



## Personal Statement Worksheet

### I. How to use this worksheet

The purpose of this worksheet is to walk you through the brainstorming process for writing a personal statement. After breaking down some important factors to take into account before you start writing, this worksheet will provide you with prompts and guide questions to help organize your information. If you follow all the steps, you can get through this worksheet with a working outline of your statement. Good luck!

### II. On Personal Statements

Your personal statement's structure will depend on a number of factors: the prompt, the word limit, the field being applied to, and whether or not you are being asked for a statement of purpose or a personal statement.

**The prompt:** Some programs ask for a personal statement outlining your experiences and your desire of going to graduate school. Other programs will ask you to speak of a particular matter regarding your application. For example, you may be asked to write about a particular challenge you faced in your life, how you overcame it, and how the experience will help you in your desired career. Whereas with the personal statement you have the opportunity to talk about how your undergraduate career prepared you for graduate school; a specific prompt will have you focus on what is being asked.

**Word Limits:** Each program you apply to has different word or character limits for the different prompts. Personal statements with strict limits are more specific and straight to the point. If there is no specified page limit, it is typically suggested that a personal statement should not exceed 3 pages.

**Difference in Fields:** The personal statement of a person applying to medical school will be completely different than the personal statement of a person applying to a doctoral English program. Before you submit your personal statement, you should consider having an advisor proofread it for content.

**Personal Statement vs. Statement of Purpose:** Generally, programs request either a personal statement or a statement of purpose. Both are very similar. The main difference between them is that the statement of purpose should focus on the *why* of applying to a specific program. The personal statement is laxer in nature and allows the author to craft a narrative regarding their preparedness for graduate school.

### III. Pre-Writing Activities

Personal statements typically follow a particular structure, which can be boiled down to these three questions: Who are you? What have you done? What do you want to

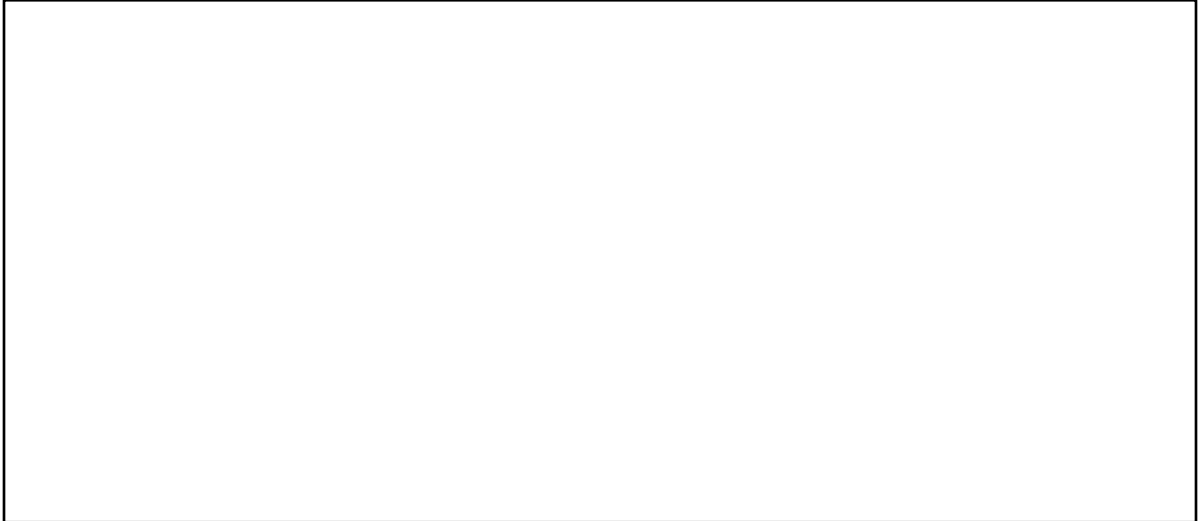
do? The pre-writing exercises in this section are meant to help you answer those three questions.

### A. Who are you?

The introductory paragraph in a personal statement should serve as a hook. You can be creative with how you catch the reader's attention. Often, people include a short personal narrative of why they decided to major in their field. That said, there are pitfalls to these narratives. For example, it is generally understood that if you are applying to medical school it is because you like to help people. Although a very noble goal, the desire to help people will not necessarily make your personal statement stand out. Similarly overdone are the kinds of personal statements that begin with a quote or a dictionary definition of the field you are intending on entering. It would be more fruitful to make your personal statement, well, *personal*.

#### Let's brainstorm.

*How did you end up here?* Take a second to reflect on the events in your life that led you to this moment and this application. Draw a map of your trajectory. It does not have to look pretty. Your map can look like a list, a series of interconnected bubbles, some bullet points... It does not matter. Use the space below to brainstorm.



Now that you have reflected on your experiences, think about your future. Why do you want to major in your desired field? Most importantly, how has your trajectory led you to want to major in that field? **Tell your story.**

### B. What have you done?

The answer to the *what have you done* question will end up working as the body paragraphs of your personal statement. Keep in mind that all of the information

that you include here will not necessarily make it into your statement. It is also okay if you do not have answers for all the questions here. When working on a personal statement, it is always useful to write down all the experiences that you have had during your time in college. You never know what will make a good addition to your piece.

<p>List all the relevant research experience you have (this can include research done in coursework).</p>	
<p>Have you done or completed any internships?</p>	
<p>List any awards you have received.</p>	
<p>Have you participated in any extracurricular activities? This can also include memberships to clubs and societies.</p>	
<p>What kind of work experience do you have? List it.</p>	

Now that you have compiled a list of your experiences, go through what you included here and select the experiences that you would like to highlight in your statement. When you start working on your body paragraphs, it is not a bad idea

to organize your experiences chronologically. **Remember you are telling your story. Tell it in order.**

### C. What do you want to do?

The last few paragraphs in a personal statement are arguably some of the most important ones. They are also the paragraphs that **NEED** to be tailored to each school. In other words, more than one school may request a personal statement. You **CAN** submit the same personal statement to different schools, **BUT** if you are following this worksheet closely, keep in mind that this is the section of your statement you will have to heavily edit per program you are applying to.

The *what do you want to do* section of your statement serves **three** major purposes:

- It gives the desired program a sense of *what* you are hoping to research.
- It allows you to talk about *why* you are applying to that particular program in that particular institution.
- It serves as a space to show off what you know about the program *both* in terms of its structure and its faculty.

Let's begin.

- 1- Develop a concept map of your desired area of research. The center of the concept map should be your major field. From there, link different possible areas of research your degree could concentrate or focus in. Draw it below.



- 2- As you explore the institution's site, what elements jump out at you? Perhaps what drew you to applying to this institution was your desired program's standing against other colleges in the United States. Perhaps the institution has the top leading researchers in your area of study. List three things that drew you to this institution.

- a.
- b.
- c.

3- Are there are faculty members in your desired program of study whose scholarship overlaps with you? Identify two or three faculty members who could potentially serve as your mentors.

Faculty Member	Area of Study/Scholarship	How it overlaps with my research interests

#### IV. Outlining

By now you should be able to produce a working outline of your personal statement. Consider making an appointment at the Writing Center to help you develop your ideas further.