

Personal Statement Guide

Looking for grad school personal statement examples? This guide covers why you need one, what makes a strong statement, and includes three sample statements from our experts.

We'll also analyze one in depth and provide links to additional examples online.



Why Do I Need a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is a chance for admissions committees to get to know you: your goals and passions, what you'll bring to the program, and what you're hoping to get out of the program. You need to sell the admissions committee on what makes you a worthwhile applicant. The personal statement is a good chance to highlight significant things about you that don't appear elsewhere on your application.

A personal statement is slightly different from a statement of purpose (also known as a letter of intent). A statement of purpose/letter of intent tends to be more tightly focused on your academic or professional credentials and your future research and/or professional interests. While a personal statement also addresses your academic experiences and goals, you have more leeway to be a little more, well, personal. In a personal statement, it's often appropriate to include information on significant life experiences or challenges that aren't necessarily directly relevant to your field of interest.

Some programs ask for both a personal statement and a statement of purpose/letter of intent. In this case, the personal statement is likely to be much more tightly focused on your life experience and personality assets while the statement of purpose will focus in much more on your academic/research experiences and goals.

However, there's not always a hard and fast demarcation between a personal statement and a statement of purpose. The two statement types should address a lot of the same themes, especially as relates to your future goals and the valuable assets you bring to the program. Some programs will ask for a personal statement, but the prompt will be focused primarily on your research and professional experiences and interests. Some will ask for a statement of purpose, but the prompt will be more focused on your general life experiences.

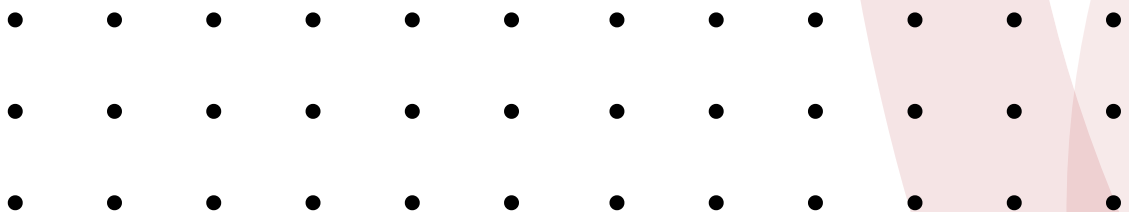
When in doubt, give the program what they are asking for in the prompt and don't get too hung up on whether they call it a personal statement or statement of purpose. You can always call the admissions office to get more clarification on what they want you to address in your admissions essay.

What Does a Good Statement Look Like?

A great graduate school personal statement can come in many forms and styles. However, strong grad school personal statement examples all share the same following elements:

A Clear Narrative: Above all, a good personal statement communicates clear messages about what makes you a strong applicant who is likely to have success in graduate school. So, to that extent, think about a couple of key points that you want to communicate about yourself and then drill down on how you can best communicate those points. (Your key points should of course be related to what you can bring to the field and to the program specifically). You can also decide whether to address things like setbacks or gaps in your application as part of your narrative. Have a low GPA for a couple semesters due to a health issue? Been out of a job for a while taking care of a family member? If you do decide to explain an issue like this, make sure that the overall arc is more about demonstrating positive qualities like resilience and diligence than about providing excuses.

Specific Examples: A great statement of purpose uses specific examples to illustrate its key messages. This can include anecdotes that demonstrate particular traits or even references to scholars and works that have influenced your academic trajectory to show that you are familiar and insightful about the relevant literature in your field.



Strong Writing: Even quantitative and science disciplines typically require some writing, so it's important that your personal statement shows strong writing skills. Make sure that you are communicating clearly and that you don't have any grammar and spelling errors. It's helpful to get other people to read your statement and provide feedback. Plan on going through multiple drafts. Another important thing here is to avoid clichés and gimmicks. Don't deploy overused phrases and openings like "ever since I was a child." Don't structure your statement in a gimmicky way (i.e., writing a faux legal brief about yourself for a law school statement of purpose). The first will make your writing banal; the second is likely to make you stand out in a bad way. Just saying "I love plants," is pretty vague. Describing how you worked in a plant lab during undergrad and then went home and carefully cultivated your own greenhouse where you cross-bred new flower colors by hand is much more specific and vivid, which makes for better evidence.

