

# Top 10 Tips for Writing an Outstanding Personal Statement

## Author

Dr. Shweta Murudkar

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A personal statement is one of the most important parts of your Ph.D. or graduate school application. What is a personal statement? A personal statement tells the admissions board, why they should select you as a student in their program. A strong personal statement can make your application stand out from the rest and be a big factor in whether or not you are admitted to a program. In this article, we will talk about what a personal statement should and shouldn't contain. We will also give you ten tips to write an excellent personal statement that can increase the chances of your acceptance into the program of your dreams.

## Do Personal Statements Really Matter?

Graduate and Ph.D. programs [ask for a variety of documents](#) that summarize your academic and professional accomplishments. However, you know that you are more than just the sum of your undergraduate transcripts and job history. That is why a personal statement is so important. A personal statement gives you a unique opportunity to explain why you chose the program you are applying to, and how it fits into your career and aligns with your personal goals.

A personal statement ties all your application documents together to [tell the admissions board a story](#) of why you are applying for their program. A good personal statement is [authentic, sincere, and tailored](#) to the specific program you are submitting it to. It describes your background, [how and why you became interested](#) in studying a specific subject, and how going to the school will help you achieve your goals. It is not your entire life story, but rather the story of how life has led you to apply for a particular graduate school program.

## How Can I Make My Personal Statement Strong?

There are several ways you can make sure you craft and submit a strong personal statement. First, think of your personal statement as an argument for why you belong in the program you are applying to. This includes not only what the program will do for you, but also [what you can bring to it](#). Examples of conferences you have presented at or grants and scholarships you have won [can strengthen your candidacy](#), but make sure they are relevant to the program. Illustrate why it makes sense for you, specifically, to join this particular program.

Second, make sure to [avoid overly generic statements](#) and descriptions. Your story of learning the value of persistence and struggle during your first part-time service job is very likely not helpful. However, explaining how you won a grant to study in China when you're applying to a graduate school to do East Asian studies provides important context about you and your motivation. Along the same lines, don't use tired cliches or broad descriptions of your personality that could apply to anyone. If your statement includes anything like "Webster's dictionary defines 'dedicated' as..." then you are writing a weak personal statement.

Third, provide examples of your achievements. Don't just say "I became a good scientist when I spent the summer working in Dr. Kevorkian's lab." Tell the admissions board how you went from taking notes and organizing the supply closet to designing and running your own experiments with a team. Explain [the lessons you have learned and how you will apply them](#) in your graduate studies. At the same time, avoid portraying yourself as you know it all- after all, you are applying to a program to continue learning!

## Top Ten Tips for Writing A Great Personal Statement

To help you get started writing a great personal statement, here are the top ten tips highlighting the most important strategies.

1. Begin with a checklist of why you want to apply for the program. What is great about it? How does it fit into your goals? Who do you hope to study or work with?
2. Explain [why you have chosen to study this topic](#). What about medieval literature appeals to you? Why do you want to be a cardiologist? Again, avoid generic statements like “I have always enjoyed reading” or “I love helping people.”
3. Write about why you are qualified to study this topic. What is your academic background? Don't just list the classes on your transcript; highlight specific papers you wrote or internships you've held.
4. Think about [what you hope to accomplish in graduate school](#). What skills do you want to leave with? Do you want to go into academia? Industry? How will this program get you there?
5. If you have any “black marks” on your record, like a bad grade or time off from school, [explain what happened and how you learned from it](#). Failure in the past is not an indication of future ability! Don't just ignore something if it is evident from your transcripts that you have had an issue.
6. Don't focus too much on your career. Professional experience can be important and relevant, but ultimately you are applying to enter an academic program, and you want to focus on your academic skills and interests.
7. Show, don't tell: rather than saying “I am a hard worker,” give an example of something you did that demonstrates you are a hard worker.
8. Ask for feedback! Don't be afraid to turn to your friends or colleagues to ask for feedback on your first (or second) draft. An objective observer can highlight issues or points you may have overlooked. They can also [proofread](#) for you, which leads us to tip number 9.
9. [Proofread](#) your work. Graduate school, no matter the field, is writing intensive. Your personal statement reflects your writing skills, and grammatical errors and spelling mistakes do not look great. Proofread multiple times, [use spell check](#), and have someone else review your application before you hand it in. You want to make a great impression!
10. Finally, make sure to tailor your application to each school you apply to. You can reuse some parts of your personal statement. However, you should make sure each school is getting a statement specific to their program and faculty.

Do you have any tips for our readers about writing a great personal statement? Let us know in the comments below.

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