

# Professional School Personal Statement

## PURPOSE OF THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is a required part of an application to professional school (such as medicine, dentistry, other health programs, law, business, education, social work, public policy, international affairs, counseling and most other professional degree programs). It is your opportunity to present your qualifications and reasons for choosing a professional education and career.

You should discuss how your interest in the program and career developed and how you have pursued that interest while in college. Your statement should persuade the admissions committee that you will be a successful student and that you have the potential to contribute to the profession. This essay should not be confused with the statement of intent for academic master's degree and Ph.D. applications. Statements for those programs should focus on academic and research experience, rather than personal history.

## PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR STATEMENT

What do you want the admissions committee to know about you? Imagine the statement as a discussion with an admissions officer. Before you begin to write, spend time reflecting on what you know about yourself. It may be useful to develop lists or an outline of what you want to convey. You might list qualities and skills you believe you possess. Is there evidence of these in your record of experiences? These might include: ▪ your experiences working with people ▪ significant work experience ▪ research experience ▪ independent study ▪ internships ▪ community service or volunteer experience ▪ student government or organization leadership ▪ teaching experience ▪ special emphasis within your major and/or minor ▪ education abroad.

You should think about how family members, professionals or others have influenced your decision. If you present your experiences in a one-dimensional manner, by merely *describing* them rather than *explaining* their significance to you, your essay will not distinguish you from others or define your individual character. It is critical that you reflect on the meaning of your values, skills and interests so that you can write an essay that will reveal to the reader who you are, and not just what you have done.

Write about your experiences in a way that conveys how they sharpened your perceptions, taught you important lessons, or clarified your goals. Developing various themes (of community involvement, the role of teamwork, the power of persistence, etc.) might provide a framework within which you can discuss your various experiences and how they reflect concepts you have come to value. Unify these ideas through your discussion of your decision to pursue a professional education.

## SUGGESTED CONTENT

Address your comments to the questions or directions stated on the application form. If no direction is given, write your essay so that after reading it, the admissions committee will know about you as a person and be able to make a judgment about you as a candidate for their program. You may include:

- **Personal background** - What distinguishes you as an individual? Which are the most significant experiences, events or relationships that reveal something about your value system, or about the types of challenges you like to meet?
- **Development of your interest** - How did your interest in this type of professional degree program and career develop, and when did you make your decision to pursue an advanced education? If there were significant role models or other individuals who have encouraged your career goals, describe how they influenced you.
- **Related experiences** - Describe experiences that helped you explore your career interests and confirm your desire to attend professional school. Such experiences may be special research or academic work, employment, internship or volunteer experience related to your career goal (e.g., tutoring a child with a disability, hospital operating room, political campaign, biology teaching assistant, part time work in a retail export company or social service agency, etc.). Convey the insight you have gained from these experiences about yourself and the way you relate to the profession.

- **Future goals** - What are your future goals, ideals, or objectives within the profession? In what type of setting do you imagine yourself working? If applicable, what area of concentration within the program or profession would you like to pursue, and why?
- **Obstacles and inconsistencies** - Be open about any obstacles you may have encountered and overcome to arrive at this point of application (illness, family tragedy, unusually large workload, refugee experience, etc.). If there are any inconsistencies in your academic record (markedly low grades one term) or admission test scores, explain those in a brief, factual, positive, non-apologetic, non-defensive manner.
- **Program appeal** - If you are asked why you want to attend a particular school, research the program and explain its appeal for you. Make references to specific aspects of the program (its philosophy, curriculum, etc.) that match with your interests.

## **STYLE**

Applicants often worry that their essay will not be interesting to the admissions committee. If you strive to make your essay readable using a clear, simple and precise writing style, your essay will have more impact.

- **Set professional tone** Avoid slang and "gimmicky" writing. Focus on informing, not entertaining. Do not use the essay as psychological self-exploration or catharsis. Avoid using emotional language, repetitive metaphors or imagery, and conversational dialogue.
- **Organize effectively** Feature early in the essay what is most important. End with what you want the reader to most remember about you. Develop major ideas in an orderly fashion, using examples where appropriate. Brief essays of this type do not require introductory paragraphs. Launch right into what you want to say. Begin and conclude on a positive note.
- **Be concise** Use words economically. Avoid redundancies. Look at each sentence you have written and ask yourself why it is important. What does it say about you? Choose simple, clear words.
- **Be clear** Think about the person reading your essay. Will he/she understand references you make to individuals, institutions or programs? Avoid using jargon and obscure acronyms. Watch your use of proper names. For example, saying that you were a tutor for "CSI" won't be understood by anyone not at SDSU, yet writing that you worked for the "The Center for Community Based Student-Learning" takes up a lot of space. Indicating that you were a tutor through the "campus tutorial center" would suffice.
- **Keep it simple** Use active, not passive, voice. Put the "doer" (you) in charge. Use "I worked on," rather than "I was afforded the opportunity to work on." Also, use easy-to-read font or typeface.
- **Be honest** Do not inflate your achievements. Your statement should reflect maturity and be written with sincerity. If you are interviewed for admission, you may be asked to discuss what you have written.
- **Be specific** Choose specific nouns and action verbs. Avoid general and abstract terms. Document any generalizations you make with specific examples.
- **Be personal** Avoid "third person" philosophizing, clichés, quotes and platitudes about a profession or about life. Take advantage of the opportunity to tell the reader about you!

## **REVIEW AND REVISE**

Good writing takes re-writing. Refine your key points so that they are as succinct and direct as possible. Proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. Read your essay aloud.

