

Lehigh University
Career Services Center

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Purposes of the Personal Statement

- **Qualitative** dimension of your application
- Demonstration of your communication skills
- Important way for the Admissions Committee reader to get to know **“YOU”** apart from “your numbers”: your personality, your motivation, how your life experience has culminated in this application, your potential contributions
- Way to differentiate yourself from other applicants (even to “break a tie” between applicants with similar “numbers”)

Choosing a topic for your Personal Statement

- Self-reflect:
 - What is my vision---my purpose? What’s important to me? What do I hold dear, and why?
 - Why this field? How has this interest evolved? What was its impetus?
 - What are my goals? My most important accomplishments? Obstacles overcome? Challenges met? Leadership shown?
 - What’s different/special/unique about me? What should Admissions Committees know about me that doesn’t show up on my application?
 - Who/what experience has had the greatest influence on me? Why?

Strategies for writing your Personal Statement

Start early: Be ready to write several drafts to polish it (some recommend 8-12 drafts!). People write in different ways. Below are two potential ways to approach writing. Figure out which strategy (or combination of strategies) will work for you.

- **Strategy #1**
 - Brainstorm. Think about the questions posed above. Write your thoughts down---don’t worry about order or theme or even pertinence. Write everything down.
 - Take a look at all that you’ve written. Try to find one, two, even three common themes; group your ideas as much as possible. Try to write a complete sentence about each.
 - Write a paragraph or two about each sentence---stream-of-consciousness style. Don’t worry about it making sense or having grammatical precision. Get it written down.
 - Go back and read what you’ve written. Now, start to whittle and shape it. First, work on making each paragraph internally consistent and well

- written: action verbs, compelling descriptions, good grammar. Then go back and work on making smooth transitions between paragraphs.
- Write your introductory paragraph. Remember that Admissions Committee members are overworked. Make that first sentence and first paragraph pop---draw your reader in.
 - Work on your last paragraph. Sum up: Why do you want to become a member of this profession? Why should this school pick you?
 - **Strategy #2**
 - Brainstorm. Think about the questions posed above. Write your thoughts down---don't worry about order or theme or even pertinence. Write everything down.
 - Take a look at all that you've written. Group your ideas as much as possible to find one or two common themes.
 - Make an outline (remember your high school English class), as complete as possible; enumerate what you want to discuss in each level.
 - Expand on your outline to write your essay. Use topic sentences for each paragraph, and make each internally consistent. Use action verbs, compelling descriptions, good grammar. Make smooth transitions from paragraph to paragraph.

While writing your Personal Statement, be sure to:

- Be concise.
- Proofread! Typos read as careless, lazy.
- Make it personal. Make this essay sound like you.

Things to avoid when writing the Personal Statement:

- Underestimating its importance.
- Listing all activities on your resume.
- Excruciating detail or flowery language (careful with the thesaurus!).
- Focusing only on childhood experiences.
- Other language mishaps: too formal or impersonal; clichés; overwrought or imprecise word usage; incorrect grammar or punctuation.
- Writing in generalities.
- Focusing on “tales of woe.”
- Not leaving enough time for extensive revision; not getting feedback.

Getting help with your Personal Statement

- Pre-Professional Counselor (email draft or make appt [but email draft first])
- Lehigh's Writing and Math Center (make a consultation appointment)
- Your friends and family (Ask: Does this essay reveal the real “me”?)
- Your professors