

## Completing Your Personal Statement

One thing that is very important to know about writing your personal statement is that “one statement does not fit all.” Carefully read the instructions for each program to which you apply. Be attentive to what each program wants. If a program stresses research, highlight your research interests and experiences. If the program stresses clinical or other applied work, highlight the development of your interest in that applied work, and your experiences to date. You also want to convey that you are a good fit for the program, in terms of your theoretical orientation, experiences, and goals. The personal statement is also an opportunity to show that you match the individual applied and research interests of faculty members, in cases where you will be conducting research in the graduate program. In planning your personal statement, consider that nearly everyone who applies to the program will have good or even excellent grades and GRE scores; you want to provide information that distinguishes you from other applicants. Discuss unique reasons why you are a good fit for the program. Also be aware that the personal statement is a writing sample; admissions committees use the statement to assess your writing skills. Thus, it is essential that the personal statement be clearly written, well-organized, interesting, and free from any grammatical or punctuation errors.

The first paragraph of your personal statement should be brief. Briefly discuss your objective (e.g., acceptance to the particular graduate program). Also, briefly discuss your background, academic interests and future goals in order to justify your admission into the graduate program to which you are applying.

The second section describes your background. This may be 1-3 paragraphs in length. It should establish your academic and other preparation (e.g., research experience, teaching experience, internship) for the program to which you are applying. If you have been a strong student throughout your undergraduate years of study, you may wish to highlight a combination of classes that seems to fit their program well. If you have been inconsistent academically, discuss your academic strengths and areas in which you have improved over time. The purpose of these paragraphs is to clearly show that you are prepared to excel as a graduate student.

The third section should describe your career goals. This section may be switched in order with the second section depending on your preference. Remember that people with graduate degrees in psychology tend to pursue careers in teaching, research, assessment, and counseling, though some psychologists also perform consulting and other duties. Talk with your advisor and visit the career center in order to gather information about relevant careers so that you can describe your career ideas in this section intelligently. This paragraph assures graduate programs that applicants are serious, that they have a purpose for seeking a graduate degree. Keep in mind that your preferences can always change – nobody will make you pursue the career that you laid out in this paragraph. Just do your best to describe what you think you would like to do for a career, knowing that you can change your plans later.

The fourth section should focus on what you intend to study in graduate school. Your interests, background, and professional goals should now be clear, so you should now make the case that the best way to reach your professional goals given your interests and background is to study at the graduate program to which you are applying. Be specific. Discuss specific faculty members (if you know about them from the program's website, for example) and how your interests are similar to theirs. The point here is to show how you are a good match for the program. The program is likely selecting from dozens of qualified applicants, so this paragraph should show why you are a good match for this particular program. This paragraph demonstrates that you have thoughtfully considered graduate programs and decided that this program is a good match for both you and the program.

Remember to talk with your advisor during this process and to have several people, including your advisor, look over your personal statement in order to provide helpful feedback.