

CLAS Academic Advising Center

Academic advising for students pursuing majors and/or minors offered by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Call Us: (616) 331-8585 • Visit us On-line: www.qvsu.edu/clasadvising

Writing Personal Statements

Before you begin:

- Know what is expected of you: read the directions or handbook provided
- Pay attention to word or character count: spaces count as characters!
- Answer the question(s) being asked
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Brainstorm and start with an outline
- Tell your story

Layout:

- Introduction
 - Grab the reader's attention/interest
- Body
 - Relate to the introduction
 - Use good transitions and concrete examples
 - Show, don't just tell
- Conclusion
 - Do not simply repeat earlier information

Answer these key questions:

- Where have you been?
- Where are you now?
- Where are you going? (your vision)

Some things to consider when thinking of what to write about:

- What do you consider to be your major accomplishments? Why?
- What makes you unique? (background, family, life circumstances, etc.)
- What personal traits do you have that will make you successful? (integrity, respect for others, empathy, common sense, maturity, inner strength, stability, trustworthiness, leadership, etc.)
- What traits demonstrate that you are a lifelong learner? (Involved in independent scholarship, mature, curious)
- Explain any irregularities in your academic record. (turn a negative into a positive)
- Are there any special hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits?
- How do you demonstrate your compassion/care for the welfare of human beings?
- What do you want professional schools to know about you that has not been disclosed in another section of the application?
- Why did you choose this profession? What is your motivation for entering this field?
- What experiences have you had that demonstrate your understanding of the profession?
- What motivates you to learn more about your chosen profession?
- What do you hope to contribute to your chosen field?

Some final considerations:

- Use Notepad for editing rather than Word (Word enters extra characters when you copy and paste into most of the online forms)
- Begin writing early
- Edit, edit, and edit some more
- Know your audience. He/she will likely be reading a giant stack of personal statements, all answering the exact same question. Make your application stand out: don't state the obvious
- Carefully check for grammar, punctuation, and spelling (read it aloud or backwards)
- Ask multiple people to review your statement
- Avoid clichés, slang, and generalizations
- Avoid wordiness and repetition: less is more
- Be honest and don't make excuses or blame others
- Do not just repeat your resume or application. Instead, add to it. Illustrate important aspects of your life that are relevant to the application
- Save all drafts, as you may decide later you don't like a change you made
- If you get stuck or become frustrated, walk away. Come back to it with a fresh mind and a fresh set of eyes
- Use your own voice
- Replace weak verbs (am, is, are, was, were) with strong, active verbs when possible
- Be consistent in what you write and don't embellish: you might not remember your embellishments in an interview
- Write about your goal not the means (hopefully you want to become a doctor, not just attend medical school)
- Make an appointment with the Writing Center for help at any stage of the process

Resources for additional help:

- Writing Personal Statements Online (Joe Schall) <https://www.education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab <http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01>
- Carnegie Mellon's Health Professions Program personal statement guide <http://www.cmu.edu/hpp/achieve/pstips.html>
- Dartmouth College's guide to personal statement writing <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/tasks/graduate.html>
- Writing Center www.gvsu.edu/wc 120 LOH, 331-2922

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C-1-140 MAK • 1 Campus Drive • Allendale, MI 49401-9403

