

## Writing Effective Personal Statements

### What you write about

- Describe your career goals
- Describe why you are choosing \_\_\_\_\_ school
- Give evidence (in the form of stories)
  - o Why you are pursuing the \_\_\_\_\_ Degree
  - o That you know what that degree or career entails
  - o Personal attributes or qualities that would help you complete the graduate school successfully or be good at \_\_\_\_\_ career
  - o How can you show you have determination to reach your goals
  - o You are prepared for your advanced academic work
- Describe any background characteristics that may have placed you at an educational disadvantage
- Describe who inspires you

### Overall Advice

- Understand that it is less of a “personal statement” and more of a “professional statement”
  - o Your audience wants to know more about your work/school life events than personal
- Tailor your personal statement for the particular opportunity you are applying for. For example, an internship personal statement is different than for graduate school or medical school.
- Follow instructions to a “T,” i.e., word limits.
- Use examples to make your points more memorable.
- Use analogies to explain your experiences or goals.
- Tell the story of your experiences including successes and failures. Include how you overcame roadblocks.
  - o Note that they want to know if you can overcome struggles--will you quit.
- Use instructions as “sentence starters,” especially for early drafts.

### Writing style

- Use the first person (I)
- Write clearly
- Consider subheadings (based on instructions and guidelines)
- Use readable smaller paragraphs (4-5 sentences each)
- Limit your sentences to one general idea
- Vary your sentence lengths
- Work on “painting a picture” for your reader
- Include a topic sentence in each paragraph

## Where to start

- Start early
- Start writing about your experiences--take 10-20 min a day for a couple of weeks, and create a collection of stories. Your first drafts have been called a "word vomit"--just write.
  - o Mentors who inspire you--what did you learn from it?
  - o An academic struggle--what you learned from it?
  - o Struggle in life--what did you learn from it?
  - o Success in life--what did you learn from it?
  - o Failures and what you learned from it.
  - o Write about your internship--what did you learn from it?
  - o Write about volunteering--what did you learn from it?
  - o Write about shadowing--what did you learn from it?
- Writing is a process--read and rewrite your stories above.

## You have a collection of stories--now what?

- Reread the directions for that particular school or program.
- Read your stories and pull out the ones that answer/support the questions required.
- Talk with your mentors to see which stories they think best support.
- Line up and talk to your letters of rec writers (note--see my handout about how to ask for a letter of rec). See if they are able to give evidence to any of your claims. Brainstorm with them about what they can write about--they might have a story idea for you to write about.
- Work on weaving them together. Write your introduction and concluding paragraphs only after you have written the body. Make sure your opening story has a closure in your conclusion paragraph.
- Visit the Writing Center. They'll be able to help with organization and structure.

## Polishing your personal statement

- Have the CAP Center read and give you feedback.
- Ask friends to read, and ask them
  - o What they feel is the most important story. (Is this what you wanted to be the most important story?)
- Sit on your draft for a month, write it set it aside and then come back to it.
- Have other professionals read your letter and provide comments. Seek professionals already in, or who are in areas close to the field... Alumni may be of help. Hook up with GU – for you

Direct terms to avoid – note that you need to write about these but do not just use these terms--give stories to show you are the following:

- Hard worker
- Want to help people
- Organized
- Work well with others

Shawgo - Revised 10/10/2018