

Personal Statement

What is a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is your chance to express who you are: your long term goals, interests, passions, and what makes you unique (your character). Typically you'll be asked to provide a personal statement when you are applying to graduate programs.

You may also be asked to write a "statement of purpose." For the most part these two things are the same. The main difference is that a statement of purpose will be narrowly focused on your *purpose* for applying to graduate school (your ability to be successful).

Use Your Voice:

You've spent years now developing your academic writing style, but a personal statement should not read like a research paper. Instead, you need to find a balance between being charismatic and writing skillfully.

Your narrative should be personal and intriguing. In other words, you should express authority and ownership of your story: experience, skill, and big picture goals.

Quick Tips:

- > Use the same header for all your application materials.
- > Pick a readable font and stick to it.
- > Be yourself. When you write in a way you are uncomfortable with, it shows.
- > Proofread. There is no excuse for mistakes. Have a peer, mentor, or a CEL staff member review your statement before you submit it!

Your Name

Street Address, Town, State, Zip Code
555.555.5555 • your.email@yotes.collegeofidaho.edu

Date

Dear Selection Committee,

1. Hook

- This is your official introduction. Establish your voice and narrative.
- The first paragraph is the most important part of your personal statement. It sets the reader up to be interested (or not) in what you have to say. Develop a hook that differentiates you from similarly qualified candidates.
- Be purposeful. What is your big picture/vision for the future?

2. Who are you?

- Identify the strengths and skills you possess to be successful in graduate school.
- What research, volunteer work, internships, or other experience has specifically influenced your desire for further education?
- Do you have any intellectual influences? Professors, theories, writers, etc.

3. Illustrate Your Thoughtfulness and Consideration

- Why did you choose *this* program/school to apply to?
- What current research is being done in the program that you can contribute to or align with?
- How do you connect with the culture, philosophy, and/or mission of the program you are applying to?

4. Connect The Dots

- Show how the narrative you established in the beginning ultimately makes this program the right place for you.
- What lasting impression do you want to leave the reader?
- Affirm your enthusiasm for the prospect of being accepted to the program.

Sincerely,

(sign your name)

Your Typed Name

THE COLLEGE
of IDAHO



Details

1) Identify Your Qualities:

For some of you, this will be the hardest part of your personal statement. Tip: being able to articulate your skills, qualifications, and strengths is a skill in and of itself. However, identifying your qualities does not need to be an individual effort. Get feedback from a friend, professor, or anyone who knows you well and ask them, “what have you seen in me that sets me apart from others who are applying for graduate school?”

2) Every Sentence Counts:

There is usually a page limit or word count that will be different for every application. In any case, you will probably feel restricted in how much you can write. Some schools may even ask very specific questions that you’ll be expected to answer. A good rule of thumb is to free write everything you can think of. This can be an outline, disjointed sentences, flowing paragraphs, *anything*. You’ve heard it before, but it’s easier to cut information and be precise when you have something on paper already.

You cannot avoid writing multiple drafts. In fact, you should have a friend or professor proof read drafts for initial review and then have someone that is unbiased read it and give you feedback. While a friend or professor knows you and can help you develop content, someone outside of your sphere can tell you whether your work is captivating and meaningful. You do not have room for mistakes or unorganized thoughts. Proof read, edit, and repeat.

3) Personalize Every Application:

Make sure you take the time to create a specific personal statement for each application. Don’t fret, the majority of what you write will be interchangeable. Just make sure you don’t send the University of Washington a personal statement that says something like “I know I will be successful in the Boise State program!” Big no, no.

4) Be Organized:

Finally, get organized. You’ll likely be applying to multiple programs. Make sure you label your materials clearly. For example, when you save a document, save it as firstlast-schoolname.doc (JohnSmithBSU.doc). Have a graduate school file on your computer and save all documentation along the way. This seems like an obvious point, but you’ll be so thankful in the future for being able to refer back to your materials.