



Personal Statements

Personal statements for scholarship or graduate school applications typically require expressive writing. Common prompts for these are:

- Write a brief personal statement
- Tell us a little bit about yourself, other than what is already written in this application.
- Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

This is your chance to shine and to exhibit yourself as an individual.

A personal statement is an expression of one's beliefs based on personal observation and experience. These can range from reflections on a summer you spent at camp to warm, humorous essays a la Robert Fulghum's "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." But keep in mind that personal statements also exhibit what Joe Schall calls "the paradox of self-expression:"

As you revise personal essays, concentrate on exuding an affirmative, positive tone. Be upbeat but not overbearing. Explain but don't equivocate. Be realistic but not pessimistic. Speak confidently but don't brag. Be idealistic but not naïve. Tell the truth about yourself and your background but don't apologize for either.

No matter what kind of essay or statement you're writing, there are three basic ideas to contemplate and incorporate into your piece:

Honesty: Be completely honest and candid in your writing – in fact, that is what admissions boards look for. When you can speak freely, you can lead yourself to revelations and epiphanies you would be without if you were trying to keep up some kind of front. Allowing yourself to be open about what you're writing about will also help you to write in your own personal voice, as opposed to the more formal language of papers and reports.

Tone: Expressive writing pushes you to find your own distinctive tone and voice. If you're not sure exactly what your voice is, try reading your piece aloud. Does it sound like you? Do you stumble over certain parts or glide along easily? If it doesn't seem to flow naturally, rethink some of your words and phrasing; when it feels right, you're on track.

Detail: Recapture your experiences. What did the subject of your piece look, smell, sound, feel, taste like? Detail is key to telling a good story and making your essay memorable. Did the rain fall, or did it gush/pour/dribble/sprinkle? What color was the sweater? How did the clay feel in your hand? Was the car a souped-up boat with fins and large, circular headlights, or was it a sleek, racy model? The more detail you can incorporate into your piece, the more comprehensive picture you will form in your reader's mind. And if you can leave a picture in your reader's mind, the chances are that they will remember your essay – and that is your goal above all.

Adapted from R. Voss & M. Keene *The Heath Guide to College Writing* (2nd Edition) and Joe Schall's *Writing Personal Statements and Scholarship Application Essays*

