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## Purpose of the Personal Statement

In addition to the application, many educational institutions require a personal statement or essay as part of the admission package for freshman and transfer students.

The purpose of the essay is to give the school a way to distinguish applicants in a process that is highly competitive. Universities receive thousands of applications from students who have similar educational backgrounds, and the personal statement gives them a better insight into the applicant's overall qualifications. Your personal statement gives you an opportunity to expand beyond the information given in the application. Take advantage of this vehicle to express and sell yourself. Highlight your personal accomplishments, intellectual maturity, leadership skills, future goals, and your interest in the school and department.

Remember, schools are not only looking for students with a 4.0 grade average, but are also looking for vital, accomplished students with a wide range of talents with the potential to become successful at the school.

## Writing your Personal Statement

Your first step should be to research the institution and the department for which you are applying. This is a very important step to help you formulate your essay. To gather information, read the school's catalog, department brochures, and browse through the school's website.

Make an appointment with a counselor at the school to find out as much as you can about admission requirements. In addition to talking to a counselor, talk to current students and alumni about your interest in the school and ask for their advice.

## Questions to Get You Started

Getting started can be a daunting task. A good way to begin is to brainstorm by writing down answers to some of the questions below. This process will give you ideas and will help you focus on possible subjects for your essay.

1. What makes you different, special from the other applicants?
2. What are your qualities and accomplishments?
3. What are your intellectual achievements? How did you get started or interested in them, and what do they mean to you?
4. Have you encountered any extraordinary obstacles in your life? If so, how did you overcome them, and how has the experience enriched you as a person?
5. When and why did you become interested in the department for which you are applying? How has your undergraduate work prepared you for this field?
6. Who are the people who have been a positive influence in your life, and why? Are they family, writers, professors, or friends, and how has the influence shaped you?
7. Do you plan to continue your education after you graduate?
8. What are your career goals, and how are they related to the school?

# Your First Draft

Once you have gathered all the necessary research, and done some soul searching by answering the questions above, you will be ready to start your first draft. Keep in mind that your target audience, the admission officers, read thousand of essays , and are expert in reading between the lines. To make sure your statement presents you in the best possible light be sure to follow these steps:

## Do's

- Read carefully and follow any specific instructions for the personal statement given in the application packet.
- Use your personal statement as a personal introduction stating the most important things the admissions committee should know about you.
- Make your first paragraph powerful and engaging.
- Develop your paragraphs clearly, make them cohesive. and carry them throughout.
- Focus on two to four main qualifications for your essay. Don't give a complete account of your life.
- Be honest, stick to the facts.
- Be creative: Write an interesting essay.
- Take your time: It usually takes many drafts to produce a good essay.
- Make sure your essay is well written: Check for grammatical and spelling errors.
- Have an instructor or counselor read your essay and give you feedback.

## Don'ts

- Write based on what you think the admission officers will want to read.
- Use cliches in your writing.
- Exaggerate or be dishonest in your essay.
- Dwell on negative issues, or overly portray yourself as a victim.
- Focus on religious, political or other subjects that are controversial.

## Editing your First Draft

1. Have you expressed your goals clearly?
2. Have you explained why you have selected the department/school, and what you hope to achieve?

3. Have you left out anything that is pertinent to your essay?
4. Does the essay present you in the best possible light? Remember, this is your opportunity to shine.
5. Were you persuasive about your strengths?
6. Is your essay well written and interesting? Is it distinctive?

## **Finally**

If you are applying to more than one school, you might have to write a different essay based on the expectations, requirements and culture of the school. Once again, your research will guide you in tailoring each essay.

The application process is a time-and-energy consuming process. Allow yourself enough time for the research, planning and writing of your personal statement. Don't overlook the impact and importance of this document as it can very well be what will set you apart from thousands of other applicants.

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