



The Personal Statement:

An Intellectual Autobiography

Personal Statement versus Statement of Purpose

- o Statement of Purpose and Personal Statement are not necessarily interchangeable but are quite closely aligned:
 - o a. The Statement of Purpose demands an articulation of links between past educational training; internship or research experience; & how these link to your future endeavors, educationally and professionally
 - o b. While these elements of your autobiography may be aligned with personal ambitions or motivations, these are usually not shared in a high degree of detail in a Statement of Purpose

Acquaintance with a Reader

- o The Personal Statement, primarily facilitates:
 - o a. Introduction to a reader – an “interview before the interview,” or an occasion to share a unique personal narrative in your own voice
 - o b. Articulating the motivations that have built up to your current endeavor and/or the myriad of influences that have shaped your trajectory and set of interests

Acquaintance with a Reader

- o c. A demonstration of communication skills in written form: as a thinker (in the public skill set of educational training and professional experience), in combination with your personal motivations (the ‘why’ and ‘how’ behind your journey)
- o d. A balance in tone – has to emulate the tone expected in an academic setting while offering detail and personality to achieve a semblance of acquaintance between writer and reader

How to Get Started

- o Outline or Free Write considering the following questions:
 - o a. What are my long term goals?
 - o b. How did I develop these goals (not necessarily from humble beginnings in pre-school) within my discipline and/or training?
 - o c. What are the skills / experience that have helped me to accomplish these goals until this point?
 - o d. How will this specific experience / opportunity help me begin to bring my long term goals into better focus and/or fruition?

Writing Long

- o Moving beyond your first brainstorming efforts – either in outline form or free write – in subsequent drafts, write the essay well beyond the expected length:
 - o a. Include lots of detail – think of sports or news journalists who offer ‘play-by-play’ descriptions
 - o b. Use specific names, time frames, the technical vocabulary of your discipline to bring your narrative to life
 - o c. Writing long allows you to work with an abundance of information. It is easier to cut an essay down to the required length than to continue to pull out information to lengthen a piece of writing

Revision

o **REVISE; REVISE; REVISE:**

- o a. Revision is a literal “re-seeing” of your work – revisiting your subtle argument (the rationale of your application for a specific opportunity), just as much as retuning to the style and mechanics of your language
- o b. Readers are essential to the revision process – ask peers who know you well & trusted mentors in the field that you intend to continue work
- o c. Time is an underestimated, crucial ingredient to successful writing – time to think, time to take a break and time to write, again, again and again

Tailoring

- o Once you have established a core piece of writing, take the time to tailor your essay for each opportunity:
 - o a. Re-tool language to reflect the specific institutional culture or program with which your reader is associated
 - o b. Show that you care about the individuality of each program / foundation – this can help cultivate a similar respect in your reader for your individual enterprise, outlined in your statement

PROOFREAD AGAIN

- o Sloppy preparation of application materials can be read (whether fairly or not) as inept preparation for the opportunity in question
 - o a. Proofread off screen
 - o b. Read sentences out of context – last sentence first, and so on, throughout the text
 - o c. Ask trusted peers or others to give your work a final read before submitting

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