PERSONAL STATEMENT LAB

DR. MARIA BEATRIZ MENDOZA

DR. JENNIFER GRILL

INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANT PROGRAM

CENTER FOR INTENSIVE ENGLISH STUDIES

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL STATEMENT VS STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?

Features	Personal Statement	Statement of Purpose
Needed for graduate school and fellowship applications	☑	☑
1 to 2 pages in length	☑	☑
Vary by culture and country	☑	☑
(In the US) Evaluation of **personal** thoughts, feelings, and reflection (in relation to the application requirements)	☑	
(In the US) Evaluation of what the applicant has done and plans to do **academically**		☑

PERSONAL STATEMENT VS STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?

Main Points to Remember:

1. **In some cases there might <u>not</u> be a difference between a PS and SOP.**

2. **For doctoral program applications, a PS or SOP is often a research statement.**

3. **In ALL cases, read the prompt carefully! Check out some sample prompts…**

PREPARATION: LOOKING AT THEM

What is the program looking for in ideal candidates?

- Carefully read about the program's mission, vision, values, current research, faculty, curriculum, etc.

What is the school/committee specifically asking for?

- <u>READ the question prompts carefully and be sure to answer EVERY aspect of the prompt</u>

- EXPLAIN how you meet the specified qualifications

- SHOW how your skills/goals/aspirations match those of the organization, program, and/or school

PREPARATION: LOOKING AT YOU

- Unique attributes of your story (personal and/or academic) *as they relate to the award or program*

- Your field of interest, why you chose it

- Personal success factors

- Goals (short and long term)

- What are you hoping to do with your education/award and how might it help you achieve your goal? How will it achieve the organization's goal?

- Values, interests, and skills

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITH A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Align your story with the requirements of the application and the audience.

- Capture their attention with your introduction. This takes different forms.

- Show; don't tell.

- Explain how investing in you will pay off.

- Give yourself lots of time, revise a lot, get help.

FIRST THINGS FIRST…
ALIGNING YOURSELF: ARE YOU WORTHY?

As a human being, yes you are!

For this organization or program? Maybe.

Choose a program or award that is <u>appropriate</u> for you.

Check with the Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards.

LET'S PRACTICE! FINDING YOUR STORY

Your grades and test scores will show that you are a good student.

Let your personal statement show your persistence, diligence, effort, creativity, focus, and potential.

Use the questions on the handout to start developing your story with a partner.

LET'S PRACTICE! FINDING YOUR STORY

EVERYONE HAS AN INTERESTING STORY!!!

Typical sentence:

In 2013 I completed my B.S. in computer science and in 2018 I earned a master's degree in art therapy.

Where's the story?

CAPTURING ATTENTION: SHOW; DON'T TELL

Which one of these openings for an application to a <u>doctoral program</u> in computer science seems most **focused**? Why?

- I have always loved technology and computers ever since I was a young child. I first began coding when I was in eighth grade and won first prize in the technology fair for my school district.

- My aspiration is to spend the next several years pursuing a PhD in computer science in the field of human-computer interaction. I'm interested in online education systems, cybersecurity, and software engineering.

- My name is Lisa Allen. I am currently finishing my master's degree in Computer Science in the College of Arts and Sciences at Florida State University.

CAPTURING ATTENTION: SHOW; DON'T TELL

Which one of these openings for an application for a <u>Fulbright Student Grant</u> seems more **compelling**? Note: The prompt asks about the applicant's service/volunteer background and personal values.

- I am applying for the Fulbright Student Grant because I have a passion for hard work and helping other people. I have done volunteer work for many organizations. When I am finished with my studies, I plan to do work that makes life better for others.

- My grandparents have touched many lives: former drug addicts, refugees, neighbors, and my own. They have an uncommon ability to build relationships; they are a paradigm of service— where service is more than what you do and is also defined by who you are. Their example has inspired me to do the same.

SHOW; DON'T TELL: STRIKING THE RIGHT TONE

That last thing about the grandparents was too poetic—no one in Chemical Engineering writes like that!

Good point!

A personal story is effective ONLY if you can relate it to the prompt and to your purpose.

If you use a story in a narrative form, be honest. Make the connection to your goal clear.

Take a look at the PS and SOP for a STEM student.

YOUR WORTH: WHY ARE YOU A GREAT INVESTMENT?

- Most of us feel uncomfortable writing personal statements because we feel like we're bragging about ourselves…even Americans are uncomfortable with this.

