

## Writing Effective Personal Statements & Application Essays

You will need to write some form of goal statement or essay as part of the graduate or professional school application process. The requirements for these essays will vary from program to program, but some general rules apply.

Personal statements give you an opportunity to explain parts of your personal, educational, and professional background that have influenced your decision to pursue an advanced degree at a particular institution. Admissions committees rely heavily on these essays, as they paint a more three-dimensional picture of you than do test scores or GPAs. It is critical for you to reflect on the uniqueness of your background and to be specific about your goals, to help the committee feel like they would be gaining a valuable new member to their program. It's also critical that you answer the question they ask!

The personal statement should be focused - you should be connecting your experiences, education, and motivations to the program you have selected. What has prepared you for this program? What do you hope to gain from it? Where do you see yourself after completing the degree? When applying to Social Work programs, you will most likely be asked to address an issue related to social justice. Depending on what they ask you to write, you will likely have to address these types of issues in a relatively concise framework.

Effective essays need to say a lot in a fairly limited amount of space. Some tips that might help you in crafting your essays:

- Be concise and selective. Focus on common themes and specific goal statements, rather than providing a biography or a list of accomplishments.
- Give specific examples that are unique to you - don't generalize. For example, if applying to a program in social work, the following statement (while true) may be read as cliché: "I want to become a social worker because I like to help people." A stronger statement would include a specific example of volunteer work you performed, and how that experience influenced your decision to enter this field -- this will convey genuine enthusiasm and motivation. If you have been involved in research be specific about the nature and extent of the research if relevant to the program to which you are applying.
- Articulate clearly how the information you are providing demonstrates your potential for this kind of advanced study (just as you must do in a job search, don't forget to "sell your skills").
- It can be helpful if you can meaningfully weave in reference to research done by a member of the department to which you are applying if it relates to an area you may want to study, or to your research.
- Follow instructions! Answer the question, and all parts of each question, put forth.
- If necessary, explain or address any discrepancies or perceived weaknesses in your record.
- Consult with your faculty adviser and faculty in your particular field on whether or not this is a necessary strategy in your situation.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread! Be sure to have your faculty advisor, relevant faculty members, and others read your essays.
- Books in the Career Development library, 203 STU, can help you get started. Look for the following book in local libraries - Graduate Admissions Essays: What Works, What Doesn't and Why and How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School. Also refer to the following web sites:

<http://www.essayedge.com/graduate/essayadvice/course/>

[http://www.psichi.org/pubs/articles/article\\_165.aspx](http://www.psichi.org/pubs/articles/article_165.aspx)

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/apessay.html>

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p\\_perstate.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html)

- The Writing Center is also available to help you in crafting your essays – Allendale: 120 LOH, 331-2922; Pew: 101B DEV, 331-6407

Adapted from <http://web.princeton.edu/sites/career/Undergrad/gradschool.html>