

3 Successful Graduate School Personal Statement Examples

Ellen McCammon Posted on September 5, 2017

Looking for grad school personal statement examples? Look no further! In this total guide to graduate school personal statement examples, **we'll discuss why you need a personal statement for grad school and what makes a good one.** Then we'll provide three graduate school personal statement samples from our grad school experts. After that, we'll do a deep dive on one of our personal statements for graduate school examples. Finally, we'll wrap up with a list of other grad school personal statements you can find online.

Why Do You 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 Makes a Good Grad School Personal Statement?

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.

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.

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 cliches 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.

Appropriate Boundaries

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.