

## Getting Started Questions for Personal Statements

- What's special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story?
- When did you originally become interested in this field, and what have you since learned that has further stimulated your interest?
- How have you learned about this field?
- If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, how has the work contributed to your personal growth?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps of discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life?
- What personal characteristics do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession?
- Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field—than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?



## The Dos and Don'ts of Personal Statements

### Do:

- Concentrate on one theme
- Be unique
- Start by grabbing attention
- Read and follow directions; answer all questions
- Consult outside sources
- Explain inconsistencies in your history
- Show
- Focus; be relevant to your field of study
- Show your personality
- Be straightforward and confident; show your strengths
- Back things up; be specific
- Have someone else look it over

### Don't:

- Appear too scattered
- Start with "I was born"
- Make it a sob story
- Make it a resume
- Repeat what you've already mentioned in your application
- Use the same statement for every school
- Tell
- Be general
- Use clichés, lists, or chronological histories
- Use humor unless confident of response
- Focus too much on other people unless they were a big influence on your career path
- Forget to proofread

## **Priorities for Personal Statements**

### **Ideas:**

Does the statement document a variety of experiences?  
Has the writer chosen the most relevant experience?

### **Unity / Coherence = Theme:**

Does the essay present the individual consistently and fully?

### **Development:**

Does the statement explain why events are important, what was learned from them, and how they are relevant?

### **Organization:**

Is it logical for the chosen theme?

### **Style:**

Does the writer's voice shine through?  
Is sentence structure strong?

### **Mechanics:**

Are there any grammatical or consistency errors?  
Has the writer proofread and had other readers proofread?

## Personal Statement—Sample Draft #1

I was born in Seoul, Korea on September 16, 1972. I am the oldest son, having three sisters. My father is 52 years old and is an auditor for Sam-Won Environment company. My mother, 51, is a housewife. In my childhood, I was brought up with the utmost care and affection by my parents.

When I took the entrance exam for the university, a very severe problem in the environment, specially river and air pollution, was occurring in my country. At this time, I really wanted to help solve the problem, so I chose to study Environmental Science at Yonsei University.

Majoring at environment science for 4 years at undergraduate school, I worked very hard to have a comprehensive understanding of the fundamentals of environmental studies. I received two prizes for high academic achievement and two scholarships in my sophomore year. I also joined the military immediately after completion of three semesters and served in the airforce for 18 months. I learned self control, cooperation, and patience from being in the military. After completion of military service and before I came back to school to continue my studies, I traveled to several countries including the United States. From this travel, I gained a strong motivation to study in America because I feel the country's research is highly developed in my field of study and can offer unlimited possibilities to achieve my goal.

I am especially interested in the areas of ground water pollution and solid waste pollution. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that in Korea, the lake and ground water was polluted by industrialization, and no one can drink any water in the lakes or wells. Until 20 years ago, our country was famous around the world for clean water, but now we must buy spring water for drinking. Second, our country is very small but heavily populated. All the people produce much waste. Because of this fact, it is hard for us to find the method to eliminate wastes. That is to say, we don't have space to dump them or techniques to solve the problem. These two reasons stimulated me to

study, and I really want to know more about these areas. This is the reason why I am applying to your school.

The ultimate goal of my study is to obtain a Master's degree and Doctorate in Environmental Engineering. To achieve that, I would like to undertake my graduate study at your university for three reasons. First of all, Environmental Engineering and its applications are underdeveloped in Korea. But the United States has a tradition of being the best country in this field. Moreover, your school, out of many graduate schools in America, is very famous for and has a good reputation in this area. Secondly, I found the curriculum at your university to be suitable and fascinating for me. Thirdly, if I get admission to your school, I am sure that I can get the best quality of education and opportunity to broaden my knowledge in this field. This is the best way to achieve my dream.

Upon completion of my master's degree in environmental engineering, I would like to pursue a doctoral degree immediately. After completing my doctoral degree, I hope to devote myself to research in this field and receive more professional experience.

I am glad to apply for admission to your school and hope my plan will be accomplished. Thank you for your kind consideration.

### **Strengths**

- Clear goals
- Shares reasons for interest in Environmental Science

### **Limitations**

- Dry tone
- Too many details
- Several details do not seem to relate
- Not personal enough
- Many proofreading errors

## Personal Statement—Sample Draft #2

I walked off the school bus; it was a beautiful summer day. The sun was shining and the birds were singing, but inside my house it was dark, a cloud had moved over us. I slowly made my way to the door, expecting my mother to greet me but instead my sister opened the door, something was wrong, I knew instantly. When I walked in and there sat my three year-old brother playing with his toys in the family room and my parents were sitting on the couch. I looked up at my mom, she had been crying. What is wrong I asked? He is sick my mom said, “Your baby brother is very sick”. I just shrugged my shoulders and walked away, I had been sick before and I got better, so would he. I went upstairs to my room and made a get well card for him. It was made out of blue construction paper and had black writing on it, I finished it off with a panda bear sticker. Inside I had written how much I loved him and to get better real soon. I proudly presented it to my mother; she took one look at it and began to cry again. I climbed on to her lap and she said, “He won’t get better, we have to take care of him the best we can”. He has diabetes she explained but my naïve eight year-old mind just did not know what diabetes was. I did not understand. Whenever I was sick I went to the doctor and he always made me better, but this time even the best doctor’s hands were tied. It was this very day I knew what I wanted to do when I grew up...I wanted to make my little brother better, I wanted to be a doctor. Although this was the first time that being a physician crossed my mind. I was sure I was destined to become one. I have always felt a deep desire to help people whenever they needed it, and would stop at no end to help them. Through the many volunteering experiences and through various jobs, my decision was solidified. My first trials with medicine and with dealing with the ill began when I was twelve years old. I began to volunteer with a youth volunteer organization, which set up various activities around the community and with different members of the community. The very first volunteering activity that I participated in was going to St. Francis nursing home and playing bingo with the residents. It was this day that will always stick out in my mind. I walked in and immediately the musty air hit me like a brick wall. It slowly began to invade me filling my nostrils and spreading its way through my body. The sickness was engulfing me and I felt as if I would not be able to let it go. I knew that most of these people

