

# CAREER SERVICES

## PERSONAL STATEMENTS

An Introduction



Career Services



University  
of Manitoba



# PERSONAL STATEMENTS

## What is a Personal Statement?

This resource is designed to be an introduction for students that are looking for information on **personal statements**; these are sometimes also referred to as **personal essays**, or **letters of intent**. Personal statements are used when applying for various educational programs or placements.

Personal statements **introduce applicants to admissions**; extending the opportunity to programs to learn about the person behind the application! They have your CV, transcript, etc., but personal letters provide a glimpse of who you are. It is a personal sample of your writing and your work, as well as a background on your priorities, qualities, and abilities.

This is also an opportunity for you to **sell yourself!** Depending on the instructions provided in the application package (which should be read very carefully), you will craft a document answering the questions provided in a thoughtful and creative way. Some personal statements may be more general in their requirements, which gives you some freedom in your writing- but even then, there are some general **tips and tricks**, and **dos and don'ts** to look out for.

Personal statements or essays are **written in the first person**, and generally admissions may be seeking some information on your **goals, plans, and your reason for applying (how do your interests, attributes, skills, and values align with the program?)**. Why are you a better applicant as opposed to others? This, along with answering other important questions, is the purpose of this document. In general, admissions are looking for someone who has **also done some research on their program**, is considerate of **how the program aligns with their goals, how past experiences have led you to develop an interest in the program, and skills that make you a suitable candidate**.

## What to Look For

Prior to writing your essay, you will want to **do some research**. It is recommended that before submitting your application, you have investigated the program and school you are applying to, visit the university **website, program pages, and publications from professors to give you some insight**. Experiential learning opportunities can be found on the program's page. This research will help you **understand the program and the university's culture and mission, as well as strengths of the department** (what are the areas of expertise in this faculty?).

Another area you may want to explore is career possibilities associated with your interests, and **how the program, or specific area of research or study, can help you in achieving professional goals**. Consider speaking with a **Career Consultant**.



# How to Start to Write Your Personal Statement

The first thing to do when you receive an application request is to **read the instructions carefully**. Ensure that you **understand the requirements** for the application and what is to be included on your personal letter. Read the instructions carefully, and more than once. If anything is unclear regarding the instructions, contact the program admissions to clarify. Answer the questions that are asked, **stay on track and focused**.

Formatting and content may vary based on what is required on the application; typically, a personal statement will be **two pages or less**, and **follows an essay format** (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion). Like a cover letter, you will **identify yourself, the program you are applying, the date, and an application number**. Contrary to a cover letter, a greeting is not recommended.

Starting is the hardest part and many people face writers block but here are suggestions that can set you up for success and make the process a little easier. Start with a **brainstorm**: consider why specific questions are being asked and write down any stories or anecdotes that come to mind. What are your past experiences like, and how do they make you an excellent candidate for this program? What goals do you have and how do they align with the goals of the program? Consider past work, volunteer, research, and academic experiences, as well as relevant extracurriculars and interests that contribute to your chance of success. Application questions are designed to **assess your fit by reviewing your experience, personal strengths, and accomplishments**. **What did you learn in the past**: was it insightful, or did you gain a specific skill set, and how will that be useful in supporting you to contribute towards the program?

## BRAINSTORM QUESTIONS

- What unique events and experiences set you apart from other candidates?
- What barriers have you overcome, how have they impacted your goals, or made you a candidate set for success?
- How would you like to use your education in the "work world"?
- What would you like to accomplish in this field?
- What experiences inspired you to pursue further education, and specifically this career path or program? What influenced you in making this choice?
- How have you pursued an interest in this field? (i.e., what steps have you taken to solidify your interest? Have you done research, worked in a similar field, conducted informational interviews, etc.)
- Why do you want to be admitted to this program? Or alternatively why do you want to be a doctor, lawyer, dentist, therapist, teacher, etc.
- Are there other occupations that you had previously considered, but decided against in order to pursue this path? Why?



