writing is terrible, it is helpful. Listen to what others have to say. But, at the end of the day, it's still up to you whether or not to make the changes.