

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PSYCHOLOGY

Writing a Personal Statement

—

Eirini Boutakis, MA

Introduction



Eirini Boutakis

- 1st year MA
- Clinical Psychology
- Child Development Research Unit

Agenda for Today



Learn what a personal statement is and how to write a successful one



Hear a first-hand perspective from a graduate student who has been through the process



Answer your questions



Your Questions

- **Poll:** what area of psychology are you thinking to apply to?
- What burning questions do you have? What do you want to learn from today's session?
 - **Let us know in the chat!**



What is a Personal Statement?

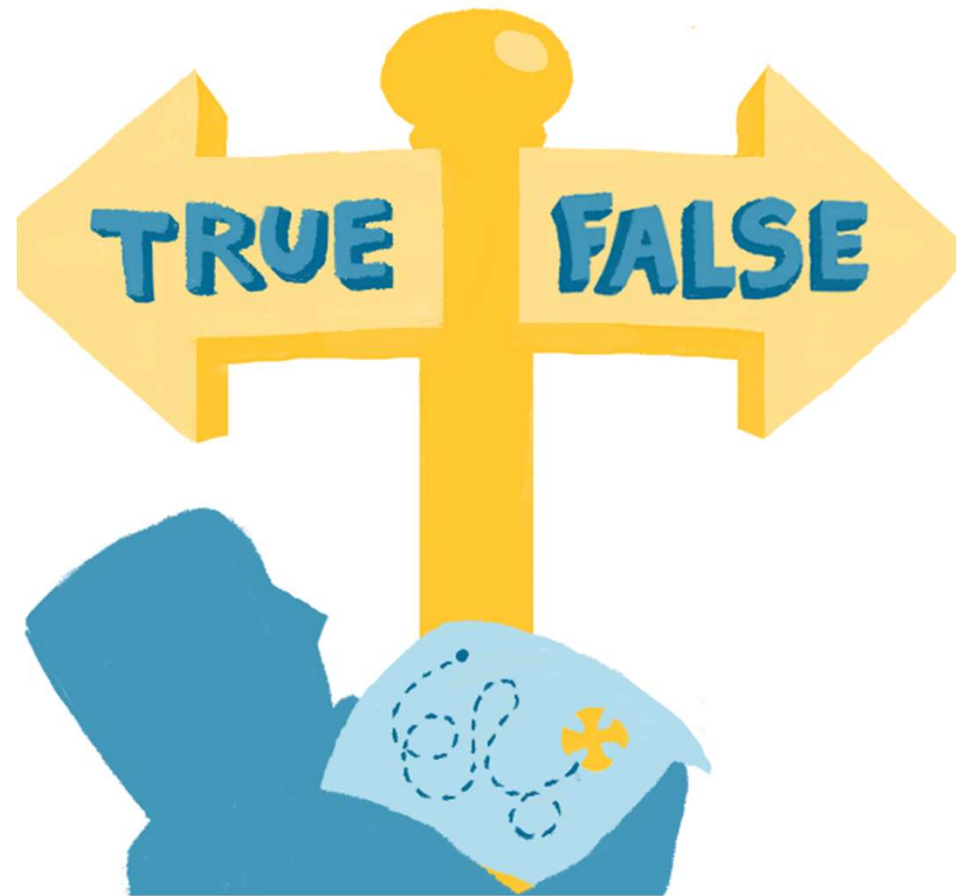
- Personal statement, letter of intent, statement of intent ... all the same thing!
- A way to bring your personal application to life, can be a way to “fill in the gaps”
- Generally:
 - Your research background, how it led to your interests, relevant training/experiences, why this program/advisor is a good fit for you (and vice versa!)

Examples of Personal Statement Leads

- **Clinical Psych:** Outline your study and/or research interests, career goals, and reasons for seeking admission (*OISE*).
- **Social Psychology:** Describe research activities to date, interests in psychology, personal background, career and personal objectives, future plans, and preferred supervisor(s) (*Queen's*).
- **I/O:** Describe your goals for graduate study and a professional career, relevant research experience, academic work in your area of specialization, and other relevant educational and life experiences... include a list of scholarships, prizes, honours... plus the title(s) of any publication(s) you are an author or co-author (*U Waterloo*).

