WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

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Though requirements for graduate and professional schools differ, a personal statement, statement of purpose, or letter of application all serve the same purpose -- to communicate "Where are you coming from?" "Why do you want to come here?" and "Where are you going after this?" Your personal statement not only introduces you to program directors and selection committees, but also demonstrates your writing ability. Therefore, it is essential that you allow yourself enough time to draft and revise your statement so it represents you in the best light.

Writing Your First Draft
The following list addresses items to consider while writing your personal statement or letter of application.

Answer the Question: A major problem for all writers can be the issue of a*ctually answering the question or questions being asked.* To avoid this problem, read the question(s) carefully as you prepare to write your statement, while you write, and again as you prepare your final draft. Keep the question(s) in front of you and refer to it often. Be honest and straightforward about your skills, experience, and motivation. Each program may request varied information, so be cautious of recycling statements for different programs.

Avoid Unnecessary Duplication: Sometimes a writer tends to repeat information in their personal statement that is already included in other parts of the application packet, such as the resume/CV, transcript, or application form. For example, it is not necessary to mention your exact GPA, specific grades or course titles in your statement. It is more efficient and effective to briefly mention academic progress ("I was on the Dean's List five semesters" or "I have taken numerous courses in the field of _____") then discuss your appropriate work or volunteer experience in more detail.

Make Your Statement Distinctive: Many writers want to make their personal statements unique or distinctive as a means of distinguishing their application from the many others received by admissions. One way to do this is to include at least one detailed example or anecdote that is specific to your own experience--perhaps a personal situation that influenced your decision to pursue a particular career or degree. This strategy makes your statement distinctive and memorable.

Keep It Brief: Personal statements may be limited to 250-500 words or one typed page, so include detail, but be concise. Make certain each paragraph is focused on a single idea (one paragraph on the strengths of the program, one on your research experience, one on your extracurricular activities, etc.) This keeps the essay from becoming too long. Also, work on your word choice by utilizing a dictionary or thesaurus to have less repetition and more precise writing.

Consider The "I" Problem: This is a personal statement, so using the first-person pronoun "I" is acceptable. While starting every sentence with "I" is not advisable, remember that you and your experiences are the subject of the essay.

Personal Statement Format
Requirements for personal statements differ, as demonstrated by these examples of admissions requirements:
- Describe your interest in _____ and why you would be effective in this field.
- Write a summary of your academic experience, related work experience, reason(s) for entering this program, and your attributes as a potential _____.
- Please write a 2-3-page Career Statement that addresses a) What experiences led to your interest in pursuing a career in _____? b) What qualities, characteristics and skills do you possess that will make you a strong candidate for the _____ program? c) What do you hope to learn from the _____ program and how does that relate to your personal and career goals?

In general, a personal statement includes the following information:

Introduction
Catch the reader's attention by making a strong opening, using a distinctive personal example as mentioned earlier. Be sure that this will connect with the content of your personal statement. Mention the specific name of the program and the degree you are seeking.

Detailed Supporting Paragraphs
Subsequent paragraphs should address any specific questions from the application which might target strengths of the program, your own qualifications, your compatibility with the program, as well as your long-term goals or a combination thereof. Use specific examples and make certain that they are relevant and support your stated qualifications, skills and/or experience.

Conclusion
Connect the various areas that you have discussed in the statement, and reiterate your interest in this specific program. You might also mention how this degree is a step towards your long-term goal.

Revising Your Personal Statement
Due to the importance placed on personal statements, it is important you allow yourself adequate time to thoroughly write and revise your statement. Not only will you want to critique your statement for content (Do I answer the questions that are asked?) but also to examine for spelling and grammar (Is the writing clear? Are the mechanics and punctuation correct?). You may need to read and revise your statement several times. Additionally, it is wise to have others read and provide input about your statement.

Questions to Consider
- What makes you a unique individual?
- Who/what has influenced you/your career direction?
- How/when/why did you decide upon a career in _____? How has this interest evolved? (*Note: Avoid the phrase "I have always wanted to be a _____."*)
- What are your career goals? What do you hope to accomplish?
- Why are you specifically interested in the program at _____?
- How have you prepared yourself to succeed in graduate school?
- What personal attributes make you likely to succeed in your chosen career?
- What is the accomplishment to date of which you are most proud?
- What relevant research or work experience do you possess?
- How will graduate study help you reach your career goals?

In Closing
These are general guidelines to assist you in writing your personal statement. View additional resources on the Career Services' website at www.uwgb.edu/careers. You may also call the office to schedule a time to have your personal statement reviewed by a staff member.