



# Personal Statements

## Graduate Admission Essays

### What are Personal Statements?

Personal statements provide graduate admissions committees a way to learn more about you as an applicant. Much like a cover letter for a job application, the personal statement is a way to sell your abilities. In graduate or professional school, the admissions committee wants to know not only what interests you about their program, but also what you will contribute in terms of research, seminar discussions, conferences and other collaborative opportunities.

Ask yourself, what interests and qualifications make you the ideal applicant for this program? Why are you pursuing a career in this field?

Also, keep in mind some programs may require multiple essays for admission, so be sure to read each application carefully. Likewise, professional programs such as medicine and law often require one personal statement be uploaded to a centralized application and read by several professional programs. Finally, note that programs may request supplemental materials or personal interviews at other stages in the admissions process.

### Two Types of Personal Statements

1. **General, comprehensive personal statement:** May or may not have a word or character count, usually a generic prompt such as “Write a personal statement describing your experiences and goals.”
2. **Response to a specific prompt:** May or may not have a word or character count. Often, the prompt includes several questions such as, “Explain why this program is the best fit for you” or “Tell us about an accomplishment that is important to you.”

**Career Development Center**  
113 Stratton Administration Center  
610-683-4067  
careerhelp@kutztown.edu  
www.kutztown.edu/careercenter

### Review Service

Email or drop off your personal statement to have it reviewed by a CDC staff member (Typically takes up to 7-10 business days) Unfortunately, we are unable to review these documents during quick questions walk in hours.

## Getting Started: Pre-Writing Prompts

Your personal statement is your opportunity to highlight yourself— your experiences, goals, and ambitions. Graduate and professional programs want to hear not only about your success in the classroom, but also about your experiences outside of academia that led you to pursue a graduate degree in a specific field.

Provided are several reflective exercises, or pre-writing prompts, to help you brainstorm and develop material to use in your personal statements. Depending on how you learn best, one exercise may prove more useful to you than others. These exercises help you focus on your specific skills and attributes so that you may expand on them.

### Exercise #1: Accomplishments & Experience Table

<b>Personal Accomplishments:</b> (Talents, interests, attributes that make you special)	
<b>Community Experiences:</b> (Extracurricular involvement, volunteering, civic or religious organizations, etc.)	
<b>Academic Accomplishments:</b> (Honors, achievements, awards received)	
<b>Professional Experience:</b> (Work experience and professional affiliations)	

### Exercise #2: Storytelling

Reflect on an experience that illustrates your personality, passions, and dreams. Think about why you chose this experience, how does it relate to the field you want to study? Then answer the following questions:

Does the story:

- explain your personality?
- give reader a sense of your passions? Your dreams?
- explain why you have chosen to study this particular field?
- describe potential research interests?
- address why you are a good candidate for their institution, considering its approach to education?
- convey that you are prepared to begin studying this field?
- explore your long-term professional goals or career path?
- share important themes in your personal statement? Explain the significance of the story or how the themes relate to the career field you are pursuing.

## The Do's & Don'ts of Personal Statements

### The Do's

- DO take time to think about who you are and the experiences that have shaped your life.
- DO mention possible career paths, interests, professional goals, and explain why you are ready for an advanced degree in this field. Prove you have the work ethic, commitment, and resilience necessary to succeed.
- DO be specific; be sure to back up all statements with examples and concrete evidence. Remember: show, don't tell.
- DO research your programs and schools. Ask yourself if there are certain values expressed in the program or aspects, such as a thesis, that intrigue you.
- DO have someone proofread your essay. If they have questions or something is unclear, the admissions committee will probably experience the same confusion.

### The Don'ts

- DON'T be cliché or use generalizations; i.e. "I want to be a doctor to help people."
- DON'T make lists of accomplishments, instead elaborate with examples and stories.
- DON'T sound defensive or arrogant. Tone is key.
- DON'T mention names of professors you hope to work with; mention areas of interest.
- DON'T have your essay focus too much on others. This is about you.



### Help From the KU Writing Center: Writing Your Personal Statement

*OM 132, M-Th 9-5, Fri 10-4, evening hours Mon & Wed 6-9pm.  
wrcenter@kutztown.edu. 610-683-4733. Walk-in Appointments always available!*

**What services does the UWC provide?** For undergraduate and graduate students in any discipline, they provide free one-on-one consultation on all types of writing, whether your assignment is a poem for a creative writing class, a biology research paper, a case study in sociology, a literary analysis, or a cover letter or personal statement.

#### **What type of help will I receive at the UWC?**

- Review of assignment requirements;
- Discussion of ideas and help with prewriting processes;
- Assistance with the development, organization, clarity, or style of rough or advanced drafts;
- Suggestions for how to improve your writing in general;
- Guidance with editing and proofreading skills;

**What happens during a session?** Consultation sessions last about 30 minutes. Your session will usually start with a conversation about your assignment and what goals you have in particular. Remember only so much can be accomplished in half an hour. While the focus of the session is on you and your concerns, you can take notes on whatever advice and suggestions from your tutor you find useful. You might even want to revise or rewrite a section of your draft in partnership with your tutor. If you need more time, you are encouraged to make another appointment.

**May I drop off my essay for the tutor to edit?** No: Writing Center sessions are designed to provide you with additional skills or insights about the writing process through discussion. The Writing Center is not a proofreading or editing service. You are assisted with suggestions and advice on specific edits that you can make yourself.

## Example of a Successful Statement

Having majored in English as an undergraduate, I would now like to concentrate on English and American literature. I am especially interested in nineteenth-century literature, women's literature, Anglo-Saxon poetry, and folklore and folk literature. My personal literary projects have involved some combination of these subjects. For a final exam, I specialized in nineteenth century novels by and about women. The relationship between "high" and folk literature became the subject for an honors essay, which examined Toni Morrison's use of classical, biblical, African, and Afro-American folk tradition in her novel. I plan to work further on this essay, treating Morrison's other novels and perhaps preparing a paper suitable for publication.

I hope to examine more closely the relationship between high and folk literature. My junior year and individualized studies of Anglo-Saxon language and literature have caused me to consider the question of where the divisions between folklore, folk literature, and high literature lie. Should I attend your school, I would like to resume my studies of Anglo-Saxon poetry, with special attention to its folk elements.

Writing poetry also figures prominently in my academic and professional goals. I have just begun submitting to the smaller journals with some success and am gradually building a working manuscript for a collection. The dominant theme of this collection relies on poems that draw from classical, biblical, and folk traditions, as well as everyday experience, in order to celebrate the process of giving and taking life, whether literal or figurative. My poetry draws from and influences my academic studies. Much of what I read and study finds a place in my creative work as subject. At the same time, I study the art of literature by taking part in the creative process, experimenting with the tools used by other authors in the past.

In terms of a career, I see myself teaching literature, writing criticism, and going into editing or publishing poetry. The degree from your institution would be valuable to me in several ways. First, your teaching assistant ship program would provide me with the practical teaching experience I am eager to acquire. Further, earning a M.A. in English and American literature would advance my other two career goals by adding to my skills, both critical and creative, in working with language.

*Adapted from: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/02/>*

## Additional Resources

- Peterson's Graduate School Guide: <https://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/graduate-admissions.aspx>
- Kaplan Test Prep: <http://www.kaptest.com/gre/graduate-school/graduate-school-application>
- Purdue OWL: Writing the Personal Statement: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- University of Indiana Bloomington Writing Tutorial Services, Personal Statements and Application Letters: [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/personal\\_statements.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/personal_statements.shtml)