were sick, but I never realized how sick they were. We quickly began our task of inviting the residents to come and play bingo with us, as I walked down the halls asking each one that I met, I was saddened. Some of the people could not get out of bed and others were just too weak to leave their rooms. I knew that the couple of hours that I was going to spend there with them were going to brighten their day. For many of these people, the volunteers that they saw were the only people from the outside world they met; their families just stopped coming to visit them sometime ago. After a few hours my mom came to pick me up some how I was not the same girl who entered the nursing home just a short time ago. Something had changed for me, I now knew that medicine was the only way that I felt I could help people. There are many things I have done that have helped me make this decision. Besides volunteering in nursing homes and other various places in my community, I have gained several years of lab experience at both Roswell Park Cancer Institute in which I was a participant in the summer research program for high school juniors and at Buffalo General Hospital. I have volunteered my time to carry out research in the areas of microbiology, immunology, and molecular biology. In each one of these laboratories I have gained various experiences of lab techniques. This has resulted in my participation in several abstracts that were presented in various meetings. In addition to this, I am the co-author of two peer review publications. I have also worked as a secretary in a pediatrician's office and an optometrist's office. Where I was able to see how the clinical aspect of medicine worked and gained experience with patient interaction and some knowledge of the business aspect of medicine. A career in medicine takes a lot of hard work and dedication, with this in mind I know that becoming a doctor is the only way for me to have a future that I will enjoy, because I will be doing the thing in life that I enjoy the most. Helping others.

### **Strengths**

- Narrative grabs attention
- Provides background info
- Goals are made clear to reader
- Unique experiences that relate to what writer is applying to
- Reflects on experiences
- Shows with examples
- Strong imagery
- Focused
- Organized

### **Limitations**

- Some details too vivid (nursing home smells)
- One single paragraph
- Awkward phrasing
- Many proofreading errors

Personal Statement—Sample Draft #3

## **On Art and Human Development**

Personal Statement for Entrance to Woodring School of Education

During high school, I was involved in a potpourri of youth outreach and community projects, where I gathered and organized people into executing tasks. At the time, I was just doing what I loved – I never stopped and considered that I was leading or teaching. (Heaven forbid!) In fact, the thought of teaching didn't cross my mind until I started pursuing where my heart was at the college level: art. As I delved further into my own art, examining my motivation and purpose for each tangible project, I began to realize that art plays a vital function in society and coming of age.

Asking someone to define “art” will surely ignite a heated debate not, only about what art is, but also what art is **not**. We all have opinions about art, regardless of whether we consider ourselves to be Artists. When words fail to express something, art steps in. Moreover, it is an *outlet*, a cathartic vessel of creative expression, an opportunity for huge confidence growth. Creating a tangible object gives us something to be proud of --something to call our own.

This past summer, I worked as an Arts Specialist at an art camp in Oregon. The camp offered everything from theater to creative writing and pottery. I worked with 5 - 9 year old kids in an area called “The Village.” Working with about 50 campers a day, I designed and implemented daily lesson plans in music and art. Many of the campers attended all summer long, giving me the chance to cultivate strong relationships.

Jonah, a five-year-old camper who attended all summer, suffered from an anxiety disorder and refused to speak. His mother explained that due to his anxiety, he rarely spoke to anyone except his parents - when he did speak, it was usually in the form of a raspy whisper. I was immediately overwhelmed. How was I supposed to incorporate this child into my classroom? How would I gauge his progress, and how would I communicate?

I had forgotten my entire philosophy about art. I've preached countless times that art can express things which words often cannot; why then, could I not apply his to my mute student? Why did I bow my head in frustrated failure every time Jonah would stomp his feet and jump up and down with tears rolling down his face when he had to use the bathroom but would not ask

me? Jonah illustrated to me what it means to use art as a language. While it's true that he did not verbally communicate, he came alive when learning a new dance, molding a clay pot, dressing up in costume, or finger painting a monster. He completely absorbed himself in his art-making, and he slowly opened up socially in ways his parents had never seen before. Jonah would grab his classmates by the hand and pull them aside to dance - a social instigation his parents had never before witnessed.

By the end of the summer, Jonah was shyly tugging at me and whispering things in my ear. He also began to speak quietly to the other kids in the class. I would like to think that this miraculous breakthrough was the result of his interactions with me, but the reality is that art gave him the freedom to speak both figuratively and literally. The creative process of art-making gave him the power of expression and the tools to communicate.

An important philosophy in both my own art and what I want to bring to the classroom is a belief in the **power of process** and not necessarily the **product** - that is, the process of trial and error, of discovering new materials and methods of expressing an idea. A personal goal I have is to get students to a point where art becomes a natural part of everyday life. When we look at something with the intention of imitating, diverging from, or projecting it in a tangible form, it is only then that we truly begin to see and understand the beautiful complexity of the world. The Artist is simply someone who *sees* and responds, someone who pays attention to the world around him or her. In a world that is becoming increasingly difficult to live in, I see the function of art rising to new and important levels. We *need* people who can perpetuate creativity and speak in a universal language. If art is why I get up in the morning, I want to instill in others the same ache, hope, motivation, and confidence.