

Writing Personal Statements for Graduate School Applications

What should go into a personal statement?

There are three main points to cover: 1) why you want graduate training, 2) why you hope to attend that particular graduate program, and 3) a summary of your training, relevant experience including specific research or clinical-counseling experience as well as statistical and computer skills. The letter also shows your writing skills, so devote adequate time to the task. Be brief and avoid irrelevant biographical details. Be specific in describing your academic interests, objectives in applying for this particular program, and relevant qualifications and experience. Ask a willing professor to check the letter for content and coherence.

Here is your chance to look good and to compensate for or explain weaknesses in grades, scores, or work experience. Admissions officers have to read innumerable essays, so meet them halfway: write clearly and concisely, be interesting, and give the reader a feeling for you as an individual. Make it clear that your decision to pursue the graduate degree is an appropriate and well considered one. Relate your interests to the specific program and faculty at that school (showing that you were interested enough to do research).

Be sure to explain important special considerations (such as reasons for a bad semester, valuable volunteer jobs). Many people find it difficult to brag, but excessive modesty will not be effective here. Do not expect anyone to read between the lines to guess what you mean. Good essays may enhance your chances of acceptance; poorly written essays will hurt.

Because it is so difficult to write the essay and then read it objectively, be sure to have someone else check it over. A faculty member would be the best choice to notice where you skimmed on important information or gave too much emphasis to irrelevant matters.

From William & Mary Psychology "Graduate School Applications" page (with minor word changes):

<http://www.wm.edu/as/psychology/undergradprogram/major/handbook/graduateschoolapplications/index.php>