



Applying to Graduate School

Writing the Personal Statement

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Parts of a Graduate School Application

- The application form
 - Online or, rarely, paper
- Academic record
 - Transcripts of all undergraduate work
- Admissions test scores
 - GRE, MCAT, LSAT, DAT, GMAT,
- Letters of recommendation
- Personal statement



What is a Personal Statement?

- Also called other things
 - Letter of intent
 - Statement of purpose
 - Autobiographical statement
 - Personal narrative
- How do I know what “they” want?
 - Look for guidelines specific to program



The Hidden Agenda

- How well do you follow instructions?
 - If the instructions give a word limit, stay within the limit
 - If you are instructed to use a form, use it
 - If you are given questions to answer, answer them
- How well do you craft an argument?
 - You are marshalling evidence that you are a good fit for the program, i.e. you are presenting a thesis and defending it. Sound familiar?
- How well do you write?
 - You must not make grammatical mistakes or errors of syntax



What is Your Agenda?

- Convince program you are well-prepared
 - Your good grades did not happen by accident. Why did you take those hard courses and study so hard?
- Convince program you have “the right stuff”
 - Use examples to show you have the will and determination to succeed in graduate school
- Convince program you have a life plan
 - Be open with your career aspirations and be convincing about how the graduate program fits with your plan



Preparing to Write the Statement

- Think honestly about yourself
 - Why do I want this degree?
 - What am I good at and what do I love?
 - What makes me better than other applicants?
- Take advantage of online advice
 - <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/FS/essays.html>
 - <http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm>
 - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/p_perstate.html



The Outline

- **First paragraph**
 - You need a “grabber”
- **Middle paragraphs**
 - Address your reasons for wanting to be in the field
 - Be specific about your level of knowledge
 - Address any gaps or problems in your record
- **Last paragraph**
 - Draw the threads of your argument together to lead to the inevitable conclusion that you are right for this program



The First Draft

- Get your ideas on paper
 - Write it quickly; don't be a perfectionist
- Get away from the internet
 - You have read other peoples ideas; now put them away and work from your own head
- Never, ever cut & paste from someone else's work
 - "I'll just put this in place until I can figure out how to say it" is a recipe for disgrace and disaster



Evaluate Your First Draft

- Let the first draft cool off before you evaluate it
 - Good writing takes time and part of that time is just getting fresh eyes
- Read it for content
 - Have you covered everything you think is necessary?
 - Have you left out critical information?
- Read it for style
 - Is my writing clear?
 - Am I getting my points across?
- Read it for the intangibles
 - Is my own personal voice coming through?



The Second Draft

- Edit ruthlessly
 - Dull, boring or irrelevant material must go
 - Sometimes interesting material must go to make way for better material
- Keep to your revision plan
 - If you decided your statement needed a more personal voice, then make those changes all the way through
- Work on your transitions
 - A revised document can sometimes be patchy
 - Make sure you have a consistent style and smooth transitions to connect the parts



Evaluate the Second Draft

- Have I improved the statement?
- Does it convey the message I intend?
- Does it speak in my voice?
 - If the answer to any of these questions is no, then REVISE AGAIN
 - If you think the answer is yes, do you really think the statement is good enough?



The Penultimate Draft

- Let the prior draft cool off
 - Does the document still hold up? Are you happy with it?
- Edit for grammar, syntax, spelling
 - Now you can, and should, be a perfectionist
- Choose a trusted external reader to give feedback
 - A good reader will give you useful feedback that may make you want to change things. That's why we called this the penultimate draft.



The Last Draft

- This document should meet all guidelines in the instructions you received
 - My statement is perfect but it is too long
 - Remember the “edit ruthlessly” rule? Apply it.
- Your voice should be clearly heard
- The writing should be clear, error-free, and professional in tone without being stuffy
- This document should not contain cliches
 - Edit ruthlessly