Writing Your Personal Letter / Statement

Your personal statement is an integral part of a successful application. For graduate schools or post-graduate programs, it allows the admissions committees to get to know you on a personal and academic level. It is your chance to summarize what prompted you to apply to that specific program and includes evidence of individual suitability to the program’s aims and objectives.

Depending on the school, they may require different forms of Personal Letters/Statements. Ensure you pay attention to the required type of letter and stated requirements in order to guide the information you include.

A Personal Letter / Statement is often interchangeable with Letter of Intent or Statement of Interest but the focus can be slightly different.

**Letter of Intent** (or Introduction Letter)
- Identify what course of study you intend to follow and in what time frame.
- Connect your work or interest to what is being done in the program (mention faculty members and projects that will link your knowledge or interest).
- Indicate work / research you have done in this area already (focus on specific skills and techniques).
- Develop a sales pitch of your skills and abilities.
- Include academic publications you read that informed your interest.
- Mention publications, presentations or conferences that you have been part of.
- Use a proper business format with a formal voice to write this type of letter.

**Statement of Interest**
- Focus more on your research interest, both past and present, along with what you hope to continue to research.
- Follow the guidelines of the Letter of Intent as it has a more business feel and format to it.

**Points to Consider When Developing your Personal Letter**
- Focus on concisely and effectively depicting your motivation / goals with respect to a program and how your academics / experiences relate to that specialty.
- Answer all the questions, even if they seem very detailed or unusual as programs are very particular about personal letters.
- Contact your program of interest to ask if they have specific items they would like you to focus on in your letter. Some programs do not provide any guidelines for your personal letter.
- Emphasize your unique qualities as they will make you stand out.
- Ensure your personal letter communicates to the reader why you would be the best candidate.
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Potential Questions to Address (depending on program requirements)

- Show how you became interested and why the field attracted you (share an interesting story).
- Explain why you are looking at their particular program and institution along with what and how you learned about them.
- Communicate passion for and describe how specific experiences sparked and developed your commitment to your field of interest.
- Demonstrate how your motivation and goals are related to the program.
- Indicate that you have what the program needs in terms of abilities, experiences, skills, maturity, compatible values, etc. Show a match between what you have and what they are looking for.

Ask Yourself

- Why am I interested in the field I have chosen?
- What am I looking for in a program and in an academic institution?
- What are my professional goals in the field I have chosen?
- Why should a program select me?
- Which accomplishments should I highlight?
- How have my past education and experiences prepared me to be successful in this program?
- What contributions can I make to the program/specialty?
- What outside interests do I have that will help the selection committee see me as an interesting and unique person?
- What is the “BIG IDEA” about me that I want them to remember from my application package?

Additional Aspects

- Do you have obvious gaps or discrepancies in your academic record? You should briefly explain the reasons.
- Have you overcome unusual hardships or obstacles (such as family history, socio-economic challenges or other personal experiences?)
- Do you possess personal characteristics (e.g. persistence, compassion) and skills (e.g. communication, leadership) that would set you apart from other applicants? Provide examples.
- What are the most compelling reasons you can provide for the selection committee to be interested in you?
Formatting and Production

- Follow the instructions provided by the program carefully and pay specific attention to details.
- The letter should be concise, keeping in mind personal statements vary in length depending on the program. Look to see if the program stipulates a word count.
- Tailor your letter for each program you are applying to. Know the emphases of each program.
- Construct a strong opening statement – be creative but professional.
- Specify your specific area of interest and why you are applying to a specific program and academic institution. This is where carefully researching the program and school is crucial.
- Address the institutions’ needs and how you can assist in meeting those needs.
- Use concrete examples to support your main points. Good stories are stronger marketers than theoretical points.
- Develop an idea in each paragraph and use a smooth transition to segue between paragraphs and ideas.
- Each sentence should build on the one before it.
- Ensure there are no grammatical or spelling errors.
- Use a conclusion that ties together your information and reiterates your interest in the program. Refer back to the lead paragraph restating your main point.

You may be able to contact a student in the program to get more in-depth information about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This will help you write your personal letter as you will be able to include specific reasons as to why you chose the program, as well as be able to answer specific questions in the interview.

If you have carefully reviewed the program’s website and application instructions and still have questions, it is perfectly acceptable to contact the program for clarification. Be professional and prepared in all communications with the program.

Personal statements can be difficult to write, but it is advisable to start early and approach present / former professors for their opinion once your letter is complete. Ensure the voice of the statement is yours. If you are invited for an interview, the school will expect to meet the person who wrote the statement.