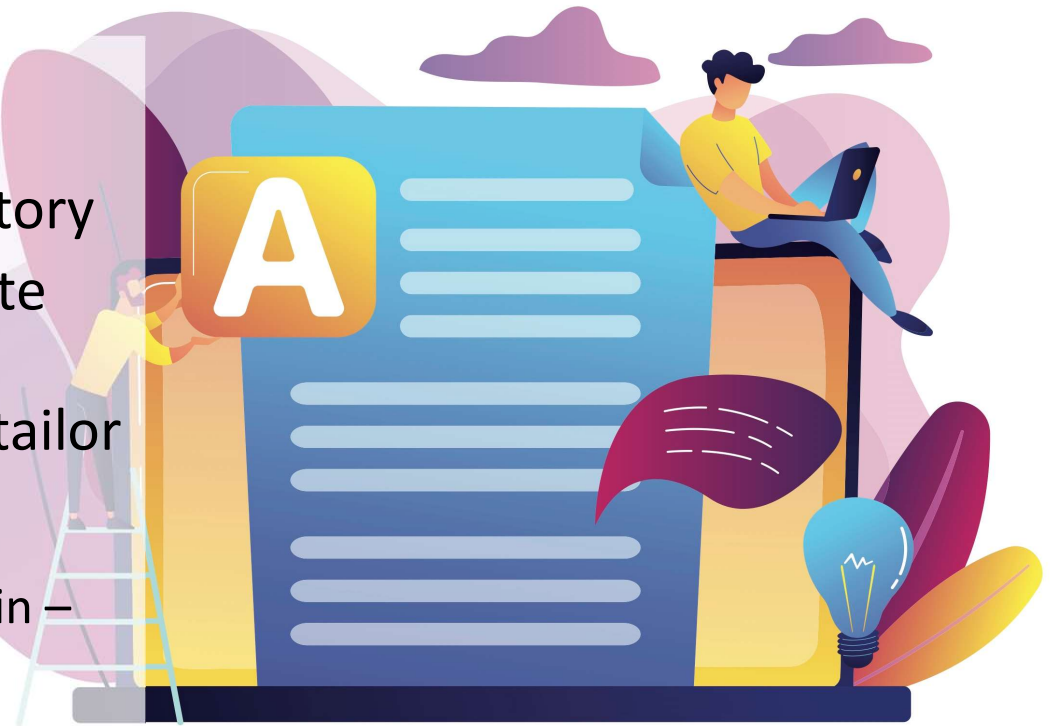
True or False?

I only need to write one
personal statement for all
of my applications



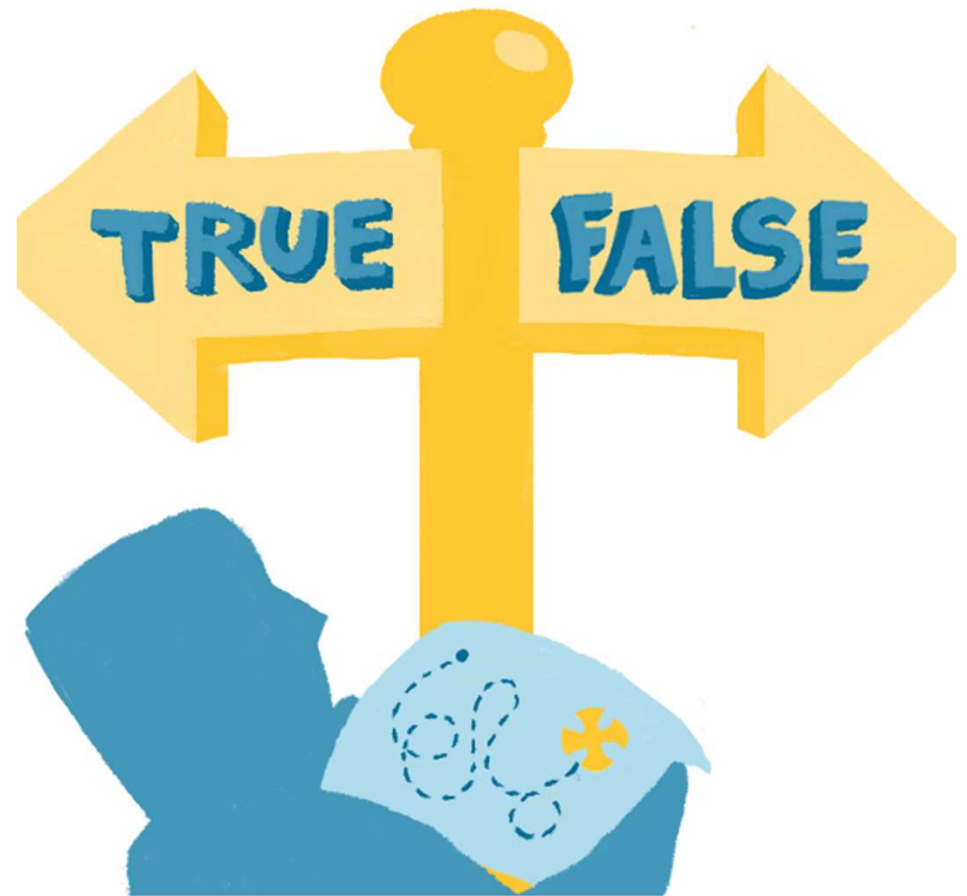
How do I write one?

- Start early and edit often! Ask others to read it over for you.
- Try to make it narrative, your story
- Ask for templates (e.g., graduate students in your lab)
- Start with a general one, then tailor for each program/advisor.
 - Write “key words” for each program/prof you’re interested in – use these to highlight in your personal statement



True or False?

