**Let’s Get Personal: The “How To’s” of Personal Statement Writing**

**What is a Personal Statement?**

* An opportunity for the audience to get a feel for you as a person as well as a student
* A place for you to put your academic record in the context of your opportunities and obstacles
* A way to provide evidence of your achievements that are not reflected in other parts of your application
* Explains HOW and WHY the events you describe have shaped your attitude, focus and most of all, your intellectual vitality.

**Characteristics of a well-crafted Statement**

* **Is Reflective:** demonstrates that you have thought about and gained a clear perspective on your experiences and what you want in your future
* Not a list of all your accomplishments: Quality over quantity
* **Conforms to the guidelines** (word count included)
* **Answers the question(s)**
* **Contains a unique & catchy introduction** with the ability to hold the reader’s attention
* **Demonstrates knowledge** of your major/college to which you are applying

**Structuring the Statement**

* **Introduction**: provides your essay’s central theme
* **2-4 body paragraphs**: develops the theme with examples and detailed experiences which build upon each other. Final body paragraph will contain your most poignant information
* **Conclusion**: widens the lens and wraps up your essay without summarizing or repeating what has already been written.

**Questions to Ask Yourself**

* What’s special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life’s story?
* What details of your life can you share (personal history, any genuinely notable accomplishments, people or events have shaped you or influenced your goals) that might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
* Why did you originally become interested in this field and what have you since learned about yourself?
* How have you learned about this field (through classes, reading, seminars, work or other experiences)?
* How has the work experience contributed to your personal growth?
* What are your career goals?

**More Questions to Consider**

* Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you would like to explain? (i.e., grades, GRE scores)
* Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life?
* What personal characteristics (integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession?
* What skills (leadership, communication, analytical) do you possess?
* Why might you be a strong candidate (for graduate school, scholarship, etc.) and more successful and effective in the field or profession than other applicants?

**Tying it All Together**

**List facts about the different parts of your life:**

* Personal History
* Personal Life
* Academic Life
* Work Life

**The Do’s and Don’ts of Personal Statements**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DO** | **DON’T** |
| Concentrate on one theme | Have grammatical errors |
| Be unique | Appear scattered; ramble |
| Grab the reader’s attention early | Start with “I was born…” |
| Read and follow directions; answer all questions | Make it a sob story |
| Consult outside sources | Make it a resume |
| Explain inconsistencies in your history | Repeat things already mentioned in your application |
| Demonstrate enthusiasm  | Use the same statement for every school |
| Focus: be relevant to your field of study | Be general/vague |
| Be straightforward and demonstrate confidence | Use clichés, lists or chronological histories |
| Focus your paragraphs on one main idea | Create long, rambling paragraphs that tackle multiple topics |
| Have a flow, progression to your statement | Fail to make a connection between paragraphs |

**When Its finished…**

* PROOFREAD
* Have a professional career advisor review it
* Make sure you have answered all the questions
* Make sure it is tailored to your school/position of choice before submitting