A Good Fit: A strong personal statement will describe why you are a good fit for the program, and why the program is a good fit for you. It's important to identify specific things about the program that appeal to you, and how you'll take advantage of those opportunities. It's also a good idea to talk about specific professors you might be interested in working with. This shows that you are informed about and genuinely invested in the program.



What Can I NOT Write About?

While you can be more personal in a personal statement than in a statement of purpose, it's important to maintain appropriate boundaries in your writing. Don't overshare anything too personal about relationships, bodily functions, or illegal activities. Similarly, don't share anything that makes it seem like you may be out of control, unstable, or an otherwise risky investment. The personal statement is not a confessional booth. If you share inappropriately, you may seem like you have bad judgment, which is a huge red flag to admissions committees.

You should also be careful with how you deploy humor and jokes. Your statement doesn't have to be totally joyless and serious, but bear in mind that the person reading the statement may not have the same sense of humor as you do. When in doubt, err towards the side of being as inoffensive as possible. Just as being too intimate in your statement can hurt you, it's also important not to be overly formal or staid. You should be professional, but conversational.



These are not included to give you a model to copy but to provide examples of how others have completed this task. Make sure you write your own statement in your own words.

Personal Statement Example #1

My only goal when finishing high school was to finish college as quickly and painlessly as possible. I took a degree path that, while enjoyable, has left me with limited career options moving forward. Getting a political science degree was a valuable personal experience that grew many of my skills, but it was far from the best option for a long-term career out of college. The job I got out of college was as a database manager which really wasn't a job for me. Processing files and constantly dealing with poor internal structures as well as difficult clients has left me feeling burnt out. I want to get into Western Kentucky's Code Academy program to move my career towards one with better long-term growth opportunities and to acquire more in-demand skills for the workforce.

I am still a relatively recent college graduate which is why I want to look for a new career path now instead of when I have more responsibilities under my belt. As far as my own coding experience goes, I only have some introductory level experience. I took a couple of coding classes in high school and learned some basic SQL for my current position. From that light experience I'm confident in my ability to learn programming skills. I'm a fast learner; I come from a past of playing games competitively at a very high level. It's a very dynamic environment that requires constantly learning new information and adapting to new strategies. This experience led to my team being invited to play and compete in an international tournament for a smaller game where we were crowned champions.

While I'm proud of my accomplishments between gaming and college, this path was far from perfect. Along the way there were thousands of lost games, less than ideal grades, and two failures. One specific instance was when I failed an important class during my college path. Constitutional law was a class that I needed to pass to graduate in a clean four-year path. However, it was far from my best subject. I was mostly focused on international relations and not on issues within the country. To overcome this delay, I had to buckle down. I reached out to see what I could do about it, but the mistake was made, and I had to live with the consequences. I registered for classes over the summer that would make up for the credits I missed out on to make up for it. Instead of getting to enjoy my summer off, I had to spend at least three hours a day in a classroom to finish my degree.

I think that I would be a good fit for the Western Kentucky Code Academy program. I have a lot of experience working in a team, both in my current job, as well as in my history of competitive gaming. I am a very flexible learner, and I have tackled difficult subject material over small amounts of time in the past. During my college career, I took a year and a half of Spanish classes over three months instead. I have some light programming experience as well and have some understanding of how basic programming logic works. I have no doubt that the class will challenge me, but I am up to the challenge. I look forward to joining the upcoming class and think I would make a great addition to the class both as a student and a teammate.

Personal Statement Example #2

Throughout my life, I knew I had a special adoration for children and helping people. When it came time to begin my bachelor's degree, I pursued the one degree that could combine and foster those two loves, teaching. However, that decision didn't come easy. At the beginning of my college years, I was an indecisive, confused young adult who was learning more about herself daily. But the moment I got into my first education class, I knew I was in the right place. During my first interaction with students, I knew even more that this was the career field for me. I had found my place and transformed into a confident, fun-loving teacher.

Currently, I am finishing my third year of teaching 7th grade Language Arts and a section of 6th grade FCS. Also, I coach middle school girls' basketball and high school softball. I am honored to be accepted by the students and staff members in this district and cherish the students I have, past and present, who look up to me for their educational and emotional needs. When a student comes to me concerned about something happening in their life, it is a moment that humbles me because I feel like I can make a difference for the young individuals I teach.