I need to have perfect
research fit with my
advisor to be competitive

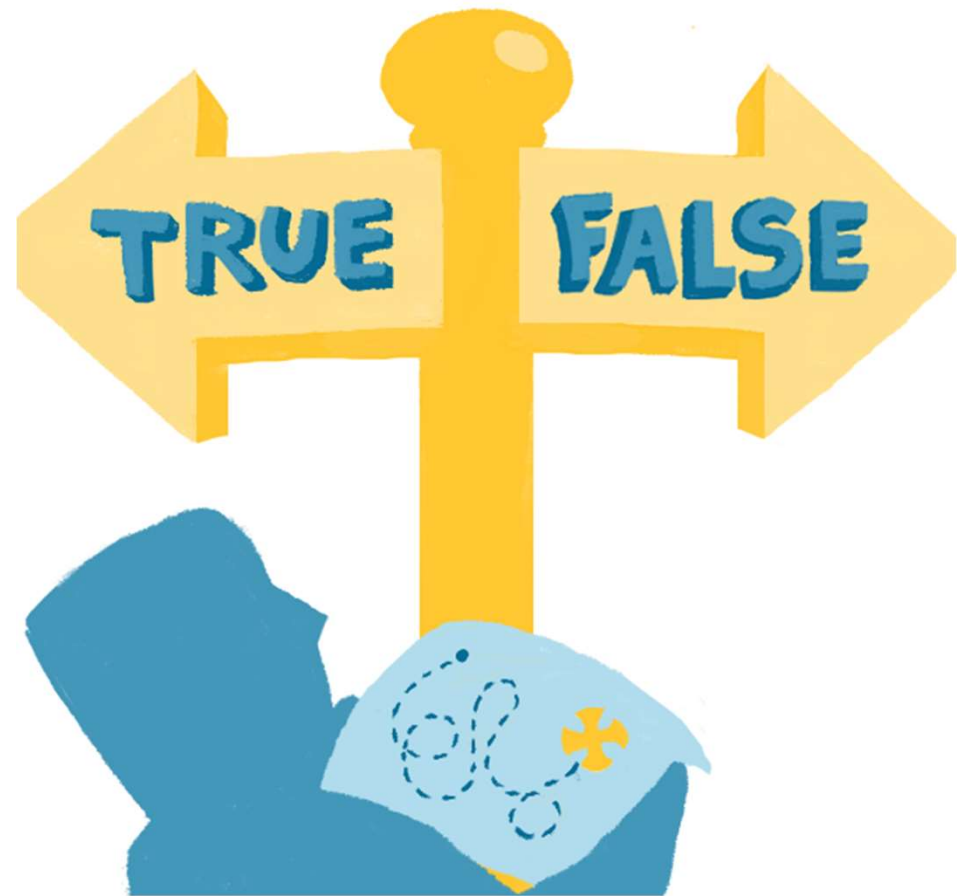


Research Fit

- #1: Make sure your supervisor is accepting students!
- Fit does not have to be 1:1
 - Review their previous research, have an idea for what you'd like to work on with them (but be flexible!)
- If not a “perfect fit” – highlight the research skills you learned, the evolution of your research questions, the populations you worked with
 - E.g., did you learn how to run an RCT? Qualitative methods?
 - Demonstrate how your research questions evolved
 - Work with one population can generalize to another
- Additionally - make sure your career goals fit with your supervisor's and program's training goals
 - E.g. scientist-practitioner is a common model

True or False?

It's best to include as much personal information as possible so the reader really gets to know me



Do's & Don'ts

Don't...

- Disclose information that could harm your chances
 - E.g., Mental illness, trauma
- Avoid addressing gaps or shortcomings
- Use it as a rehash of your CV
- Focus on clinical experience & interests
- Include cliched reasons for applying
 - I want to help people
- Copy and paste – the reader can tell
- Wait until the last minute

Do's & Don'ts

Do...

- Showcase your writing skills
 - Write clearly, concisely, in a straightforward manner
 - Have a logical narrative that naturally brings you to the present application
 - Show, don't tell
 - Proofread
- Highlight your ability to succeed as an *independent* researcher
- Include aspects that you think make you stand out from other applicants (in a good way!)



Eirini Boutakis

 eboutaki@uoguelph.ca

Resources

- Twitter (#AcademicTwitter)
- forum.thegradcafe.com
- *Insider's Guide to Graduate Programs in Clinical and Counseling Psychology* (Norcross & Sayette, 2020)
- *Getting In: A Step-by-Step Guide for Gaining Admission to Graduate School in Psychology* (APA, 2007)
- *Mitch's Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology* (Prinstein, 2017)
- *Kisses of Death in the Graduate School Application Process* (Appleby & Appleby, 2006)

An illustration featuring a variety of hands and forearms raised against a solid yellow background. The hands are depicted in different colors (white, grey, brown, blue, red, green) and some have distinct patterns like stripes or polka dots. The arms are raised in various directions, creating a sense of movement and diversity. A horizontal white band with thin blue borders runs across the middle of the image, containing the text "Questions?".

Questions?