

# Your Personal Statement: Grab Their Attention!

It's time to start thinking about one of the most important aspects of your application: the personal statement, or statement of purpose. Admissions committees use the statement to get a feel for you as a person, an individual. Up until now, they have seen your grades, test scores and lists of activities in which you've been involved. The personal statement is your opportunity to shine. This is a chance to write a compelling story about your achievements, your character, maybe a situation in which you have learned a life lesson. If you write a compelling statement, an admissions committee member might decide that you have something unique to offer their school. By this time in your life you've had many life experiences: tackled challenges, experienced disappointment, learned lessons, even learned a lot about yourself as a person. Now you're going to share one or two of these personal experiences with the admissions committee; this is not a time to re-list things that are already located elsewhere in your application, but a time to share personal aspects of your life. This process can take lots of time, even weeks.

## First Things First:

Before you begin:

- Think about your audience. Who will be reading your statement?

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- Read the prompt for the essay and be sure to answer the question asked..
- Reflect back on past experiences and how they have affected you. Some questions you might ask yourself are:

Who are your role models and why?

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How have you spent your summers during college? How has this influenced your life?

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What activities have you enjoyed most during college and why?

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Were you on a sports team? What did you learn about teamwork? Leadership?

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Do you come from a disadvantaged background? What was it and how did you persevere?

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What challenges have you overcome and what did you learn?

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Are you particularly interested in a topic such as a social issue or political cause?  
Why? What have you done to validate that interest?

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Have you ever helped a friend or family member through a difficult time?  
Tell me about that.

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Have you held a leadership position in college? What did you learn about people?  
What did you learn about yourself? How were you affected by the leadership position?

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What accomplishment are you most proud of? Why?

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What have you learned about yourself while you have been in college?

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What is the most important lesson you have learned?

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Why do you want to go to med/dent/law school?

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How have you reassured yourself that this is the right path for you?

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What has been most influential in your decision to pursue this profession?

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Why should this professional school admit you?

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What can you contribute to the professional school? To a new group of professional students?

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Is there something in particular that is interesting or different about you and/or your family?

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**Time to Start Writing:**

- Once you have thought about the answers to these questions, start writing stories that answer the questions. Think about the details of the situation, how you felt about it, what you learned from it, how you reacted to it.
- Write about how the situations either clarified or made you question your values.
- Create images in the minds of the readers; give them a video clip of your life to see in their minds. To do this, you need to write with details and specifics.
- Make sure you talk in the first person (remember it is a *personal* statement). Make this similar to a letter you might write a friend. It does not need to be formal (but it does need to be technically perfect: grammar, spelling, appropriate word usage, etc.). Feel free to use humor and creativity, but don't go overboard!
- Don't write what you think someone else wants to hear. Write about yourself, with feeling. That *is* what they want to read!
- Start to put stories/paragraphs into an appropriate order with good transitions between.
- Start your statement with a catch phrase and a story. Which would you be more likely to want to continue to read:  
    "I know I will be a good student at your medical school."  
    Or  
    "If I had known that I would end up here, I might have made a very different decision." This phrase makes me want to find out what happened and what the writer is talking about.
- Have friends, parents, and professors read your statement. Have them check for interest and especially for errors.
- Proof and re-write as necessary.
- Once you are satisfied, transfer the statement to your application.
- Take your time! Make it say what you want it to say!