Writing a Personal Statement

Personal statements can be very difficult to write. You have to “sell yourself” and distinguish yourself, but you also have to avoid clichés, highly technical language, and reiterating information that you already have on the rest of your application. You need to write about what is interesting and unique about you, but you also need to be sure to answer a specific prompt.

Stand Out
You want to stand out from the crowd of other applicants in a good way. Do this by telling your readers about what you have already done in the past in your field, but don’t simply list accomplishments: evaluate the impact these accomplishments have had on you and your readiness to take on whatever challenge you are applying to take on.

Remember, you are making an argument that you deserve to be accepted. You have to make that argument with your story and accomplishments as evidence. Evidence alone isn’t an argument: it’s how you interpret evidence for your audience that makes an argument successful. You demonstrate that you have the skills and characteristics that you claim you have by writing persuasively and convincingly about them.

Imagine you are applying to grad school or some other position that requires a personal statement. List several accomplishments or parts of your personal history that would be relevant.

How would you turn those into an argument? Take one of the things you listed and explain why it is relevant and how it makes you a good candidate.

Grab My Attention
You may not have movie studios lining up around the block to produce the movie of your life. How do you create drama and make your personal statement interesting? It’s good to have an angle and to explain that angle clearly.

Part of explaining your angle is grabbing the reader’s interest in the first paragraph of your essay. As you write and revise, think of and develop a “hook” that will interest your reader from the very first sentence. Once you have your reader’s attention, you can work in your thesis statement, the main argument of your essay.
Do you have any interesting perspectives or experiences that give you an interesting and different angle? How could you turn that into a hook? Try writing a hook for a theoretical essay below:

**Write Carefully**
There are two aspects to writing carefully: avoiding clichés and following accepted writing conventions. Clichés tell a reader that you have nothing interesting to say. Grammatical errors can make readers think that you aren’t careful in your writing.

Cross out the clichés in the following paragraph:

From a young age I have always been interested in computer science. I have been passionate and determined in pursuing any achievements that I can get access to related to computer science. I won first place in a national coding competition when I was a junior in college. For me, that was like winning the Super Bowl! I have a thirst for knowledge about how to make computers do things faster and better than people can. Computers have the potential to be the biggest tool in making life better for people, and I am passionate about using computers to help people. The world we live in today is changing quickly, and I want to use computers to help change it for the better.

Grammar errors can be a little more difficult to recognize. If you can, drop by the UT Dallas Writing Center to talk to a tutor about your personal statement or get a friend to read over it. Tips for editing your own work include reading your essay backwards sentence by sentence and reading your essay out loud. For help with grammar, check the UT Dallas grammar and punctuation handouts and talk to a tutor!

**Contact**
Want to discuss your personal statement? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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