Writing a personal statement is an important part of your application to graduate school. It’s your first (and possibly only) chance to show the admissions committee who you are as a person, beyond your transcript and test scores. Think of it as your “professional autobiography,” where you tell a story about yourself to communicate to the committee why you’d be a good addition to their academic community.

Of course, it’s not an easy task to communicate who you are in an engaging, professional, and accurate way. Give yourself plenty of time to craft your statement!

**SOME STEPS TO HELP PRODUCE AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT**

**Know Yourself:**
Here are some important reflective questions you should ask yourself as you start the process. Take some time and write out your thoughts. Give yourself several pages—the more you write, the more you have to work with as you draft:
- What do you think is most important for the admissions committee to know about you?
- What’s distinctive, interesting, or unique about you and your experiences?
- When did you become interested in this field? What experiences or events have lead you to this field of study?
- What special qualities or skills do you have that show your potential to be successful in their program? How did you develop those qualities or skills?

**Know Your Audience:**

- **Know where you’re applying:**
  Be sure you’ve done some research on the programs to which you’re applying and (when appropriate) tailor your statement to each program. Moreover, be sure you’re answering the question (or questions) asked—some schools (especially MBA programs) ask for multiple essays with specific prompts.

- **Be engaging and be clear:**
  Admissions Committees read many, many applications. Figure out what makes you stand out! But also remember to respect the committee’s time and patience—you don’t want to “stand out” in a negative way.

- **Be professional:**
  Investigate your field. Talk to your professors and other professionals—learn what “professional” means in this context. You want to present yourself as having great potential, that you’re ready to move beyond your undergraduate experience and enter into a new intellectual community.

**Draft, Get Feedback, and Revise:**

- **Give yourself time for multiple drafts.**
- **Do not** be the only person to read your statement. Get as many people to read it as possible.
- **Proofread** very carefully.

The consultants at the [Miller Writing Center](mailto:) will be happy to help you at any stage in this process.
SOME “DOS AND DON’TS” FOR WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Do:

• **Tell a story.**
  This will help you show your audience who you are, not just tell them.

• **Find an angle.**
  If you have particular struggles in your life, obstacles you’ve overcome, or issues you’ve addressed, these events can help show your audience who you are and why you’d be a good addition to their program.

• **Be specific.**
  Use tangible, specific details from your experience to communicate your story. Don’t rely on vague generalizations.

• **Concentrate on your opening paragraph.**
  Your audience has many, many personal statements to read. Catch their attention early with an anecdote or “hook” that engages your reader while setting up your point about who you are.

• **Be sure you’re answering the question.**
  This seems obvious, but be sure you’re clear about what you’re responding to—especially if you’re applying to multiple programs.

• **Tell what you know, not what you think people want to hear.**
  You are representing yourself—be honest. It will come across best.

• **Give yourself time to reflect and write.**
  Your story, your angle, your details, and your opening “hook” are unlikely to appear magically the first time you sit down to write. Give yourself time to think back on your experiences, draft out your ideas, and revise.

• **Get feedback from mentors and peers at every stage of the process.**
  Talk to professors about what it means to be a member of your chosen academic community and about what in your experiences would be relevant to your statement. Have as many people as you can read your drafts and give you feedback. The Miller Writing Center will be very glad to help!

Don’t:

• **Use clichés.**
  You may want to be doctors because you always wanted to help people, but you want to find a way communicate that idea in an honest and tangible way. Basically, avoid saying “I’ve always wanted to be….” And don’t start with quotes from other people, even famous ones, unless you can think of a particularly engaging way of doing so.

• **Be negative…**
  …especially about your institution or other institutions. It can give your audience a general bad feeling—and worse, someone on the admissions committee may know who you’re talking about.

• **Include everything that ever happened in your life.**
  You have limited time and space. Be selective! And definitely don’t rewrite your CV. Be sure you’re telling a story that communicates who you are as a whole, not just listing your accomplishments.

• **Talk about high school.**
  You risk looking immature…

• **Talk about hot-button social/political issues.**
  You risk alienating your audience. Of course, the story you want to tell may demand you do both these things—but be sure you have a very good reason to do so.

• **Go over the page or word limit.**
  Respect your audience’s time and energy. Don’t overload them.

• **Mispell words or use grammer bad.**
  You can lose your audience instantly. Don’t risk it.

• **Be the only person who reads your proposal besides the committee.**
  Try to have at least two other people read your statement. It’s best if at least one of them is a faculty member or professional in the field, but anyone can give you useful feedback and help check for surface errors. The Miller Writing Center is there for you!