

Graduate School Personal Statement – Getting Started

A personal statement, or statement of academic goals/purpose, for your application to graduate school may be a bit overwhelming to write. You may be wondering where to start or what to include. If there are no specific question(s) or essay prompt, begin by:

Brainstorming Your Answers to:

1. Why do I want to go to graduate school?
2. What are my relevant experiences (i.e. research, clinical, volunteer, or jobs)?
3. When did I become interested in the field and what have I done and learned that has solidified this is what I want to pursue (i.e. through classes, shadowing, research, work)?
4. What area of study am I interested in and why? (e.g.: Social Psychology, Biostatistics, Chemistry, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Art History, etc.)
5. What are my short and long term career goals?
6. What skills, strengths, and qualities do I possess and how do they relate to my career plans? (Think about your top 5 strengths from the CliftonStrengths assessment, if known.)
7. How do my unique background, experience, and/or identities add to the program or profession?

Develop a First Draft

May include some or all of your previous answers. Discuss:

1. A brief description of the history of your interest in the field.
2. What area(s) of study are you interested in (e.g: Biostatistics, Art History, Applied Economics) and why?
3. Descriptions of your experiences including research, volunteer and work experience, accomplishments, and/or any clinical experiences you have had.
 - How have you prepared and why are you a good fit for this field?
4. What do you want to research in graduate school?
 - Who are the faculty with whom you want to work and why do their research areas interest you?
5. Why do you want to enroll in this program? How does the program curriculum match your interests? How do your interests relate to any specific features of this program or school?
 - If you visited a school and program, mention whom you met with and when.
6. What are your short and long term goals (Masters?, PhD?) and what will you do with a degree from that school? Teach? Do research? Work in academia? Work in private industry?

Additional Tips

- **Be yourself** and “tell your story” rather than trying to be the “ideal applicant.”
- **Discuss the meaning and value of your experiences** when describing them. Explain what you learned about yourself, your field, your goals, and your future career choice from the experiences.
- **Avoid providing just a chronological list** of your accomplishments or saying generic statements such as “I want to be a counselor because I want to help people.”
- **Have your statement reviewed** throughout the draft process by a Career Counselor in Career & Internship Services, and by faculty members and/or the Writers Workshop.
- **Check the application instructions** to ensure you answered any required questions AND confirm required character, word, and/or page limits.
- **Double-check spelling, punctuation, grammar, and formatting.**

Check out the UMD Career Center website for more tips, and a free Canvas site with this handout and additional information on Preparing for Graduate or Professional School:

<https://career.d.umn.edu/students/graduate-or-professional-school>

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