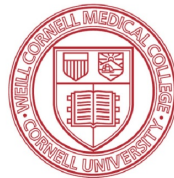# Writing the Personal Statement

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The POINT of Personal Statements

Personal Statements:

➢ Tell a story

➢ Communicate your own:

- Motivations
- Experiences
- Values
- Traits
- Skills
- Fit for the program

➢ Launching point for conversation in a potential interview

Your personal statement puts you in charge.

The "Velcro" Personal Statement

➢ What do you want to **stick** in the minds of your readers?

➢ How can you make a personal **connection** with admissions?

➢ What is **special** or **unique** about you?

➢ What experiences have you had that **set you apart** from others?

➢ What stories can you tell that would help an interviewer **know and remember you**?

➢ What circumstances (good or bad) would help an interviewer **understand you** better?
  - Work experiences, leadership, life events, successes
  - Unusual hardships or obstacles
  - Gaps or discrepancies in your record—**but only IF you can do so in a positive way.**

Consider:

Personal characteristics

Traits and values

> ➢ Integrity, perseverance, compassion, maturity, teamwork, sensitivity, professionalism**,** self-awareness, respect
>
> ➢ How would you **prove** that you have these characteristics?

Skills

Things you can do (maybe that other people can't)

> ➢ Leadership, design, technology, areas of expertise
>
> ➢ How would you **prove** that you have these skills?

The experiences you choose to share should **illustrate** and **support** these skills and qualities.

Personal Traits

You should **illustrate** and **support** your personal trait(s) with **concrete experience(s)**.

Maturity	**Compassion/Empathy**
Reflectiveness	**Sincerity**
Honesty and Integrity	**Leadership**
Clarity of Thought	**Insightfulness**
Passion	**Enthusiasm**
Positivity	**Self-Awareness**
Commitment	**Persistence**

Prompts

➤ While some universities require a **general statement**, other provide a **specific prompt**.

➤ When the university provides a prompt, **make sure to address all components!**

Examples

Describe the world you come from—for example, your family, community or school—and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations. *University of California, Berkeley*

Considering your lifetime goals, discuss how your current and future academic and extra-curricular activities might help you achieve your goals. *University of Texas at Austin*

Prompts

➢ Sometimes specific programs have their own prompts. This is especially true of professional and pre-professional programs (e.g. engineering, nursing, pre-medicine)

Examples

Computer science and engineering requires creativity, teamwork, and strong academic ability. We value breadth of interest, leadership, and diversity. Tell us about your academic and personal interests, goals, and what you will bring to the CSE community.

University of Washington, Seattle, Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE)

The WCMC-Q Prompt

Please write and submit a personal statement (essay) that will help us to **know you better as a person**. Your essay will help us become acquainted with you in ways that your transcripts or course grades and examinations results cannot. You may write a story about yourself that provides us with **deep insight** into the **type of person you are or strive to be**. Your story could involve a **personal experience**, a situation in which your character was tested, a humorous anecdote, or a significant academic situation. You may also include your most significant accomplishments to date and **what inspired you to want to pursue a medical career**.

MUSTS (the DO list)

- ➢ Unite your essay with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the **main point** you want to communicate.

- ➢ Use **concrete examples** from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants.

- ➢ Write about what interests you, excites you. That's what admissions staff want to read.

- ➢ Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead – an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.

- ➢ Adhere to word and character limits (**WCMC-Q = 800 Words**)

- ➢ Use formal writing.

- ➢ Use correct grammar and punctuation.

- ➢ Be concise.

- ➢ Revise, revise, revise!

Points of Caution (the DON'T list)

➢ Don't write an autobiography, itinerary, or resume in prose (listing experiences and achievements).

➢ Don't include information that doesn't support your thesis.

➢ Don't try to be a clown (gentle or subtle humor is okay)

➢ Don't provide a collection of generic statements or platitudes.

