

Writing the Personal Statement

The purpose of the personal statement is to provide you with an opportunity to present yourself and your background that may not be apparent from the other parts of the scholarship application information. The personal statement is often the deciding factor in making decisions about scholarship awards.

Carefully read any instructions provided for preparing your personal statement. Specific instructions are generally indicated on the scholarship application form or in the Scholarship Handbook. Go over the guidelines for each scholarship and make a list of general topics and essential information the eligibility requirements wish you to include. Pay attention to the requirements of specific scholarships you apply for and address those requirements.

Recognize both the importance of the personal statement and the difficulty of the task. The personal statement is not something that should be simply scribbled just before you submit your application. Give yourself enough time to produce a thoughtful and carefully composed essay. A personal statement that is done well may be used over and over again with a little editing. University applications require a personal statement. The essay you use for your scholarship application may serve as a draft in the future.

THE WRITING PROCESS

You will be more satisfied with your personal statement if you allow yourself more than one week to write it. Writing may be done more effectively if you use a process or a specific set of steps. Your essay will be more thoughtful if you break up your writing sessions into productive chunks of time for brainstorming, creating your first draft, developing focus and organization strategy, revising and editing and composing your final draft.

A HELPFUL STEP-BY-STEP TASK LIST

Ideas

The ideas are the **heart** of the message, the content, the main theme. The writer chooses details that are interesting, important and informative. These are the kind of details the reader would not normally anticipate. Notice what special qualifications are emphasized for the scholarship. Imagine the ideal recipient. In what ways do you match this ideal (i.e. grades, personality, life experience, motivation, persistence)? How would a scholarship help you achieve your goals? How would it affect your finances and motivation?

Organization

Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the pattern. When the organization is strong, the essay begins meaningfully and creates in the writer a sense of purpose that is conveyed to the reader.

Voice

The voice is the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to the reader and cares about the message. It is the **soul** of the writing, the wit, the feeling. When the writer is engaged personally, it imparts to the reader a personal tone that is distinctively singles out the writer.

Word Choice

Word choice is the use of rich, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. Strong word choice is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary, but more by the skill to use everyday words well.

Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the **rhythm** and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear and not just the eye. A good test is to read your essay out loud. How does it sound? Is it free of awkward word patterns that slow the reader's progress? Remember, you want to make your essay memorable for its content, not for its difficulty to read.

Conventions

Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece – spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing use of capitals and punctuation. Writing that is strong in conventions has been proofread and edited with care. (Spell check!)

Presentation

Presentation combines both visual and verbal elements. It is the way we exhibit our message on paper. Even if our ideas, words and sentences are vivid, precise and well constructed, the essay will not be inviting to read unless the guidelines are followed. The format for your personal statement is typed on 8 ½ by 11, white paper with one inch margins, top, bottom and sides; name and ID in the top right-hand corner; Times New Roman font; 11 pitch; double-spaced; two pages maximum. Remember, committee members are reading many of these applications. You want to make it as easy for them to know about you.

FIRST DRAFT

Here are some questions to get you thinking...and writing!

- Write a brief statement introducing yourself like: where you come from; what your major is; something about your family, and one unique thing about you.
- What are your goals and what kind of career do you want for yourself?
- What do you hope to be doing in 5 years? In 10 years?
- How did you choose your career goal or area of interest?
- Have you been influenced by anyone in particular?
- What are your best qualities?
- Are you creative? Hard-working? Persistent? What experiences have you had in your life that demonstrates these qualities?
- What kinds of activities or experiences or achievements demonstrate that you are actively preparing to achieve your goals?
- What challenges have you faced so far in your personal or academic life?

Write the first draft. Just get something down on paper. You'll feel better right away. Print a hard copy. Keep all drafts and notes together in a folder with you, so you can easily find and look it over, revise, or add something that comes to mind. It is probably a good idea to have a friend, a professor, a counselor, or a parent provide you with feedback on how well your personal statement conveys what you want it to say.

DO'S & DON'TS

Do:

- Include brief descriptions of your specific achievements.
- Give credit to people or books or whatever has inspired you. Mention early influences that led you to your goal if they are interesting or unusual. Remember to keep the focus on you.
- Give the readers a taste of your daily life to make points about yourself (multiple responsibilities, busy schedule, financial hardship, etc.)
- Rely on your letters of recommendation to supply praise and superlatives.
- Identify your long-range goals.
- Acknowledge the support you've received at the College (include counselors, faculty, classes, clubs, etc.)
- Make your opening paragraph as individual as you are! Spend time crafting your first sentence, and each sentence, until you are satisfied with the message and style.
- Make your statement easy to read. Consider format, fonts, and margins.

Don't

- Don't simply list honors, awards or achievements from your application.
- Don't include long narrative passages or take up too much space describing other people.
- Don't include details of your daily life that are common to many students.
- Don't compliment yourself with praise, making you seem immodest. Let your readers decide whether you "have a great GPA" or "are extremely diligent."
- Don't make too many detailed promises about what you intend to do (volunteering, special projects.)
- Don't promise to figure out your career options at some point in the future.
- Don't spend too much time discussing what other people have done for you.
- Keep most of your personal statement focused on what you have done.
- Don't begin with: "Hello, my name is..."
- Don't use fonts that are too small or fancy. Don't use bold, CAPITALS, or underlining to emphasize key points.
- Don't forget to use spellchecker and proofread for missing words & typos.

THE FINAL EDIT

Check the guidelines and eligibility requirements again to make sure you have answered all questions. Proofread your final draft. Use the spell and grammar check. Consider using this checklist:

- Is the educational goal clearly stated?
- Have you shown care in your choice?
- Is your plan for the future in the essay?
- Are sections boring or irrelevant?
- Is the writing clear? Is the vocabulary well chosen?
- Are there heart, soul and rhythm in the essay?
- Is the paper's formatting as specified in the guidelines?
- Have the spelling and grammar been checked?