



# Personal Statement Guide

The purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant who should be selected.

## Start by asking these questions:

- ✓ What is special, distinctive, unique or impressive about you and your life story?
- ✓ How did you learn about this field and get interested in it?
- ✓ What have you accomplished in the field to date?
- ✓ What characteristics and skills do you possess that enhance your prospects for success?
- ✓ Have you overcome obstacles?
- ✓ If so, how did you overcome them and how did you grow from the experience(s)?
- ✓ Are there any gaps in your academic record that you want to explain? (You may want to explain this in an addendum, rather than in your statement.)
- ✓ What are the most compelling reasons for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

Graduate and professional schools often require some sort of written statement called a "statement of purpose," "personal statement," or "letter of intent" as a part of the application.

## Before writing...

### Read the question!

- Some students don't address the question or guidance statement.
- Write your statement with the question constantly in mind.

### Develop a Theme

- Graduate school personal statements need a thesis, organization, cohesiveness, and direction.
- Develop a creative theme that answers the essay question and gets your message across. Convey through your theme that you are qualified, motivated, and will be successful.
- Admissions committees read hundreds of essays. Make sure yours stands out.

### Read Example Admissions Essays

- The Career Center library has books on successful admissions essays.
- Read a few to get ideas and decide what you like and dislike.

## When writing...

### Be Positive

- You have accomplished a lot at UCSC and have admirable career goals. Be proud and avoid the negative.
- Confidence in your own accomplishments convinces the committee to have confidence in you.

### Give Details

- Anyone can claim to be assertive, intelligent, and creative. Prove the skills you are claiming with examples. If you can't back up your talents, then they are not worth mentioning.
- Explain events in detail because they reveal who you are. It is better to have a few captivating points and stories than generalities.

### Seek Help

- Have your personal statement critiqued by faculty, TAs, and advisers and solicit constructive criticism and comments.
- Make sure your essay is free of typos, spelling, and grammatical errors.

## Tips

- Structure your statement with a clear direction and unify all components with a cohesive, overarching theme
- Be objective, yet self-revelatory
- Form conclusions about the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself, your field and your future goals
- Be specific - document your conclusions and your skills with specific examples



Some statements require specific information—for example, the applicant's intended area of study within a graduate field. Others are quite unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of matters.

## Background

- It may be relevant to describe your community, family background for certain graduate programs.
- You can describe any personal attributes and qualities you have that would help you complete graduate study successfully, such as determination in achieving your goals, initiative and ability in developing ideas and capacity for working through problems independently.
- Give some specific examples that will support these statements.

## Opening paragraph

- Introduce yourself to the committee in a compelling manner. Start out with an interesting opening- a story, experience, anecdote, or quote that will fit in with the theme/thesis of your essay
- Express your individuality.
- You may want to include your general reasons for pursuing graduate study in your particular area.

## Qualifications

Explain the experiences that will serve as a foundation for your graduate work.

### Examples:

- How your interest in and knowledge of your chosen field developed
  - Your expertise and accomplishments in your major field
  - Your undergraduate studies in general and how they relate to what you intend to do in graduate school
  - Specific learning experiences that demonstrate your motivation and inspiration for continued study
  - Other relevant experiences that relate to your future graduate studies such as jobs, community activities.
- Include names of organizations and concrete details
- **Your unique preparation** for study in the field. Correlate your academic background with your extracurricular experience to show how they collectively make you a special candidate.
  - **Any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in the application, such as a significant (35+ hour per week) workload outside of school.** This, too, should be followed with a positive statement about how this developed your abilities and will contribute to your future.

### Specific Goals:

- The area of study in which you wish to specialize. Learn about the field in detail so that you are able to state your preferences using the language of the field.
  - You may be asked, "Why do you wish to attend this school?" Research the school and describe its special appeal to you. Research faculty that have similar interests to yours.
  - Express the specific training and background that you would like to acquire while in your graduate program. Your specific goals should be consistent with those of the department to which you are seeking admission.
  - You may be asked your intended future use of your graduate study.
- Include your career goals and plans for the future.

## Closing paragraph

Leave the reader with a strong sense that you are qualified, motivated, and will be successful in graduate or professional school.

## Things to avoid

- Little white lies: "This program is my first choice..."
- Flattery: "This program is the finest in the country..."
- Generalizations: "My work as a teacher's aide was challenging."
- Philosophical: "Life in the universe is ever-changing..."
- One-dimensional: "My greatest desire is...my only goal in life is..."
- Juvenile: "I have always wanted to be a doctor..."
- Painfully obvious: "I believe my undergraduate education has prepared me for..."
- Autobiographical: "...and when I was twelve my family moved to..."

## Next steps...

- Meet with a career adviser
- Attend a Graduate School *workshops*
- **More Guides from the Career Center:**
  - Graduate School Guide
  - Interview Guide