



Center for Writing and Speaking

C NO. 1 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Preparing to Write a Personal Statement

This handout can help you brainstorm and edit your personal statement or application essay for graduate school, scholarships, Fulbright grants, etc. Also see the other handouts in the CWS 'Career' section!

The Preparation Process.

1. **Make a list** of your most exciting and compelling college courses, internships, work experiences, research projects, independent study projects, study abroad experiences, volunteer or community service experiences, etc. Which of these might offer anecdotes and substantive comments for the personal statement? Which of these offers an opportunity for expansion in the essay?
2. Make list of personal events that shows the **timeline** of your growing interests in this field or area of work. Note the **turning points** that led you to applying and the experiences that prepared you for this step.
3. What do you see yourself doing in five, ten, fifteen years? What do you really want to accomplish during that time in your career?
4. How will this particular program or school (or scholarship opportunity, etc.) fit with those aspirations and goals?
5. Create a **tentative outline** with 3-5 of the most important events, ideas, and turning points you want to use. Talk to someone—a friend, a professor, a tutor, etc.—and ask them if your points connect well. Is the place and position you are applying for the best fit based on your experience and vision?

Editing a draft- *When answering each question, try to identify a specific example that demonstrate the qualities you're thinking about.*

6. Imagine you are having a conversation with a trusted mentor, advisor, or friend who truly understands your motivations and qualifications. What do they know about you that isn't currently demonstrated in your draft?
7. Why do the people who believe in you believe in you?
8. What abstract qualities or characteristics define you beyond what the selection committee will see on your resume? Or, what qualities and characteristics have guided you in a way that connects the experiences on your resume?
9. If you are generally comfortable in conversational interviews-- what is it about yourself that you know you can communicate by just 5 minutes talking to someone face-to-face that might not be present in this draft?

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Dos and Don'ts

- **Do** talk concretely about your adult interests and experiences using examples. Be as detailed and thoughtful as possible about future plans for research, career goals, service, etc.
- **Do** show how your mind works—how you solve problems and get results.
- **Do** show this essay to one or more faculty members. They have invaluable experience that will help you make your essay stand out.
- **Don't** talk about childhood experiences or even high school, unless they are extremely relevant.
- **Don't** use the word “passion” or similar fuzzy terms. Avoid clichés and be substantive.
- **Don't** spend time on detailing personal stories. The right anecdotes can be helpful, but they must be written succinctly and powerfully and their relevance must be clear.

Reverse Outlining: Use this chart to organize what you already have in your draft. Think about where and how you can incorporate your answers to the above questions.

Story	Takeaway/Significance	Connection to Selection Criteria

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