- Get beyond yourself: How can you help? (Your field? Others? The planet?)

- From this helping perspective: how do your skills benefit the organization? Investing in you will pay off…how?

- When your confidence runs low, return to: How can I help?

LET'S PRACTICE! HOW DO I SHOW I'M A GOOD INVESTMENT?

Which one of these statements seems most **compelling**? Why?

- Given my own particular abilities with linguistics, English, and education, I would like to contribute toward reversing the many inequalities that I have seen in K-12 education in the U.S.

- The Smith Scholarship will benefit me because it will allow me to continue my research on climate change. Even though I won a scholarship of $5,000 last year and my parents have lent me some money, I still do not have enough funding.

LET'S PRACTICE! JI-YOUNG'S FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION

The Miller Fellowship:

- Annual award for Asian female graduate students from Turkey to Japan to facilitate field research in Asia.

- Provides 6 months' support, including travel, living, health insurance, research expenses.

- Requires CV, names of 2 referees, transcripts, proof of Asian nationality, and a statement of purpose.

LET'S PRACTICE! JI-YOUNG'S FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION

The statement of purpose: No more than 250 words explaining how the fellowship would contribute to the applicant's academic development. The applicant must also clearly indicate how her work will further the position of Asian women in her country upon her return home.

Kim Ji-Young: is from Korea and is looking for funding for her research back home. She is working with her advisor, Susan Grant, who has given her feedback, but Ji-Young is feeling confused. Read the drafts and Dr. Grant's comments and help Ji-Young. Is one draft better? Should she combine the two? If so, how?

BREAKING DOWN THE SOP REQUIREMENTS

- Is Ji-Young an appropriate candidate for this fellowship?

- No more than 250 words. Is that long or short?

- How will the fellowship contribute to the applicant's academic development? She wants to do research—what might the committee need to know about this?

- Clearly indicate how her work will further the position of Asian women in her country upon her return home. Is Ji-Young a good investment?

JI-YOUNG'S STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- **Version A Comments:** Not bad, Ji-Young. I think you explain your need for the fellowship quite well—indeed you might overdo it a bit. However, the main problem is that the committee will likely conclude that you haven't thought through what data you will need and how you are going to collect it. Please try again, and try to write a bit more formally.

- **Version B Comments:** Well done! This is much more professional. I like the way you offer a coherent research plan toward the end of your text. But I don't think you should suggest that going to Korea is my idea. And maybe you should put in the action research issue first, rather than presenting your personal details? One more go perhaps?

FINAL TIPS

- Do your research!

- Break down the instructions for the statement.

- Get your information on paper (in any language) and don't edit yourself. Don't worry about word count.

- Find the details of your story (academic and/or personal) that relate to the instructions/prompt.

- How will you help others and/or the organization with your work?

- Write a first draft. Don't worry about grammar or vocabulary—focus on the information and organization. Now you can worry about the word count.

- Write a second draft—and as many drafts as you need. Once you have your story, you can correct grammar, vocabulary, sentence variety.

- Ask for help! Have others read your work and give you feedback.

GENERAL RESOURCES FOR PERSONAL STATEMENTS

- **FSU's Office of Graduate and Fellowship Awards:** http://ogfa.fsu.edu/

_____

- **FSU's Career Center Info on Personal Statements:**
  http://www.career.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu746/files/Writing%20a%20Personal%20Statement_0.pdf

- **Personal Statements for Fellowships from Profellow:**

  https://www.profellow.com/tips/5-powerful-personal-statement-openings-of-fellowship-winners/

- **Chronicle of Higher Education (Lang, 2012):**

  https://www.chronicle.com/article/Helping-Students-to-Tell-Their/134502

RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

Applying for a PhD Program in Computer Science: this file contains information on the entire application process and has some very good points for students in STEM fields (not just computer science); this is a section of tips on statements of purpose:

http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~harchol/gradschooltalk.pdf

Examples of SOPs and PSs in STEM all by the same person. These are great examples of giving details and telling a story about research:

http://seankross.com/notes/grad-school-essays/

THANK YOU!

If you have questions, feel free to contact the English for Academic Purposes Program:

- Dr. Maria Beatriz Mendoza: mmendoza@admin.fsu.edu

- Dr. Jennifer Grill: jgrill@fsu.edu

- Visit our program: https://cies.fsu.edu/programs/eap