

## **Your Personal Statement**

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Everyone finds it difficult to write a personal statement; however, don't get discouraged. With strong forethought and clear presentation, you can write a powerful essay that will dramatically increase your chances for admission. Richard Stelzer's book *How To Write a Winning Personal Statement* provides guidelines for a successful personal statement.

### **Questions to ask before writing your statement:**

- What is most important for the admissions committee to know about me?
- What is most unusual, distinctive, unique, and/or impressive about me?
- Have I had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
- Are there events or experiences in my background that might be of particular interest to those considering my graduate school application?
- Are there any special qualities or skills I possess that set me apart from others as a successful graduate school candidate?
- When did I originally become interested in my field of study? And, what have I since learned about it and myself?
- How has intern or job related work contributed to my personal growth?
- What critical skills (leadership, communication, analytical, etc.) do I possess?
- What are the most compelling reasons for the admissions committee to be interested in me?

### **TIPS**

- Concentrate on your opening paragraph; make sure you stress compelling reasons for the admissions committee to be interested in you.
- Treat your statement like a job interview. You have 5 minutes to impress.
- Find an angle, tell a story, set yourself apart from others.
- Balance personal and analytical thought in your statement. Catch the reader's attention in your first paragraph with personal information, and remember to sell yourself throughout your statement.
- Tell who you are. This is your personal statement; open up, get personal.
- Be selective. Write clearly and concisely. Adhere to word limits.
- Use positive language:

**DO:** I am productive with my time.

**DON'T:** I do not waste my time.

## Questions to ask after you've written your first draft:

After you've written your first draft, you need to revise. Revision is very important, so take your time. Try reading your draft out loud to hear any weaknesses. You may find an objective reader helpful; tutors are available at the Career and Writing Centers. Remember to present "yourself" clearly and effectively. Stelzer suggests you begin revision by asking the following questions:

- Does my statement accurately answer the question(s)?
- Does my opening paragraph capture the reader's attention? Is my entire statement interesting?
- Does my statement distinguish me from others?
- Is my statement positive, up-beat, and confident?
- Have I been selective? Have I introduced any controversial material?
- Have I expressed myself clearly and concisely? **Note:** The reality of the process often forces committees to read the first and last lines of your paragraphs. Short paragraphs force them to know more about you.
- Is my statement well written in standard essay format--i.e., is it a complete essay with an introduction, body, and conclusion? Do I have smooth transition sentences that link my paragraphs together?
- Is my statement a true representation of myself? Does it sound like me? And, is it personal?
- Finally, have I proofread for all spelling and grammatical errors?

### AVOID

- High school accomplishments, unless outstandingly relevant.
- Controversial subjects, ie. politics and religion.
- Being overly creative; you may come off as "cutesy" and conceited.
- Writing what you think the committee wants to hear. This is transparent.

### REMEMBER

Everyone is in the same boat. You have special qualities that distinguish you from everyone else; if you didn't, *you* wouldn't be *you*. So, tell the admissions committee who you are and why you are a successful candidate for graduate school.

## GOOD LUCK!

For any additional assistance stop by the **Career** or **Writing Centers**.

This handout was derived from How To Write A Winning Personal Statement, by Richard Stelzer, available in the Career and Writing Centers at Hamilton College.