

## Personal Statement Workshop

**Objective:** Students will be able to write a personal statement for their college application.

**Overview:** The personal statement is the student's opportunity to sell themselves in the application process. However, before you even begin we will go through some personal statement ideas, do's and don'ts.

**Materials:**

"Spanglish" movie

Computer/projector (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>) or Handout 2: Purdue list

Handout 1: Personal Statement Workshop

Lined paper

Pencils

**Preparation:**

A week prior check the website to make sure the information is still present. Create a keynote/PowerPoint with the cited information needed and video clip.

For homework prior to lesson, have students attempt writing their personal statements.

### Instruction: (1 hour 15 minutes)

**Part 1: (10 minutes)**

- a. Start with the video clip from Spanglish. Prior to viewing the video clip remind students that they are: looking at what the admissions ladies reactions to some of the applications and the daughter's personal statement.
- b. After the video clip, have a quick 5 minute discussion on what the students saw and what a personal statement is, and how it helps the applicant sell themselves to the university.

**Part 2: (30 minutes)**

- a. Once students have an idea of what a personal statement is, have them turn to the Personal Statement Workshop (handout 1).
- b. The students will follow along with a PowerPoint/keynote from the English department at Purdue that goes over questions you should ask yourself before you write, as well as general advice, rules to follow and pitfalls to avoid.

- c. Make sure students have the information but they do not need to copy down word for word.

**Part 3: (35 minutes)**

- a. Students will now have the opportunity to perfect their own personal statement using the advice given during the workshop.
- b. The students may use their personal statements written during homework or start over. Their goal is to have a completed personal statement by the end of the lesson.

**Extension:**

- a. Once students are done with their personal statements, they submit them to the admissions department represented by our mentors. The admissions department will review the personal statements and select the top three personal statements for a recognition award.

**P2HS Closure/Transition:**

Note to students: This workshop has shown you what goes into a personal statement. Having completed your own, discuss:

1. Did you find writing a personal statement difficult? Why or why not.
2. Did having advice and rules help you produce a better statement?
3. How could these rules and advice help you in the future?

I would suggest keeping your personal statement along with the advice and rules. In a few short years you will be writing your own personal statements to be judged among hundreds by an admissions committee. Use this information to help make yourself stand out.

## Handout 1: Personal Statement Workshop

Purpose: The personal statement is your opportunity to sell yourself in the application process. However, before you begin writing, there are some questions you need to ask yourself as well as some do's and don'ts.

Questions you should ask yourself before you write:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

General Advice:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

What are the Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls when writing a personal statement?

	Rules to Follow	Pitfalls to Avoid
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		



# Purdue Online Writing Lab

## Questions to ask yourself before you write:

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
- If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

## General advice

### Answer the questions that are asked

- If you are applying to several schools, you may find questions in each application that are somewhat similar.
- Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications. It is important to answer each question being asked, and if slightly different answers are needed, you should write separate statements. In every case, be sure your answer fits the question being asked.

### Tell a story

- Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is to bore the admissions committee. If your statement is fresh, lively, and different, you'll be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself memorable.

### Be specific

- Don't, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.
- The middle section of your essay might detail your interest and experience in your particular field, as well as some of your knowledge of the field. Too many people graduate with little or no knowledge of the nuts and bolts of the profession or field they hope to enter. Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field and use the language professionals use in conveying this information. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you're suited to it. Since you will have to select what you include in your statement, the choices you make are often an indication of your judgment.

### Don't include some subjects

- There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Don't mention potentially controversial subjects (for example, controversial religious or political issues).

### Do some research, if needed

- If a school wants to know why you're applying to it rather than another school, do some research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.

### Write well and correctly

- Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many admissions officers say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.

### Avoid clichés

- A medical school applicant who writes that he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought. Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements.

# Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls

**Summary:** This handout provides information about writing personal statements for academic and other positions.

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## Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules

1. Strive for depth rather than breadth. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences
2. Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say
3. Provide the reader with insight into what drives you
4. Be yourself, not the 'ideal' applicant
5. Get creative and imaginative in the opening remarks, but make sure it's something that no one else could write
6. Address the school's unique features that interest you
7. Focus on the affirmative in the personal statement; consider an addendum to explain deficiencies or blemishes
8. Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them
9. Proofread carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style
10. Use readable fonts, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins

## Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Pitfalls

1. Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application
2. Do not complain or whine about the "system" or circumstances in your life
3. Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme
4. Do not talk about money as a motivator
5. Do not discuss your minority status or disadvantaged background unless you have a compelling and unique story that relates to it
6. Do not remind the school of its rankings or tell them how good they are
7. Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions
  - "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is..."
  - "This question asks me to discuss..."
  - "I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application."
  - "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school."
  - "In sum, there are three reasons why you should admit me..."
8. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages
9. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
10. Do not get the name of the school wrong
11. Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words