➢ Skip the **controversy**

- Political statements
- Religious beliefs
- Issues of age, gender, orientation, habits
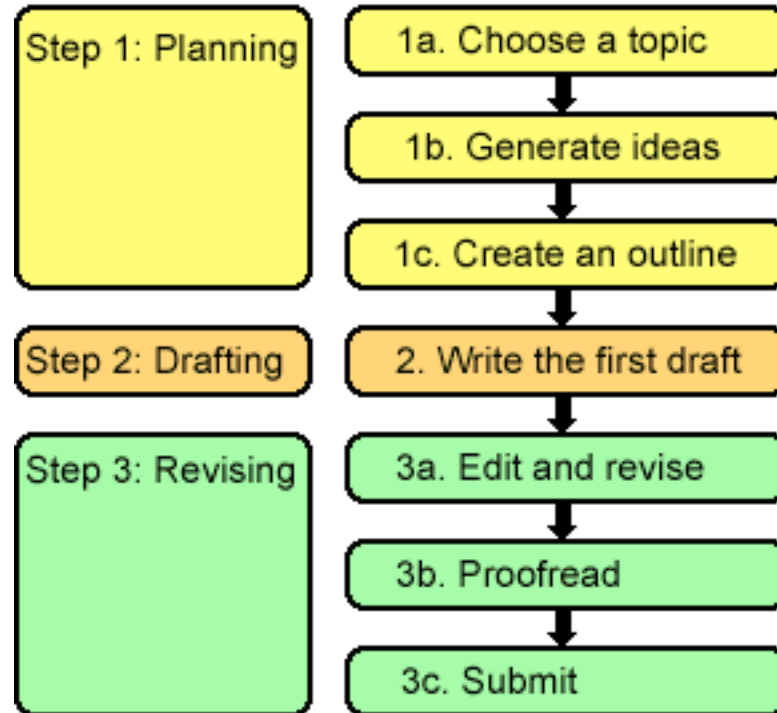- Respect boundaries

Adapted from Accepted.com, Inc.

Any questions?

Writing the Personal Statement: How Long Should It Take?

3-4 Weeks

➢ **Week 1** Brainstorming, drafting

➢ **Week 2** Rewriting, multiple drafts

➢ **Week 3** Leave it alone

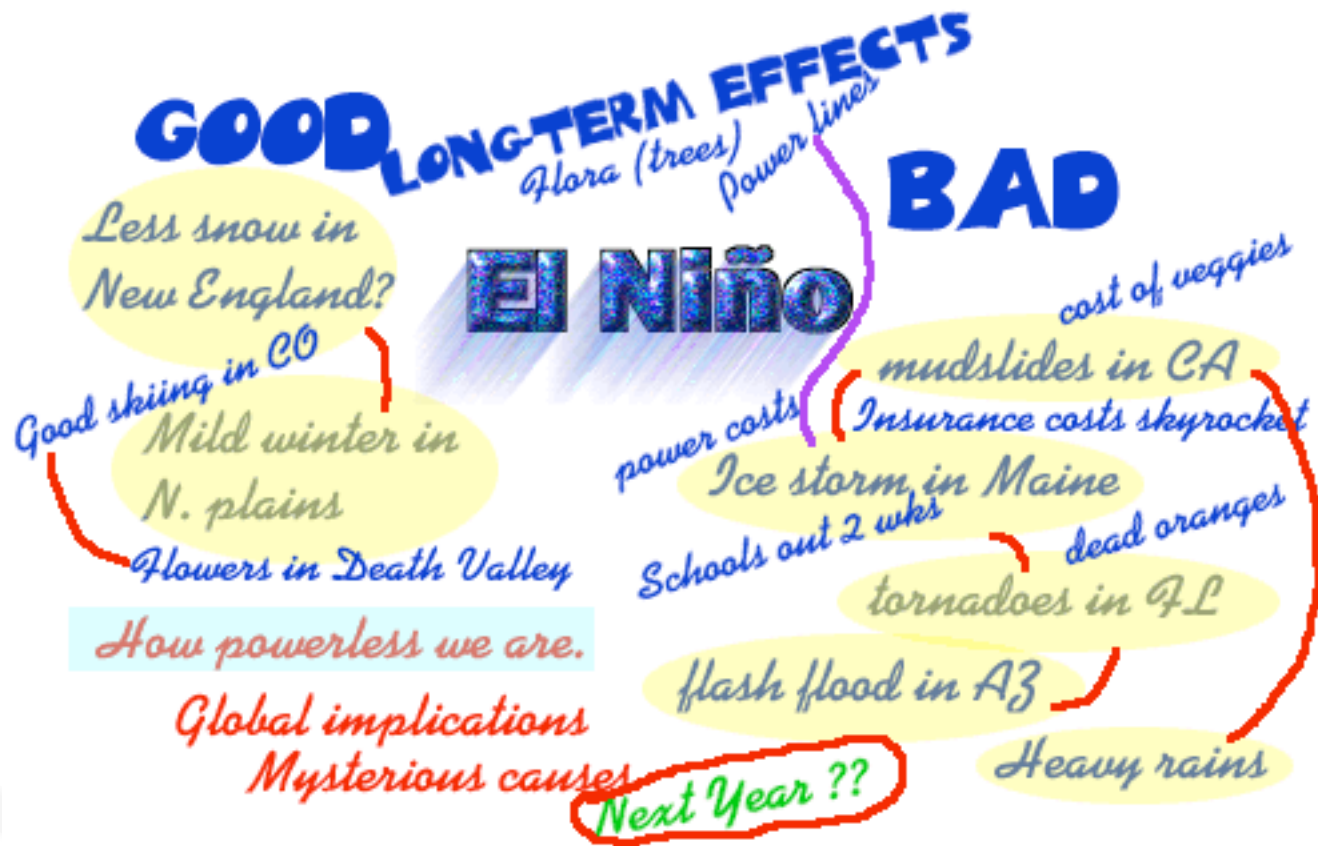➢ **Week 4** Final Proofreading / Editing

