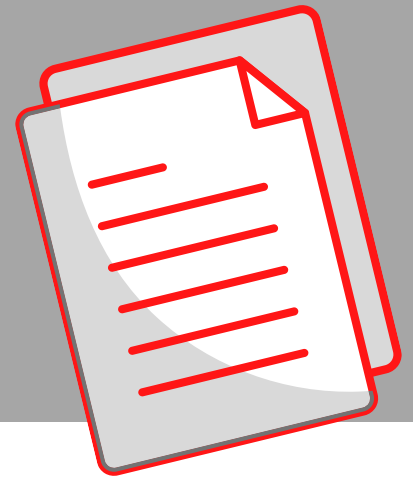




PERSONAL STATEMENTS

WACKERLE CENTER FOR CAREER, LEADERSHIP AND FELLOWSHIPS

It takes dedication to earn a master's degree. Admissions committees know this quite well, and they examine candidates carefully, looking for applicants that are the right fit and have what it takes. They want to hear that you care deeply about your chosen discipline; they ask why, not because there's a right or wrong answer, but to find out how deep your commitment runs. They'll examine your reasons for undertaking graduate work to see how badly you want it and how well you know what you're getting into.



WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT

Schools phrase their prompts for the personal statement in a variety of ways. They even name them differently; what is a personal statement at one school is a letter of intent or a statement of purpose at another. Additionally, some schools require specific information and provide you with questions or prompts to answer. Others are unstructured, leaving you free to address a range of topics. The purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are a distinctive applicant who should be selected.

When drafting your statement, it is important to include ideas that support your overall purpose, and keep in mind the audience reading your statement are professionals in their field. They are assessing you for fit, distinctions, self-awareness and quality.

DO:

- Read the instructions provided carefully. Not following the detailed instructions, when provided, will hurt your chances of acceptance.
- Spend time reflecting on your strengths and what makes you special. Take notes before beginning to draft your statement.
- Be authentic! Readers can pick up when you are not being genuine. Stay focused on who you are.

DON'T

- Don't give them your life story. Focus on the program and why you're an excellent candidate.
- Don't list your achievements. Providing an exhaustive list of what you have done tells little about you as a person.
- Don't give them a lecture. Don't make unnecessary claims about the field. The committee already knows a lot about it.

DO TALK ABOUT:

Some programs provide questions or guidance to help you structure your statement. Analyze them. Answer the prompts fully and thoughtfully. Other programs, leave it up to you to determine what to include. Here are some topics that schools are generally interested in:

WHAT YOU WANT TO STUDY AT GRADUATE SCHOOL

What big issues and questions are you interested in tackling in graduate school? How will you apply your graduate study in your future career or professional goals? You should demonstrate knowledge about the program by referring to faculty, curriculum and other program details.

WHY YOU WANT TO STUDY THIS SUBJECT

Connect your academic experience and your co-curricular experience with the criteria for the program you are applying to. Show how they go together to make you a special candidate. Talk about how you are different than other candidates based on your background, interests, goals and passions. Many programs value diversity, so highlight your diverse perspectives.

WHY THIS PROGRAM?

Why does this school appeal to you? Refer to the schools curriculum, approach and faculty. Talk about how your goals align with the details of the program. Make it clear why right now is the time for you to begin this program. Your statement should convince the committee this is your top choice of any program.

TELL THEM WHO YOU ARE

The admissions committee does know a lot about their program, but they know nothing about you. Tell them who you are as a person beyond credentials. Relate your application to passion. Demonstrate that you will be an active and generous member of the learning community. Also, keep in mind that faculty are selecting candidates who they will work closely with over the next several years.

DON'T TALK ABOUT

The admissions committee has hundreds, or even thousands, of essays to read. Don't waste their time. Doing this may cause the committee to wonder how well you really understand the academic world that you are trying to enter. Don't include an undergraduate-style paragraph about how well-rounded you are. Your undergraduate institution may have been interested in your avid ultimate-firsbee playing, that you write science fiction, or you love to cook, but graduate schools do not. Grad schools are looking for the best minds in the subject area and instead are interested in activities that speak to your suitability for graduate work in that specific subject area.