Writing a Personal Statement

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Introduction

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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!)
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Resources

- Twitter (#AcademicTwitter)
- forum.thegradcafe.com
- *Mitch’s Uncensored Advice for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology* (Prinstein, 2017)
Questions?