

# Writing a Personal Statement

for Fellowships and Awards



The  
**Career Center**  
*linking futures*

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# Overview

- How to Prepare
- Guide to Writing
  - Content & Theme
  - Format & Style
- Tips for Success & Common Mistakes
- Evaluate
- Resources

# What is a Personal Statement?

- An introduction
- A picture or a story
- A writing sample
- Evidence of knowledge





# **Preparation:**

## ***Looking at You***

- Unique attributes of your personal life story
- 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?
- Values, interests, and skills

# 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.
- Talk to current students/awardees who succeeded
- Speak with organization representatives about what they are seeking

**What is the school/committee specifically asking for?**

- **READ** the question prompts carefully and be sure to answer **EVERY** aspect of the prompt
- Discuss how you meet the specified qualifications
- Speak to how your values/goals/aspirations match those of the organization, program, and/or school

# Activity!

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

1. What field are you currently considering?
2. Write 2-3 things that sparked your interest in your field.
3. How did you discover these things?



*Find a partner and discuss your answers!*

# A Guide to Writing: Format & Style

## Readability is key

- Use an easy-to-read and professional font
  - Size 11 or 12 with 0.5" – 1" margins
- Be mindful of word limits and page limits

## Language

- Write in the first person (I/Me/My)
- Be authentic – stay away from quotes and clichés
- Develop a thesis about yourself and follow the theme throughout

# A Guide to Writing: Content & Theme

- **Avoid gimmicks or clichés**
  - *“In the matter before the court of UCLA, regarding the admission of...”*
  - *“I believe the children are our future!”*
- **Be authentic! Authenticity inspires interest**
  - *“My double major in Government and Women’s Studies always provokes one of two reactions...”*
  - *“Every morning when I wake up, the first thing I do is dance.”*
- **Ask yourself...**
  - *Are my goals clear?*
  - *Is my tone confident?*
  - *Did I use concrete examples?*





# What to Write?

## *Unstructured Prompts*

**“Write a personal statement consisting of 500  
– 1000 words.”**

### **Where to begin?**

- Jot down some strengths, accomplishments, background, experiences, goals, etc.
- See if you notice a pattern or theme
- Start to create your “thesis statement”
- Develop an outline
- Begin free-writing
  - Try writing in 20 minute intervals, no stopping!



# What to Write?

## *Unstructured Prompts*

### *Remember to:*

- Tell a story or review personal history (keep it recent and relevant!)
- Discuss goals & aspirations
  - What you will do with the degree/award?
- Explain what draws you to the organization
  - Think about the purpose of the program and how it will help you achieve **your** goals or further **their** cause

# What to Write?

## *Structured Prompts*

Graduate Admission – “The personal statement should address your intellectual interests, academic and professional objectives, and proposed topic(s) of graduate study.”

### *You may want to:*

- Describe your interest in the program and the field of study
- Identify and articulate:
  - **At least one academic goal** (type of degree you want and why; faculty you want to work with, research ideas)
  - **At least one professional goal** (what you want to do after obtaining the degree)
- Discuss an idea you would like to research for your thesis/dissertation

# Tips for Success

- Start early!
- Read the prompt several times before writing
- Choose a theme and provide concrete examples that illustrate your point
- Be unique
- Write about what *you* like
- Introduce skills and show evidence that supports them
- Revise, revise, revise



# Common Errors

- Using the phrase “I’ve always wanted to be...”
- Criticizing others
- Discussing your background without relating it to your current goal
- Avoid unnecessary capitalizations
- Embellishing/being untruthful
- An autobiography or retelling of your resume



# Evaluate: *Revising Your Drafts*

Strategically choose people to critique your personal statement

- Begin with a trusted **friend** to clean up language and grammar
- Stop by **The Career Center** for help from a Career Advisor
- Take it to a **professor** in the field you are applying for
- Utilize services offered by the **Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards**
- Pass it on to people who are writing your **recommendations**

# Evaluate:

## *Check the details*

- Is the name of the school/program/committee correct?
- Do you have the correct number of pages/words? Not too few or too many!
- Check for typos!
- Save & submit it as a PDF when possible.



# Let's Practice!

**Explain how you think you contribute to the Mission Statement of the Fellows Society.**

- To recognize and advance academic excellence at the graduate level by developing leadership skills.
- To promote exchange and interactions among fellows from multiple disciplines.
- To encourage service to the University and Community and to develop an interdisciplinary network of scholars



# Drop-In Career Advising

**Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.**

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(Fall and Spring semesters only)

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# The Career Center

Located in the Dunlap Success Center at the corner of Learning Way and Woodward Avenue.



100 South Woodward Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32306

# How Did We Do?

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