personal Statements

Individual Assessment:  

Group Assessment:  

Personal Inventory:  

Other Thoughts/Notes:  

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T:/Handouts/Career Planning
One Process for Writing the Personal Statement

1. Analyze the question(s) asked on a specific application.
2. Research the school and/or program to which you are applying.
3. Take a personal inventory. Write out a 2-3 sentence response to each question.
4. Write your essay.
5. Revise your essay for form and content.
6. Ask someone else -- preferably a faculty member in your area - to read your essay and make suggestions for further revision.
7. Revise again.

Personal Statements: Personal Inventory

Questions to ask yourself before you write:

What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?

What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?

When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?

How have you learned about this field--through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?

If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?

Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre SAT or ACT scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?

Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life?

What personal characteristics (for example: integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?

What skills (for example: leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?

What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
Personal Statements: General Advice

Answer the questions that are asked

If you are applying to several schools, you may find questions in each application that are somewhat similar. Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications. It is important to answer each question being asked, and if slightly different answers are needed, you should write separate statements.

Tell a story & “hook” your reader

Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. If your statement is fresh, lively, and different, you'll be putting yourself ahead of the other applicants. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself memorable.

Be specific

Don't, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

Concentrate on your opening paragraph

The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement.

Tell what you know

Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you're suited to it.

Write well and correctly

Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many admissions officers say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.

Avoid clichés

Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements.
Ten Do's and Don'ts for Your Statement of Purpose

The Do's

1. **Unite your essay** and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate.
2. **Before you begin writing**, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it.
3. **Use concrete examples** from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants.
4. **Write about what interests you**, excites you. That's what the admissions staff wants to read.
5. **Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead** -- an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.
6. **End your essay with a conclusion** that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.
7. **Revise** your essay at least three times.
8. **Ask** someone else to critique your statement of purpose for you.
9. **Proofread** your personal statement by reading it out loud or reading it into a tape recorder and playing back the tape.
10. **Be honest**. Use your essay to explain weaknesses in your application.

The Don'ts

1. **Don't** include information that doesn't support your thesis.
2. **Don't** start your essay with "I was born in...,” or "My parents came from..."
3. **Don't** write an autobiography, itinerary, or résumé in prose.
4. **Don't** try to be funny (but gentle humor is OK).
5. **Don't** be afraid to start over if the essay just isn't working or doesn't answer the essay question.
6. **Don't** try to impress your reader with your vocabulary or write what you think the review committee wants to hear.
7. **Don't** rely exclusively on your computer to check your spelling/grammar.
8. **Don't** provide a collection of generic statements or empty words (ex) meaningful, beautiful, challenging, invaluable, rewarding; “ly” and “ings”.
9. **Don't** emphasize the negative. Explain what is important (i.e. Low test scores) while emphasizing the positive.
10. **Don't** get too personal about certain subjects like religion or politics.

Ask yourself the following questions as you edit for content:

- Are my goals well articulated?
- Do I include interesting details that prove my claims about myself?
- Do I explain why I have selected this school and/or program in particular?
- Is my tone confident?
- Do I demonstrate knowledge of this school or program?
- Make sure your essay is absolutely perfect spelling, mechanics.
Ten Tips for Better Writing

1. Express yourself in positive language. Say what is, not what is not.

2. Use transitions between paragraphs. Transitions tie one paragraph to the next.

   (ex) Transition words: later, furthermore, additionally, moreover, or After this incident.

3. Vary your sentence structure. It's boring to see subject, verb, object all the time. Mix simple, complex, and compound sentences.

4. Understand the words you write. You write to communicate, not to impress the admissions staff with your vocabulary. When you choose a word that means something other than what you intend, you neither communicate nor impress.

5. Look up synonyms in a thesaurus when you use the same word repeatedly.

6. Be succinct. Say what you have to say in as few words as possible. The admissions officers are swamped; they do not want to spend more time than necessary reading your essay. Compare:

   During my sophomore and junior years, there was significant development of my maturity and markedly improved self-discipline towards school work.

   During my sophomore and junior years, I matured and my self-discipline improved tremendously.

7. Make every word count. Do not repeat yourself. Each sentence and every word should state something new.

8. Avoid qualifiers such as rather, quite, somewhat, probably, possibly, etc. Deleting unnecessary qualifiers will strengthen your writing. If you do not believe what you write, why should the admissions officer?

   You might improve your writing somewhat if you sometimes try to follow this suggestion.

9. Use the active voice. Compare:

   The application was sent by the student. (Passive voice)
   The student sent the application. (Active voice)

They both communicate the same information. The active voice, however, is more concise; it specifies who is performing the action and what the object is. The passive voice is wordier and frequently less clear.
Few Last Things….

1. Follow and Read Directions, especially with length and word length.
2. Stay on Topic
3. Make it personal!! They want to hear YOUR voice and see your personality. The selection committee wants to know you are focused and serious about your goals and they want to see how you are planning of your future.
4. Look at your statement in the eyes of the selection committee. They want to see connections between goals/life planning and your actions/involvement to reach those goals.
5. Do not use excuses! Explain why you got a low overall GPA or a bad grade in a class but do not use excuses. Instead, tell them about why it was challenging and then what you got out of the challenge.
6. Do not repeat what is one your resume and do not plagiarize.
7. Look at samples but do not copy from them! (www.essayedge.com)

Express what you learned in reference to what you did. Do not list.

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<th>What I learned and how this event influenced me</th>
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