



SWC 9: Writing Personal Statements for College Admissions

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement is a way to introduce yourself to a college admissions committee. It helps the admissions personnel get a better idea of an individual's qualifications, goals, values, and fit for the program.

Is there more than one type of personal statement? Yes.

Open-ended prompts:

- These allow applicants to decide the direction(s) they want to take.
- Prompts may include broad questions like:
 - Why do you want to attend this university?
 - What are your goals?
 - What is something you value and why?
- Prompts may also remain general while providing slightly more structure:
 - "Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story."¹
 - "The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?"²

Specific prompts:

- These allow applicants to respond to a specific topic, issue, or question such as:
 - What is a book you love? How has it impacted you? In what way(s) do you identify with the text/characters?
 - What extracurricular activity has had a significant impact on your life?
 - Is there a particular moment in your life that has made you who you are today? What was the moment, and how/why did it impact you?

What is the process for writing a personal statement?

- Brainstorming:
 - Take your time and evaluate multiple writing options/paths
 - Remember the purpose: to portray yourself accurately, to highlight your strengths, and to explain why you are an ideal candidate
 - Keep the personal statement parameters in mind including word count (You want to choose a topic that you can fully cover.)
 - Keep the audience in mind and consider how you will build ethos (your credibility)
 - Consult our brainstorming handout: [COM 4: Brainstorming](#)
- Outlining:
 - After selecting a primary topic, form a preliminary thesis statement to guide your personal statement
 - Next, decide your subtopics that support the thesis
 - Organize these subtopics in a logical way (e.g., chronological, order of importance, etc.)

¹ <https://signededucation.com/blog/personal-statement-essay-prompts>

² <https://signededucation.com/blog/personal-statement-essay-prompts>



- Drafting:
 - Using your outline, begin writing your personal statement section by section
 - While drafting, ensure your focus remains clear (thesis statement) and your points are well supported (topic sentences and supporting information)
- Revising:
 - Ensure you have adequately explained your ideas to your audience
 - Receive feedback from multiple sources (UWC tutors, professors, etc.)
 - Focus on the content during this stage (grammar can wait):
 - Is there information you should omit?
 - Have you adequately supported all of your main ideas/sub-topics?
 - Did you sufficiently address the prompt?
 - If you were on the admissions counsel, what would your impression be?
- Editing:
 - After revising, begin editing for grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, and typos.
 - Consult our editing handout: [COM 11: Editing Strategies](#)
- Submitting:
 - Ensure that all application documents meet the institution's criteria
 - Convert all documents to PDFs (unless otherwise specified)

Final tips for a successful personal statement:

Do:

- Tell your audience specifically what you mean through descriptions and details
- Write about a topic that truly represents you or something that you care about
- Be genuine and detailed in your descriptions
- Honor your authentic writing voice and consider word choice that fits the rhetorical situation
- Remember that typos will stand out

Don't:

- Use clichéd statements that make your writing vague or impersonal
- Force a topic that doesn't fit with you or your life, interests, or goals
- Exaggerate or be redundant in your writing
- Use words you don't know, slang, or profanity
- Forget to proofread and get feedback

Visit the Writing Center for more help on your writing project! Stop by LIB 362 or visit us online at mtsu.mywconline.com to schedule an appointment.