



# The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO  
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

## Personal Statements

### Rationale

A personal statement presents the admissions committee with an interesting and comprehensive picture of the applicant. Specifically, it allows the committee to learn more about the applicant beyond what the resume/CV/transcript conveys and determine whether the applicant is a good match for the program or department. For many, the personal statement is the only writing sample submitted during the application process and thus the only chance for applicants to both demonstrate their writing skills and humanize themselves.

### Organization

Many schools or programs will provide a prompt or ask specific questions; applicants should first check for any prompts or length restrictions before writing. These guidelines often define the scope and determine the organization of information committees want.

The outline below assumes a general personal statement prompt:

Write a personal statement discussing your interest in the field, your career goals, and why you want to be in this program.

Introduction: Your introduction should grab the readers' interest, develop a theme, and present the organization of the essay in the form of a forecast statement.

1. Lead-in/Hook:

Don't necessarily begin with The Beginning; instead, hook your readers with an attention-grabbing and/or unexpected first sentence that hints at an eventual theme. Avoid starting with something cliché that many others will write (e.g., "I want to be a doctor in order to help people.").

If the committee/prompt requests a personal statement focusing on research activities, this statement should be less of an attention-grabbing hook and more functional.

2. Develop a Theme:

Ideally, you should develop a thematic idea you can return to throughout the essay that brings otherwise separate or unrelated ideas together in a cohesive way.

3. Forecast Statement:

Conclude the introduction by providing a forecast statement. Remember that readers are busy and may not read the entire essay. The forecast statement

previews what is coming and the order it is coming in, thus making the entire statement easier and quicker to read.

Body: The body of the personal statement might cover a number of different topics—topics are largely dictated by the field you are in and the prompt you are given. For instance, if you are in a research-oriented field, you will want to spend time discussing your past, current, and future research. In contrast, professional fields may ask for a teaching philosophy, professional development experience, or specific character traits related to success in that field.

#### Common Paragraph Topics:

1. The Inception of Your Interest: Indicate where your interest in the field began, whether it was as a child or in grad school. Discuss the point in time when you realized a particular interest or research focus as your impetus to pursue a specific focus or specialty.
2. Particular Abilities/Experiences that Demonstrate Success: Focus on demonstrating your proven ability to succeed. Specifically, you want to illustrate your potential to excel in your field and your ability to complete valuable research or other appropriate activities. Do not simply state that you will be successful, and don't just list accomplishments available elsewhere in the application packet. Instead, demonstrate your ability through previous experience using CSSAR:

#### **C.S.A.R.R. – Claim, Situation, Action, Result-local, Result-global**

In order to truly demonstrate your ability to succeed, provide examples of past success by creating a **claim** about the skill or ability you've developed. Next, describe a **situation** you were in where you utilized or cultivated that skill, then follow with a description of the **action(s)** you took in that situation. Finally, wrap up with the favorable **result** for that specific situation (local) and how you will apply that skill to a future situation (global).

3. Research Focus: Mention your future research interests or a particular area of focus. Many graduate programs admit very few students, and the students who do achieve admission typically have a very specific research agenda. Identify how your research interests fit into a specific department. If relevant, mention any scholars or individuals you want to work with (as many programs determine admission based on placement with specific faculty members).
4. Personal Qualities: Elaborate on specific qualities you possess that will help to advance your success. Avoid making unsubstantiated claims; instead, use SAR to show specific qualities in action that resulted in success.
5. Career Goals: Indicate what you intend to do with your advanced degree. Provide a specific career goal, research area, specialty, etc., and indicate how

this program will help you to achieve your goal. Prove that you have thought about how you will use this degree/training.

6. Conclusion: End your personal statement by connecting back to any themes you developed in the beginning, making a final appeal as to your potential for success and concluding with a statement that indicates your desire to be a part of that particular program.

### **Tone**

There are no hard-and-fast rules regarding exactly what each committee is looking for. Each person on the committee probably has particular qualities, pet peeves, and desires in mind. It is nearly impossible to ensure that you are going to please everyone with your personal statement. Instead, do your best to communicate effectively and concisely while maintaining a personable but professional tone:

- Never make excuses. While you may feel the need to explain a bad grade or test score, you should only do it in a way that shows your ability to overcome adversity and/or proves that it was a situation that happened in the past that will never happen again.
- Be confident but not over-confident. You don't want to brag, but you do need to give yourself credit for your accomplishments.
- Go for quality over quantity. Just because your statement can be two pages long does not mean that it has to be. If you can get your point across in fewer words, do so.