It was not long ago that I used to be the same student sitting across from their teacher asking tough questions -- when I was in grade school, my parents got divorced and they both got remarried. Then, when I was in middle school, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. Both moments defined my childhood growing up because of their emotional magnitude which caused me to turn to my teachers for help. I am still to this day thankful for the support and help that teachers gave to me during those times. One of these teachers was my Language Arts teacher. Not only did she help me navigate the world, my life situations, and understand where I was meant to be, but she also turned me into the avid reader that I am today. She encouraged me to love school, reading, and most importantly, love myself. She is the reason I am the teacher that I am today.

I have a natural urge to learn and strive to be the best educator I can be and will always be a student at heart. When my boss sends out the latest professional development opportunity at the next educator conference, I am quick to respond with interest. When it comes to continuing my education and completing a master's degree, I know it's something I want to do. The lifelong learner in me has led me to where I am today writing this personal statement and to continue bettering myself as a teacher through the Master of Education program at Western Kentucky. My hope and aspirations when it comes to continuing in the education profession are to remain in the classroom for many years to come but to also help students in a new capacity such as high ability learner (HAL) educator or a school counselor.

There isn't a thing I would change about how I got where I am today because I am a teacher who is just at the beginning of her journey and has found her place in the world. So, for the time being, I will remain in the classroom. However, through the School of Education, I believe I will open a new door for myself by acquiring new tools, techniques, and a better understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Thank you for taking the time to consider me for your program, and I look forward to the possibility of continuing my education at Western Kentucky University.

Personal Statement Example #3

Business and entrepreneurship have long been central to my life. I grew up observing my parents making tough decisions to grow their agribusiness like the crops in their fields. Steeped with risk and hard work, the rewards of having grown up on a successful farm were invaluable. I always enjoyed taking a ride with my dad and grandpa to check progress on our crops, talk market forecasts, and discuss financial strategy for the next season. I was utterly fascinated, as I am today, with the challenges and processes it takes to run a thriving business.

Growing up on a farm in a small-town, I had a great undergraduate college experience while earning my business degree. I fully embraced the “liberal arts” philosophy to become a well-rounded student. Soon after, I took a job with one of the largest beer distributors in the country. I helped promote their portfolio of brands in small downtown bars and massive corporate grocery stores. A short time later, I found my niche with a growing in-home healthcare store. Through each of these experiences, I have developed a clear vision for my future.

But now I need help gaining more knowledge from those with an abundance of real-world experience. I also need to learn how to speak competently and easily with all departments of small and large businesses and to connect with people and ideas from across a broad spectrum. I need an MBA from Western Kentucky University.

In my current position, I am responsible for ensuring each department is running effectively and efficiently. My line of business has a lot at stake, arguably more so than most other businesses. For example, if we do not stay solvent, people who need walkers, wheelchairs, and home care will no longer have easy access to those items. Working with a vulnerable demographic that is subject to constant and drastic change to meet healthcare regulations. Therefore, our company must be running in top form. Each department (marketing, customer service, billing...etc.) needs tools, training and clear path for growth and success.

In the future, I need to be able to talk with local politicians and government officials to remind them of our commitment to our customers in need. Networking with professors and fellow students could help me connect with influential people in related industries. Learning from courses focused on strategy and management decisions would teach me how to advocate for our company and other companies like ours across the country. Every individual brings a different outlook and set of skills to a team. I’m excited to get to know my fellow classmates and even more excited to see what creative solutions our groups can invent. In the past, I have worked for small businesses and large corporations allowing me the ability to see both the big picture and small interests. I believe that my knack to quickly relate to different personality types, work ethic, and patience can help my cohort complete successful projects. I am a natural born leader and a great team player as teamwork is key to any business and project.

With a combination of all my experiences professionally, I am ready to take my next step to earn a MBA from Western Kentucky University. The program will help me to further my academic education, connect me with persuasive people and help me to advance my understanding of running a business in my current role. I hope to build relationships and make friendships lasting well into the future. With all the tools and resources Western Kentucky MBA has to offer, I am confident I will be successful.



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