The Basic Writing Process

Basic Writing

Brainstorming

➢ Getting ideas down

➢ Discussing with friends and counselors (peer review)

➢ Freewriting

➢ Visual diagrams – flow charts, clustering

GOOD LONGTERM EFFECTS BAD

Flora (trees)   Power lines

El Niño

Less snow in New England?

Good skiing in CO

Mild winter in N. plains

Flowers in Death Valley

How powerless we are.

Global implications

Mysterious causes

power costs

Ice storm in Maine

Schools out 2 wks

flash flood in AZ

cost of veggies

mudslides in CA

Insurance costs skyrocket

dead oranges

tornadoes in FL

Heavy rains

Next Year ??

Source: http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/brainstorm_clustering.htm

Basic Writing

Outlining and Reverse Outlining

Outlining

Using the Library and Other Information Sources

I. Introduction to the library
   A. Programs of orientation and instruction
      1. Pamphlets, handbooks, other materials
      2. Orientation tours, lectures, courses.
   B. Books about the library (cite examples)
II. The central catalog or central information system
   A. The online central catalog
      1. Definition and description
      2. Searching the online catalog
         a. Searching by author, title, subject, keywords
         b. Limiting the search
         c. Using Boolean logic
            (1) Definition of Boolean logic
            (2) Examples of Boolean logic
      3. Information accessed from the online catalog
   B. Information needed for research and writing
   C. The card catalog and other catalogs
   D. The central information system
III. Reference works
   A. Types of reference works
      1. Indexes
      2. Bibliographies
      3. Collections of abstracts
      4. Guides to research
      5. Dictionaries
      6. Encyclopedias
      7. Biographical sources
      8. Yearbooks
      9. Atlases
   B. Publication forms of reference works
   C. Searching a reference database
IV. Location of library materials
   A. Classification systems
      1. Dewey decimal system
      2. Library of Congress system
   B. Main collection (open shelves, closed stacks)

. . . . . *and so forth.* . .
Conclusion -- knowledge of the library and successful
research papers.

Reverse Outlining

"Burn it! Burn it! His arm is gashing with blood!" A commander says. "But the pain will be so great that he might die." A soldier said. The commander willingly took the iron rod and placed it on the vein. The wounded soldier screams in agony and pain. His skin starts to burn all over his arm. The skin begins to die off and eventually it turns into *Story to Introduce topic* a scab. A few years pass and the soldier (who was wounded) goes for treatment. "You know this scab is a site of infection." The doctor says. The soldier sites their thinking for a minute. He looks around and sees that there are many people coming into his office with the same condition. The cauterization done by the general had worked at the moment but had caused long-term defects. So how can we define the correct method of cautery? *Topic Sentence*

importance of topic

To many of us medicine has come from a variety of sources. This vast break of knowledge that we humans endure comes from our past. From the past we are capable of initiating a brighter future. From our ancestors, we have learnt how to cure certain illnesses. In ancient Egypt honey was used for curing the ill, the Arabs later used honey *example of honey* as a means of curing illnesses. As we see there are ways in which we have taken different paths into finding new and necessary cures. People of different regions have come up with different cures. In the Muslim world the teachings of the prophet have long been *importance of religion in medicine* lived to this day. His sayings or Hadiths have always been the basis to the medical

Reverse Outlining

I. Story to introduce topic
  A. topic sentence
II. Importance of topic
  A. Example of honey
  B. religion and medicine
III. Quote from Hadith
  A. What is cautery?
  B. Where practiced?
  C. history of Cautery
  D. quote from someone cauterized
IV. Medical Doctors on Cautery
  A. opposition to Cautery
  B. evidence-based approach
V. conclusion — Cautery today + Future

Reverse Outlining

Basic Writing

Multiple Drafts

Multiple Drafts

➢ Between each draft do major revisions, like changing the order or paragraphs, adding more evidence and examples.