You may also wish to include personal details that have **impacted your interest in your field of study**, such as personal and familial history, as well as **events, hobbies, and activities that have shaped you and influenced your goals**.

Next, create an **outline**. You may choose to take a **thematic approach** in your writing, or a **chronological approach**. The thematic approach follows a singular theme throughout, without following a timeline of events. The chronological approach focuses on relevant steps in order of occurrence that led to your application at an institution's program. Either approach aims to keep your document **easy to understand** while **connecting your ideas and stories to the purpose of your application**.

When writing a personal statement, you want it to be **engaging, informative, and thoughtful**. Use the introduction to reel the reader in and grab their attention. Write a thesis that will intrigue admissions. In the body paragraphs, focus on stories or experiences that are most relevant to the theme or timeline that the paper is following. Keep the writing concise and avoid over-explaining any one topic. In the conclusion, restate the thesis, and provide a summary.

When writing, make sure to start early; give plenty of time for multiple drafts, and implementing edits.

## What Not to Include

Some topics will distract from the point of the essay, and so these subjects should be avoided in writing. The main points of your essay should be related to answering the questions asked.

### WRITING TRENDS TO AVOID

- **Cliches:** these are commonly used, and therefore will not aid in the mission to stand out among other applicants. Some examples: passion for public service and justice, travel diary, monetary themes, etc.
- **Repetition:** although you want to get certain points across, you do not want to be repetitive. Instead, be clear, concise, and focus on **quality over quantity**.
- **Slang:** this is a professional sample of your work and using slang can be isolating or confusing.
- **Being critical or negative** (of self, of people, other schools, programs, etc.)
- **Flattery or "name drop":** unless you have a direct connection to this person, do not mention them. If you do have a connection, consider their influence on you directly.
- **Media and popular culture:** having media as your primary motivation or influence mentioned is not recommended, even if they have a connection to the program you are applying.
- **Overly personal or sensitive topics:** focus primarily on your educational and professional goals. Some personal topics can be included, if they feel relevant (impacted your studies, professional goals, or contribute to your ability to succeed in the program). Some sensitive topics may alienate members of the admissions committee.
- **Writing about another person:** this essay should be an introduction to you, and your experiences. If choosing to talk about someone influential in your life, make sure your reactions and experiences are the focus.
- **Rewriting your resume:** this document should be different and unique in comparison. You do not want a summary of all your accomplishments or experiences.



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## Other Resources and Considerations

### CAREER PLANNING

Career planning is a process of preparing to make decisions to manage your learning, work, and personal life. Career Services is here to support you as you determine your career direction and work towards reaching your goals. We want you to be aware of your strengths and preferences, be informed about your career options, and engage in meaningful experiences that can also build your employability.

### CAREER INFORMATION

There are many resources online and in-house in the Career Services Centre that can help you explore occupational options or search for educational alternatives. A Career Advisor and Career Consultants are available to provide information, support, and advice to students who are career undecided or seeking occupational or educational information

### EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Career Services also provides employment services for students and recent UM alumni. Students can receive help with their interview preparation and job search via workshops, or individual appointments. In the Resume Learning Centre, students can receive guidance with resume and cover letter development. The unit hosts employer info sessions and career fairs. Another very important resource for students is [UM Connect](#), where students can view job and volunteer postings, and register for workshops and employer events.

### MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

There are many ways to connect with professionals in the industry, including UM alumni. The Career Mentorship Program (CMP) is designed to help students explore occupations and connect students with industry professionals. The Indigenous Career Mentor Program (ICMP) was designed as an extension to our existing Career Mentor Program. The goal of ICMP is to connect Indigenous students with Indigenous professionals in the community for career guidance and industry information. UM Cafe is an online networking program that connects UM students with alumni and industry professionals for coffee chats.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

Career Services' [website](#) has resources to assist students along their career journey. [The Occupations Library](#) has 250+ Occupational Files, which contain occupational information, labour market information, educational requirements and program listings, and career interviews. Workbooks can assist and help prepare students for [interview](#), [job search](#), [resume](#), [cover letter](#), and [career planning](#).

