

PERSONAL STATEMENT

A personal statement or admissions essay gives you an opportunity to present yourself. Moreover, it enables you to distinguish yourself from other candidates.

An admissions committee at the university evaluates you, as an applicant through your personal statement.

What do the Universities want to know about you?

Apart from your grades and references, Universities would like to read your personal statement in order to know more about you and to find out where you are headed. If you are applying to one of the top colleges, it is likely that everyone applying there will have good grades and excellent credentials. However, the Universities you are applying to would like to know that you are indeed capable of taking on the demands of your coursework and that you will not drop out of college midway. Universities get superior ratings through where their students get placed, the research they do and through the prestigious posts their alumni hold in the world job market. Your college would like to know if you have the potential to stick to your area of study and make a name for yourself and thereby for the University.

For example Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, Princeton and other such Universities have produced Nobel Laureates and world leaders and students flock to such universities in order to gather experience and benefit from their curriculum, activities and their teaching.

The University would like to know whether you will fit in there and how you will contribute to the University through your academics and other activities.

What are the steps to follow to write a good personal statement?

You must prepare your resume before writing out your personal statement. To each point on your résumé, expand into sentences what your real thoughts on your achievements are. For example, under your academic records in your résumé, you may have mentioned your subjects and high school or undergraduate scores. In your personal statement, explain why you opted for these subjects. Which subject were you most passionate about? Was there any subject you did not perform well in? In that case, how did you try and improve your scores?

A paragraph on your academic achievements should reflect your willingness to work hard and your ability to cope with the course work drawn up for you.

Mention all your strengths. You can start by putting down your strengths in points. Later, qualify your strengths by proving it through facts or events in your life.

Research information about the university or college you are applying to. Information can be found on the university website. Read up from brochures and other internet data about the courses available and the popularity of the college. How are the labs and the library facilities? Find out about the city, town and campus the college is situated in. Now make a list of the things that attract you to the University.

Next, zero in on your course. How does the university of your choice compare with other universities in this particular subject? How long is the course? What are your career

prospects after finishing your course? Most courses will have their faculty listed along with their credentials. Do you have the opportunity to train under eminent faculty members?

Make notes as you keep getting information. You will need all this information to write your essay.

How early should you prepare your Personal Statement?

Give yourself at least two months to prepare your personal statement. This is because you get so caught up with your exams/work and other admission processes that you are likely to leave the personal statement to the very end. You may have to hurry to meet the university applications deadline. You may end up making a shoddy, incomplete personal statement and the University admissions committee then sets you apart as a very mediocre applicant. Sometimes, in spite of your good academic scores or excellent school/college records, you may get rejected because, what they see in carelessly structured personal statement is a disorganized candidate and a poor communicator.

What should you include in your Personal Statement?

In your Personal Statement include everything that proves that you are hardworking, conscientious and interested in the subject of your choice. Mention your life experiences from school to college which made you choose this area of study. For example if you want to take Law, explain when and why you thought of applying for Law. Also, mention all the career options open to you and what pathways you intend to take after you complete your studies. For example, do you wish to start out on your own or research or teach and study further?

A personal statement should also include any special skills you have—do you know many foreign languages? Can you play a musical instrument? Do you excel in any sport? Also put down all your extra-curricular activities and participation in any events. If you are part of any social or national cause put that down too.

If you are working or have worked before, write down your work experience and your achievements at work. Explain how your work experience has contributed to your interest in your area of study.

Your personal statement in short, should present you in as an eager student holding a lot of promise. You should also be able to demonstrate that you are willing to adjust in a new environment especially if you are an international student.

Your personal statement is also a statement about your excellent communication skills, so proofread and structure your essay well.

Lastly, do mention why you chose this particular University to study in and how you will contribute to this University through extra-curricular activities or through research. A good thing to add is how, as an alumnus you will continue to be part of the University. For example, if you are part of say an Environmental Group, you could start a club or society at the University, hold regular meetings, conduct activities, publicize your activities through the media, publish newsletters and papers. Even non-academic activities count for a good resume later in your career. You could then mention that you

will continue to mentor and monitor the activities of the club or society you will be part of, even after you pass out of school and begin your career.

You could talk about starting a Science Group, Think Tank, a debating society... very academic in nature or even an informal one like Latino Dancing and the activities you would like to promote.

If you are part of a Forum or Blogging Community (of the serious type, of course), mention this also. If you have a website or a Blog in your name and it is related to your academic interest, you could talk about it in your personal statement. Do not expect the admission committee to visit your Blog but this is a way to impress upon them that you are indeed passionate about your subject and are already involved in thinking activities. A student with a large set of world views always has the potential to shine in his or her field and contribute to society and even help change government policies.

The “extras” you bring in will help you stand out among other applicants to the University.

The Final Copy

The personal statement should have a good introduction, middle and conclusion. You may put in some personal anecdotes or observations but keep well within the prescribed word limit. Do not get too comical and never crack jokes. Use appropriate respectable language and do not get too familiar with the reader. A personal tragedy or hard-ship you faced may be mentioned but do not describe it in detail because it will look as if you are looking for sympathy.

Above all, proof read for spelling and punctuation errors and grammar mistakes.

You can have the personal statement read by others: maybe a senior or a teacher and then make the necessary changes if advised.

Most importantly, send it off before the time limit expires!

Good Luck!