➢ Between drafts, do content editing, use a peer editor, and the 'objective distance' technique.

➢ Use SAVE AS function and print out a new paper draft instead of overwriting one document.

Basic Writing

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Expert and Peer Review

Expert Review

➢ Ask for feedback from someone who is more knowledgeable in the subject of language and writing, like a teacher, school counselor or older student.

Peer Review

➢ Ask for feedback from someone who is at your same level of language and writing, and whose opinion you respect and value, like a friend or fellow student. Ask a friend if the essay reflects you as a person.

Important!!! Ask your peer reviewer to look at the main important features of the essay (NOT spelling, grammar):

➢ Interesting and unique essay (describes YOU)?
➢ Organized?
➢ Logical?
➢ Transitions from idea to idea?
➢ Understandable (correct words used)?
➢ Repetitive?

Basic Writing

Content Editing and Copyediting/Proofreading

Content Editing = Major Changes

➢ Multiple drafts – self, peer, expert review

➢ Read out loud (try to hear your own voice – does it sound like me?)

➢ Read out loud to another person

➢ Reverse outlining

Copyediting = Minor Changes

➢ Put pencil on each word

➢ Read backwards

Basic Writing

6

Objective Distance: Leave It Alone

Avoid writing at the last minute and then submitting the essay. Finish the essay and don't look at it for at least one or two weeks before the deadline. Then go back and re-read the essay with a fresh perspective.

Avoid Overwriting

➤ Keep your previous drafts (Use SAVE AS in Microsoft Word). Don't keep overwriting the same draft.

➤ You might like a previous draft better after making changes suggested by a peer reviewer.

➤ If your draft becomes disorganized and messy, use the reverse outline process.

Basic Writing

7

Final Proofreading

1. Put pencil on each word

2. Read backwards

3. Use a Peer editor

Avoid Plagiarism

➢ Student personal statements are expected to be original and written by the students themselves (they can receive assistance from peer editors or mentors). The essay should reflect the personality and language use of the student applying to university.

➢ If plagiarism were detected, the application would be removed from the applicant pool. Admissions staff would assume that the student was intentionally misrepresenting herself (dishonesty).

Originality | GradeMark | PeerMark

Plagiarized Paper
BY PLAGIARISM STUDENT

turnitin

63% SIMILAR

-- OUT OF 0

Match Overview

◀

1 accepted.com
Internet source
63%

Personal Statement

As I tightly wrapped my fingers around it, I felt a job bigger than I ever dreamed possible. I had won the Al Buttuta School Prize for best volunteer. I remember being fatigued by my efforts, but I knew there were two paths: slow down and give up my chance of winning to gain momentary comfort, or push myself even harder and give up momentary comfort to receive greater rewards later. I chose the second path and later held a trophy that represented my perseverance and hard work. My sacrifices in working as a volunteer at the Qatar Skilled Nursing Center taught me discipline and perseverance. These qualities will help me cross a different finish line and achieve a new goal: becoming a doctor.

I have had to learn to budget my time to meet the demands of school, training programs, and volunteer activities. I worked in the volunteer center for 6 hours every week, and I also helped my brothers and sisters with their homework. My most satisfying volunteer activity, however, was participating at the Skilled Nursing Center.

At the center, I continually saw young and old people whose suffering was overwhelming. These patients suffered from many problems. They also frequently had infections that antibiotics can easily treat. I will never forget the feeling of complete fulfillment after a long day of using my talents for the betterment of others. The desire to replicate this feeling strengthens my commitment to becoming a physician.

Final Checklist

- Captures voice and personality?
- Clearly states reasons for becoming a doctor?
- Well Organized?
  - One main theme?
  - Contains introduction, body, conclusion?
  - Each paragraph has a topic sentence?
  - Transition between each paragraph?
- Avoids clichés?
- Avoids repetition?
- Uses specific examples: avoids general, vague or abstract ideas?
- Words spelled correctly?
- Punctuation is correct?
- Grammar is correct?
- Correct word is used (word choice)?

Any questions?