VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY
CAREER CENTER
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HOW TO:
WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Personal essays are a necessary part of the graduate school application process. These essays not only serve to demonstrate the depth of your writing but also give the admissions committee a glimpse of your personality and character that will not easily reflect through your transcripts. We have compiled a few tips to keep in mind when writing your essays and how to ensure that they are a polished representation of your preparedness for graduate school.

Personal Statements vs. Statements of Purpose

The first step when writing your essays for graduate school is to determine what type of essay you will be writing. While both are used in applications, there are significant differences in these types of essays that one must know before writing:

Personal Statement	Statement of Purpose
Focuses on you (motivations, experiences, skills)	Focuses on the program (why this specific program & how it aligns with your goals)
Content: Broader look at experiences that shaped you	Content: Specific academic achievements & research interests
Style: Can be more personal and creative	Style: More formal and academic tone
Length: Varies depending on program (often shorter)	Length: Often longer and more detailed

After you have determined the type of essay you will be writing, make sure that you copy the prompt and paste it into your Word Document to easily refer to it and help ensure that you are answering all questions. Also, bear in mind your page and/or word limit. If you need help with editing, please refer to the Campus Resources below.

WRITING TIPS FOR PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

For statements of purpose, please see our Statements of Purpose Guide

As mentioned above, personal statements can be just that—personal. It is important to focus on 1-2 broader experiences that shaped who you are, rather than just walking through information that is already on your resume. Consider these tips below as you construct your essay:

Start Early & Brainstorm:

- Don't wait! Give yourself time to reflect and write multiple drafts. Brainstorm experiences and motivations that make you unique.

Show, Don't Tell:

- Use vivid stories and specific examples to showcase your skills, passion, and achievements. Let your experiences come alive for the reader.

Focus on Your "Why":

- Explain what sparked your interest in this field and what drives you to pursue graduate studies. Show genuine passion and intellectual curiosity.

Highlight Your Accomplishments:

- Don't just list coursework. Discuss projects, research experiences, awards, or internships that demonstrate your research aptitude and academic fit.

Craft a Compelling Narrative:

- Weave your experiences into a story that showcases your growth and potential. Think of it as a journey towards your graduate goals.

Clarity and Concision:

- Write clearly and concisely. Proofread meticulously for grammar errors and typos. Visit the Writing Center for help with this.

Showcase Your Writing Skills:

- Use strong vocabulary and varied sentence structure. Your personal statement should demonstrate your ability to communicate effectively.

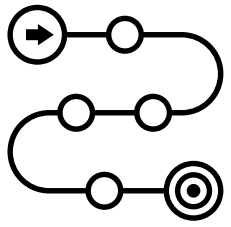
Get Feedback:

- Ask professors, advisors, or trusted peers to review your drafts. Seek constructive criticism to refine your statement and ensure it shines.

Be Authentic:

- Let your personality shine through! Your statement is a chance to stand out from the crowd. Be confident in your voice and unique perspective.

HOW TO DEVELOP AN OUTLINE FOR YOUR ESSAY:



Brainstorm Topics/Reflect on Your Experiences:

- Identify 3 meaningful experiences from your life (this should be focused on your personal growth and not simply a reflection on your resume)
- Choose one experience and describe how this experience changed you. What did you learn?
- Connect this experience to a theme. Choose one word that represents the theme
  - ***Example: Growing up in a large family and having to assume responsibility early on = RESPONSIBILITY***

Develop an Outline:

- Your outline does not have to be a full essay, but should cover the main points below:
  - Introductory Paragraph
  - **Hook:** Personal story that connects to your interest and motivation for pursuing the field/program that you are applying for
  - **Thesis and Preview:** Explain how/why you are a good fit for "x" graduate program and preview some of your rationale

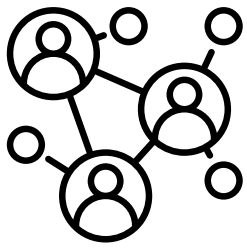
Body Paragraphs:

- **Current/Past Experiences, Future Goals:** Summarize your relevant experience, what you learned, and how this connects to your journey to graduate/professional school
- **Transitions:** Include a topic sentence at the beginning and a connection back to your thesis at the end of each body paragraph

Conclusion:

- Create a strong conclusion that restates your introduction in a new way, connects back to your personal anecdotes, and/or looks forward to the future and what you are excited for

CAMPUS RESOURCES:



Villanova Writing Center:

- For grammatical issues, syntax, structure, and final polishing, schedule an appointment with the Writing Center, located in 210 Falvey. You can book an appointment online here: villanova.mywconline.com

Villanova Career Center:

- To review topic choices, overall structure, impact of storytelling, and final drafts, schedule an appointment with the Career Center.
- Navigate to Handshake and select "Personal Statement and Document Review" as the appointment type
- **Note: Pre-Law Students should meet with Alex Karlesses, and Pre-Health Students should meet with John McGranaghan.** All other programs can choose any counselor.