Writing a Personal Statement for Fellowships and Awards
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.
Extended Tuesday hours, 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
(Fall and Spring semesters only)
Closed Fridays, 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. (Fall semester only)
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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