



You may need a personal statement, letter of intent or application letter when applying for jobs, internships, and graduate/professional programs. This document challenges you to concisely outline your strengths, goals, experiences and qualifications while demonstrating good writing skills. This process is going to take a while.

## PREP WORK

Before you start writing, gather documents such as your transcript, resume and application. Brainstorm information you may need to include in your essay: names of past supervisors, applicable job titles, experiences and job skills you want to specifically communicate, past successes, etc. Having the information right in front of you before you start will bring ease to the writing process.

## WRITING TIPS

**Answer the Question:** If the application asks you to state the reason you are applying to a particular academic program or company, do not spend the entire letter talking about your qualifications. Instead, talk about what attracted you to the company or program. To keep yourself accountable to answering the question, keep the question in front of you as you write, and refer to it often.

**Consider The "I" Problem:** This letter is about you. It is okay to use first person, plus it keeps your writing more active and succinct. However, to demonstrate creativity, do not start every sentence with "I."

**Avoid Unnecessary Duplication:** Do not reiterate information that is already seen elsewhere in your application, resume or transcript. If the reader has access to your transcript, you do not need to list your grades and course titles. You can be more general in mentioning these topics. For example: "I was on the Dean's List" or "I have taken numerous courses in the field of nutrition" and then move on to discuss appropriate experiences in more detail.

**Make Your Statement Distinctive:** To make your letter unique include at least one detailed example specific to your own experience (e.g. Describe an important family member or personal moment that influenced your decision to pursue a particular career or degree).

Be wary of using humor to connect with the reader. Most of us are not very good at making someone laugh whom we have never met before. The safe

option is to avoid any "funny-business" unless you are absolutely sure that it will work.

**Keep It Brief:** To keep your essay brief (essays are typically limited to 250–500 words or one typed page) write concisely yet detailed. Focus each paragraph on a single idea (e.g. one paragraph on the strengths of the program, one on your research experience, one on your extracurricular activities, etc.) to keep the essay from becoming too long.

Use a dictionary and thesaurus to provide more word variation and to avoid repetition. However, be careful not to be overly zealous in your use of vocabulary. This pretty tacky sentence: "I endeavor to pursue my doctorate in the field of cognitive psychology because I believe human thought permeates all facets of human behavior—from exam-taking to abhorrent aggression—and I believe that, as a cognitive psychologist, I would find the profession fulfilling to such a degree that I would be ecstatic regarding my chosen profession," would sound better like this: "I want to get my PhD in cognitive psychology because I think it is an intriguing field and I know I would be happy working in it."

## PERSONAL STATEMENT FORMAT

Requirements for personal statements differ, but generally a personal statement includes certain information and can follow the format below:

**Introduction:** Gain the reader's attention by starting with a catchy opening, such as the distinctive personal example mentioned earlier. Then, connect the example to the actual program/position for which you are applying. In this first paragraph mention the specific name of the program or company, as well as the title of the position or degree you are seeking.

If you have a fine-tuned personal statement, use it. However, it is better to start with a straight forward option than try to create some grandiose personal philosophy. Avoid cheesy clichés and egotism. Avoid using a famous quote.

**Detailed Supporting Paragraphs:** The next few paragraphs should address specific questions from the application. Each paragraph should be specifically focused and support a topic sentence. You may be addressing your qualifications, why you are interested in the program, etc. Regardless, keep your examples relevant to supporting your qualifications.

**Conclusion:** In the last paragraph tie together the various examples and claims you have raised in the essay, and reiterate your interest in this specific program or position. You might also mention how this job or degree is a step towards a long-term goal.

**General Suggestions:** In applying to multiple graduate schools/companies, have at least one paragraph that you change so your essay will sound individualized. For graduate schools, you might specify that you have a similar research interests that match faculty interests at that institution. For companies, you may share an interest in their mission, leadership style, product, etc.

An application letter contains many of the same elements as a personal statement, but it is presented in a business letter format and can sometimes be even shorter and more specific than a personal statement. An application letter may not contain the catchy opening of the personal statement but instead includes detailed information about the program or position and how you found out about it. Your application letter usually refers to your resume at some point, and you ask for an interview in the conclusion.

### REVISING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT \_\_\_\_\_

Because this document is designed to either get you an interview or a place in a graduate school program, you must allow yourself enough time to revise it thoroughly. When revising, check both the content (Did I address the question? Is there enough detail?) and for technical errors (Is the writing clear? Are the mechanics and punctuation correct?). Spell- and grammar-checks are helpful during revision, but do not rely on them exclusively. Read through the essay yourself and have others (graduate students, professors, career counselors, parents, supervisors, etc.) review it as well.

### RESOURCES, SAMPLES AND ADDITIONAL TIPS \_\_\_\_\_

[www.studential.com](http://www.studential.com)

[www.personalstatement.info](http://www.personalstatement.info)

[www.jobpostings.net/resource.cfm?id=18](http://www.jobpostings.net/resource.cfm?id=18)

[www.petersons.com/ugchannel/file.asp?id=1008&path=ug.gs.admission&sponsor=1](http://www.petersons.com/ugchannel/file.asp?id=1008&path=ug.gs.admission&sponsor=1)

[www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/personal\\_statement.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/personal_statement.shtml)

[www.hkjobs.com/resources/writing/application/checklist.html?sessid=1c693ddb7d](http://www.hkjobs.com/resources/writing/application/checklist.html?sessid=1c693ddb7d)

[www.studential.com/guide/write\\_personal\\_statement.htm](http://www.studential.com/guide/write_personal_statement.htm)

### PERSONAL STATEMENT CHECKLIST \_\_\_\_\_

- Spelling and grammar have been checked.
- The person's name and title are correct.
- The company name and address are correct .
- It reads like a good business letter.
- The opening paragraph will interest the employer enough to prompt the rest to be read.
- It suggests that I am genuinely interested in the kind of work to be done.
- It is positive and I am presenting the information in a Win/Win format.
- I have specified follow-up.
- It is single-spaced and printed on one side of paper.
- All lines start on the left-hand side of the page.
- It has two spaces between each paragraph in the letter and the letter is positioned on the page well.
- It is typed in the same font, with the same margins and printed on the same type paper as resume.
- It is signed with a black pen.
- Place the resume behind and fold in a tri-fold, with no staples.

### SUMMARY OF DON'T'S \_\_\_\_\_

- ... try to be funny or make jokes
- ... start every sentence with I
- ... include your hobbies/interests unless relevant
- ... use vocabulary you don't normally use and just looked up in a dictionary
- ... use famous quotes in your statement
- ... repeat things already in your application
- ... write a list of all your hobbies and interests without explaining them
- ... lie or embellish the truth
- ... say you are going to do something before you come to university
- ... include boring phrases/hobbies as everyone else
- ... take any political viewpoints