

Types of Personal Statements

There are different situations that would require a personal statement, each of which would have slightly different approaches. The most common types of personal statements are: cover letters, admissions essays, and statements of purpose. In all three of these situations, you as a writer are trying to convince the reader to invest in you by showing evidence of your ability and potential.

While the exact specifications of these writing tasks will vary, all of them expect the writer to disclose personal information and respond to the prompt clearly and fully. The idea of sharing details about your life or "bragging" about your qualities can feel deeply uncomfortable for many people. It is therefore important to remember the purpose of a personal statement. This type of writing exists to provide the reader with relevant information about you that would set you apart from others. A personal statement stands in conjunction with the rest of an application and transforms that data into a full picture of you as a person and how you would fit into the institution.

[The Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) has some excellent personal statement advice and examples.

Admissions Essay

An admission essay is part of the application to a college or university. The school will have access to a lot of information about you from the rest of your application, but this is your opportunity to present your full self. Think of it as a written interview where you get to provide more details about yourself that add to their understanding of how you would fit in the college environment.

The admissions essay typically prompts you to talk about a specific aspect of yourself that they would not know about from just your transcript and demographic information. The question may be about your goals, overcoming past challenges, service, or any other attribute the college views as being essential for success in that specific school.

Every university will have different expectations for how many admission essays you submit. They will also have varying word or character counts. It is important for you to use that limited space wisely to really persuade the reader that you are an ideal future student.

Examples of admission essay prompts include:

1. Many students submit applications to several colleges. What will determine which one you will choose to attend? Please be specific in your response.
2. Describe a specific time when you were aware of a need in your family, school, or community. How did you respond to that need?
3. Tell us about a time when you did not achieve a goal or experienced a difficult challenge. How did you recover from this experience? What did you learn from this and how will it influence your future reactions to challenges?
4. Discuss an area of interest that you find really engaging. Why is this topic so fascinating to you? What do you do to learn more about this topic?

If you are applying to a graduate school (Master or PhD level), some programs may also ask for you to write on a specific prompt. However, they are more likely to ask for a statement of purpose instead. Graduate school education is more individualized than general undergraduate education and has fewer applicants. Therefore, the admissions process is more individual as well. The admissions committee for the graduate program would want to know your individual goals and purpose for seeking admittance to that specific program. See the Statement of Purpose for more information about what you would write for graduate school admissions applications.

Cover Letter

Cover letters serve a similar function to an admissions essay. This type of personal statement goes along with your resume or curriculum vitae to give a more complete description of you and why you would be the best choice for the position. Again, it serves as a written interview that allows a potential employer to narrow down the search to candidates that would be most competitive.

In today's world of online submitted job applications, the resume or CV will get you through the initial sorting of applicants if the necessary experience is listed and certain buzz words are mentioned. The cover letter then discriminates between the applicants based on their character and personal alignment with the business.

Therefore, it is important to fully research the business you are applying for and to tailor your cover letter to the specific company. You can do this by looking at the mission or vision statements on the company website's About Us page. You can also learn about specific current projects and reference them in your cover letter. The cover letter is your way of showing that you really understand what the business is about and how you could contribute to it.

Cover letters do not generally have specific prompts. However, if the prompt were to be articulated, it would be something along the lines of:

- How do your experience and your skills qualify you for this role and why should we choose you instead of the many other applicants?

That being said, some specialized careers may include a short written response to a question. For example, a teacher may be asked to provide their philosophy on learning.

Statement of Purpose

Finally, there are times when you may be asked to write a more general personal statement. This might be as part of an application for a scholarship, a nomination to receive an award, a promotion, or an investment pitch. It may also be part

of your personal goal-setting routine.

The statement of purpose is slightly different than the other two personal statements because it is more focused on the present and future goals rather than your past experience. Like a cover letter, there is unlikely to be a specific prompt to respond to. However, you can approach a statement of purpose by thinking about these questions:

- Where do you see yourself in (number) years?
- How do you plan to achieve your goals?

Exercises

Exercise 4.2: Admissions Essay Brainstorm

1. Choose a school to apply to or program you would be interested studying. Even if you are not planning on studying at a US college, you can choose a technical training or certification program that would be of interest to you.
2. Take a look at the website for the program/school to get a general idea of the purpose/mission and the expectations for enrolled students.
3. Make a list of talents, skills, experiences, etc that you already have that would fit the purpose/mission and help you be successful in meeting the expectations for students.
4. Make an additional list of features or aspects of the program/school that appeal to you. What will you gain from this specific learning opportunity?
5. Once you have your list, choose the ideas that feel like the strongest or most unique points from your brainstorm. The idea you choose should address the prompt.
6. Think of how you can show these ideas instead of telling your audience. Is there a story you can share that demonstrates these ideas in a more interesting way?

Exercise 4.3: Cover Letter Brainstorm

1. Search for a job online. Look for one you would actually be interested in applying for.
2. Read through the description and the qualifications (required and desired/preferred).
3. Make a list of all of the characteristics and skills you currently have that meet the job description.
4. Make another list of the characteristics and skills you do not think you already have.
5. With the "not yet" list, think of how to put a positive spin on your lack of experience in these areas. A "**positive spin**" is a way of showing a weakness as a strength. If your weakness is that you are new, you can compensate for that by saying you learn quickly. Are you open to adapting to a different company culture? Have you ever had to quickly learn how to complete tasks in a previous job?
6. Think about what items on the list will be most important to highlight in your cover letter. A cover letter is always used together with a resume or curriculum vitae (CV), so you don't want it to just list experience. You are telling a story.
7. Next to those most important highlights, write how you would choose to present that information in a memorable way.

Exercise 4.4: Statement of Purpose Brainstorm

For this practice, you will write a statement tied to your personal goals in studying or working in your chosen field.

1. Make an honest list of all of the reasons you decided to study or work in your field.
2. Make a list of the benefits you imagine for your future self because of this goal. Be specific about how studying or working in your field will make that future ideal self possible.
3. Make a list of the challenges you have faced during this experience.
4. If there is a specific story from your experience in your field that demonstrates both the highs and lows of reaching for this goal, write down some of the key points.



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