

Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement for Admission to Wayne State University Graduate Programs

Note that this is a general guide to assist you in preparing a personal statement. Applicants should also review the requirements of the degree program by visiting the program website and/or consulting with program staff to determine whether other information is required in the personal statement.

What does this statement need to accomplish?

The personal statement should convince readers—often the faculty on the department admissions committee—that you have experiences and solid achievements showing your promise for persistence and success in graduate studies. Admissions committee members may use a rubric to evaluate your personal statement.

What information should I include in my personal statement?

Include information that gives reviewers a sense of you as a person and a scholar. Display your communication skills and discuss your ability to maximize effective collaboration with the broader academic community. If you have faced any obstacles or barriers in your education or have seized upon unique opportunities for research, sharing those experiences serves both for the selection process, and for your nomination for assistantships and fellowships. If one part of your academic record is not ideal due to challenges you faced in that particular area, this is where you can explain any issues and direct reviewers' attention to the evidence of your promise for success in higher education. This is also where you can communicate your potential to bring to your academic career a critical perspective rooted in your experiences.

Part 1: Introduce yourself, your interests and motivations

Tell readers what you're interested in, and perhaps, what sparked your desire for graduate study. This should be short and to the point; don't spend a great deal of time on autobiography.

Part 2: Summarize your undergraduate and, if applicable, previous graduate research and scholarly pursuits

Describe the research you conducted. Indicate with whom, the title of the project, what your responsibilities were, and the outcome. Write in the style of your discipline. Describe any important papers or thesis projects, as well as anything scholarly beyond your curricular requirements such as involvement in an Honors program. Also address any work experience that might be applicable, especially if you had any kind of responsibility for testing, designing, researching or interning in an area similar to what you wish to study in graduate school. What did you learn from these experiences? How did these experiences prepare you for graduate studies?

Part 3: Your academic achievement in context (note that this section may be placed anywhere in your statement. Consider the flow of the other sections and where the following information

best fits for you).

It is especially helpful if you discuss circumstances or activities that may have affected your academic and professional development. Admissions committee members want to know if you have what it takes to persist and succeed in graduate studies. This is your chance to contextualize your application (e.g., GPA, standardized test scores, research experience) for the committee members. The following list is not an exhaustive list of contextual factors but will give you an idea of the kinds of activities that may be evaluated by the admissions committee:

- Demonstrated initiative to seize opportunities for advanced academic work or research and/or clinical experiences;
- Demonstrated persistence and significant academic achievement by overcoming barriers including but not limited to economic, health, social, or educational disadvantages, including first-generation college student status;
- Potential to contribute diverse perspectives to enhance the higher education enterprise (e.g., research, scholarly work, classroom dialogue) as evidenced by life experiences and educational background. For example:
 - Ability to articulate the barriers facing women and minorities in science, technology, and engineering (STEM) fields;
 - Participation in higher education pipeline programs such as BUILD, IMSD, McNair Scholars, or summer research and internship programs;
 - Military service
 - Service in Peace Corps, Teach for America, Americorps, City Year, Summer in the City
 - Service in campus life organizations and groups
 - Varsity Athletics
 - Significant travel experiences including Study Abroad
 - Research, scholarly, and artistic experiences, if not already mentioned
 - Other community and volunteer experiences

Part 4: Discuss the relevance of your recent and current activities

If you graduated and worked prior to returning to grad school, indicate what you've been doing: company or non-profit, your work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned. You can also indicate how this helped you focus your interest in graduate studies.

Part 5: Elaborate on your academic interests

Here you indicate what you would like to study in graduate school in enough detail to convince the faculty that you understand the scope of research in their discipline, are aware of resources in the department, and are engaged with current research themes.

a) Indicate the area of your interests. Ideally, pose a question, define a problem, or indicate a theme that you would like to address in your graduate studies. This should be an ample paragraph!

b) Look on the web for information about the department you're interested in, including professors and their research. Are there professors whose research interests parallel yours? If so, indicate their names. Check the specific program; many require you to name a professor or professors with whom you might work.

c) End your statement in a positive manner, indicating your excitement and readiness for the challenges ahead of you.

Essential Tips

1. Emphasize everything from a positive perspective and write in an active, not a passive voice.
2. Demonstrate everything by example; don't just say that you're a persistent or motivated person. Provide evidence.
3. If there is something important that happened to you that affected your grades, such as economic hardship, illness, or excessive work, state it. Write it affirmatively, showing your perseverance despite obstacles.
4. Make sure everything in the statement is linked with continuity and focus.
5. Unless the specific program says otherwise, be concise; an ideal essay should say everything it needs to with brevity. Often 500 to 1000 well-selected words (1-2 single spaced pages in 12 point font) is ideal, but specific instructions for the degree program should be followed.
6. As noted above, check the program website and/or contact program staff to learn about specific information that must be included in your statement to be considered for admission.