**Writing the Personal Statement**

The personal statement is your opportunity to present yourself to a selection committee. Some personal statement requirements are very general and comprehensive whereas some are constricted and the selection committee is anticipating your response to specific topics, concerns, or questions. Writing an effective personal statement requires much time, thought, personal reflection, and a considerable amount of planning. The writing process for the personal statement should include many revisions, as this is your ‘first impression’ on a selection committee, and we all know that first impressions are vital and lasting.

**Questions you should ask yourself when preparing to write your personal statement:**

* What is special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
* What details of your life (personal/family problems, history, people/events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants? Note: do not give a ‘sob story’ unless there is a positive outcome that you can highlight, showing how you exhibit the type of character traits the selection committee is searching for.
* When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
* How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
* If you have ample work experience throughout your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
* What are your career goals?
* Are there any gaps or discripancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
* Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
* What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way you can demonstrate, illustrate, or document that you possess these characteristics?
* What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
* Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
* What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in YOU?

**General Advice Regarding Your Personal Statement**

**Be sure to answer the questions that are asked of you:**

* Do not be tempted to use the same statement if you are applying to multiple schools, programs, etc. Each personal statement should be specific to the program in which you are seeking admission. Be sure to answer what each specific program is asking for—follow the guidelines that are established.

**Tell a story:**

* Think of terms of illustrating or demonstrating through the use of concrete examples. One of the worst things you can do is bore the selection committee. If your personal statement is fresh, lively, and different, you will be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself more memorable.

**Be specific:**

* Do not, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your personal statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

**Find an angle:**

* Figure out a way to make your personal statement interesting. Think of your statement as a ‘window’ in which the selection committee can look through to gain a clear, distinct landscape of WHO YOU ARE. Find an angle or a ‘hook’ that will capture the selection committee.

**Concentrate on your opening paragraph:**

* The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important in your personal statement. It is here where you grab the committee’s attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of your personal statement.

**Tell what you know:**

* The middle section of your essay might detail your interest and experience in your particular field, as well as some of your knowledge of the field. Too many people graduate with little or no knowledge of the nuts and bolts of the profession or field they hope to enter. Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field and use the language professionals use in conveying this information. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you’ve read, seminars you’ve attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you are suited for it. Since you will have to select what you include in your personal statement, the choices you make are often an indication of your judgment.

**Don’t include some subjects:**

* There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Do not mention potentially controversial subjects (for example, controversial religious or political issues).

**Do some research if necessary:**

* If an institution wants to know why you’re applying there rather than another school, complete some research to determine what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. Be specific about the reasons why you believe THIS program and institution is best for you; illustrate an investment in the institution. If the institution’s setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor worth mentioning.

**Write well and correctly:**

* Be meticulous. Type and proofread your personal statement very carefully. Many admissions officers say that good written communication and command of correct use of language are important to them as they evaluate these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely, and be sure to adhere to stated length requirements/limits.

**Avoid clichés:**

* A medical school applicant who writes that he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original or unique thought. Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements. Be authentic in your writing and display your uniqueness.

**Revise, Revise, Revise:**

* Revise your statement repeatedly. Have others look over your writing. Think of ‘Revise’ as a RE-VISION of your writing. View it from multiple lenses and revise accordingly. Make sure your main points are clear, distinct, and memorable; remember, this is your first impression!!!