



# MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™

## CAREER CENTER

## Graduate School Admissions Essays

### Personal Statements/Interest Statements/Admissions Essays

A personal statement allows you the opportunity to sell yourself to an admissions committee; much like you would sell yourself to an employer when writing a cover letter. Most often, personal statements will fall into one of two categories:

- **General Statement:** Allows you the most freedom and flexibility in terms of what to include.
- **Question-Specific Statement/Directive:** The academic program asks specific questions which you should address in your statement.

### As you begin to draft your personal statement, consider the following:

- When did you become interested in the field? What knowledge have you gained about the field that has strengthened that interest?
- What are your career goals after graduate study is complete?
- What personal qualities/experiences will make your application appear unique?
- How has your involvement in college activities, part-time work, internships, or volunteer work helped prepare you for this next phase of study?
- What skills do you possess that would be most relevant to the field? (Use EXAMPLES to illustrate those skills.)
- Are there any academic discrepancies on your transcript or in your application you need to address?

### General tips as you write:

- Be specific. Use examples to illustrate your interests, skills, etc.
- Tell an interesting story. Admissions committees read a ton of these statements...what will you write that will make them remember your story? (In a positive way)
- Make sure your opening paragraph is an attention-grabber. If not, the reader will lose interest and move on to the next applicant.
- Avoid clichés. Use this statement to show your originality.
- One size does NOT necessarily fit all. If you have the chance to tailor your statement to particular schools, do it. It will be worth the extra effort.
- Proofread! Review and revise your document, and get others to review it as well (including the Career Center).

## **From Kaplan**

**Personal Statements:** The personal statement is where you can explain why you're applying to graduate school, what interests you about this program, and what your future goals are. The situations you choose to write about and the manner in which you present them can have a major bearing on the strength of your candidacy.

Writing an effective personal statement requires serious self-examination and sound strategic planning. What major personal and professional events have shaped you? What accomplishments best demonstrate your abilities? Remember, admissions officers are interested in getting to know you as a complete person.

## **Creating Your Statement:**

Your statement should demonstrate the pattern in your life that has led you to apply for the program. Part of demonstrating why you are right for the program involves demonstrating that you understand what the program is and where it will lead you. A personal statement requires honesty and distinctiveness. If you are heading to graduate school straight from undergraduate school, what has made you so certain that you know what you want to do with your life? If you are returning to school, particularly if you are changing fields, what has led you to this decision? You can use vignettes from your personal history, academic life, work life, and extracurricular activities to explain.

## **General Personal Statement Tips:**

**Length:** Schools are pretty specific about how long they want your statement to be. Adhere to their guidelines.

**Write in the active voice:** Candidates who write well have an advantage in the application process because they can state their case in a concise, compelling manner.

**Tone:** On the one hand, you want to tout your achievements and present yourself as a poised, self-confident applicant. On the other hand, arrogance and self-importance do not go over well with admissions officers.

## **Making Your Statement Distinctive:**

One of the best ways to be distinctive is to sell your image briefly and accurately, including real-life examples to back up your points.

Authentic enthusiasm can be a plus, and writing about parts of your life or career that are interesting and relevant help grab a reader's attention.

Note: Do use your personal statement to clear up any confusion or gaps in your resume, but do not dwell on weaknesses.

Avoid trying to include as much information as possible, without regard for limitations or strategic intent. Get rid of the idea of "comprehensive" and focus more on "distinctive."

A strong personal statement, for example, about how much you learned in your current position and how the experience and knowledge you've gained inspired you to apply to graduate school will give readers what they want – a quick image of who you are, how you got that way, and why you want to go to their school.