

Introduction to the Personal Statement

What is a personal statement and why is it so important?

The purpose of the personal statement is to convince admission officers whom you've never met, in less than ten minutes, that you would be a good match for their colleges. The essay allows the admissions officer to see who you are as a person outside of just your transcript, test scores, and resume. It gives information about your background, attitudes, interests, values and creativity. The essay also demonstrates your writing ability, which is a key component to success in college. It can make a significant impact in your college admissions process.

How do you choose an essay topic?

- 1) Choose the essay topic that appeals to *you* most
- 2) Below are some questions that might help you think of an essay topic:
 - a. What details of your life (personal or family history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the admissions committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
 - b. What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
 - c. Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
 - d. Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre SAT scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
 - e. How do you spend your free time?
 - f. What have you done in your life to translate passion into action?
- 3) What are some bad essay topics to avoid?
 - a. Winning or losing the big game
 - b. Death of a pet
 - c. Friendship problems
 - d. Religious or philosophical epiphanies
 - e. Anything that suggests that you don't see the world beyond high school
 - f. Simple solutions to world problems
 - g. Parent-bashing
- 4) After you select your topic ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. Is your topic repeating information listed in your transcript or test scores? (answer should be no)

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- b. Can you offer vivid supporting paragraphs with examples to your essay topic? (answer should be yes)
 - c. Will an admissions counselor remember your topic after reading hundreds of essays? (answer should be yes)
 - d. What will your lasting impression be on the admissions counselor?
- 5) Remember regardless of the essay topic, YOU are the main character
- 6) The topic is less important than your delivery. Be original in your delivery regardless of the subject matter

The best personal statements tell a captivating story. How do you choose your story?

- 1) The story should not be about your whole life, but rather a small glimpse of it
- 2) Use a story about a past event to talk about the impact it had on you
 - a. Example: A student connected her visit to the Emergency Room with her mom to her passion for science and medicine:
 - i. *These patients constantly reinforce the reasons why I attend four-hour labs after school, why I read the infinite details of how the body works. My instinct was to assist; in time I will be able to. I want to do this not for the title I have grown to respect so much, but to relieve the stress and fear that so many experience every day, stress and fear my family and I know too well..*

Now that you have a topic and a story, how do you start writing your essay?

Before you begin typing away at the essay, start by writing an outline.

Example of a basic outline template:

- 1) Introduction:
 - a. Start with a HOOK - Make a statement that will engage the admissions counselor that will be reading your essay. Remember, the admissions counselor will be reading hundreds of essays so you need to make yours stand out!
 - b. State/Rewrite the prompt or introduce the topic (if topic of choice) that will serve as theme throughout essay
 - c. Write 1-4 sentences about what the following paragraphs will be about
 - d. Conclusion sentence to wrap up this paragraph
- 2) Body Paragraphs (2-3 paragraphs):
 - a. 4-6 sentences per paragraph expanding on intro and topic

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- b. It helps to have a theme that runs through the entire essay
 - c. Insert concrete details (quotes, anecdotes, strong imagery, etc)
- 3) Conclusion:
- a. This is your last chance to persuade the reader or impress them
 - b. Expand on the broader implications of your discussion
 - c. Connect back to the theme and story but also discuss the meaning and impact of it on you
 - d. State what your plans are at college and tie it into how whatever was just written will have a profound impact on your contributions to your college

You have the outline. Now what?

Start writing! Begin by typing your thesis—the main idea of your essay—and building on it. Each paragraph should be written based on the content of the outline you created. Start with the introduction and work your way down. Create an essay that appeals to the reader’s five senses; make him (or her) see, feel, taste, and smell your anecdotes. Leave little to the imagination while keeping it **concise**.

Write something for each paragraph, and then go back and add forgotten details to each paragraph until you are satisfied with the results.

How do you finish the essay?

After you have completed the body of the essay, it is time to wrap it up. The conclusion reiterates your thesis and summarizes the information presented in your personal statement. If you haven’t already tied in the attention-grabbing material (imagery, anecdote, quote, etc.) from your introduction, now is the time to do it. Even if you successfully carried it throughout the paper, make sure you bring it all the way to the end.

Revise, Revise, Revise

Once your conclusion is finished, it is time to begin proofreading and editing. First read the paper in its entirety to check for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. As you read be sure to note where you have answered all the key questions you planned to address before you started writing.

It is wise to re-read your own essay three times and then have your RTC counselor and ELA teacher read over it.