UIS CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER
PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDELINES

About Personal Statements

A personal statement, also known as a "statement of purpose" or "goal statement," is a document that demonstrates your writing ability on a more personal level for your application into a graduate program. Each graduate program will have its own set of guidelines that need to be paid close attention and followed precisely. The personal statement's guidelines will usually ask for your personal, career, and educational goals or answer a general question posed by the graduate school's admission committee.

Your personal statement will be used by the admission committee to gauge your critical and analytical thinking as well as your writing, editing skills, and general reasoning skills and your ability to reflect on your education and work experience. The personal statement is the admission committee's chance to get to know you and determine if you would be a good fit for their graduate program.

Format

The general format of a personal statement is rather basic. You have an introductory paragraph and a concluding paragraph that surround the body paragraphs. The length of your paragraphs and how many body paragraphs you will include will be determined by the guidelines the admissions committee will have for you. Other than that, open with something that will catch their attention, and finish with something strong and memorable. Also keep in mind that the services of the Career Development Center and the Center for Teaching and Learning are available to help you brainstorm, develop, or proofread your personal statement.

General Tips

- The first thing you will want to do above everything else is be yourself and not what you think the admissions committee is looking for. This will make everything easier when writing your personal statement, and it has the benefit of being genuine.

- Avoid cliché statements and ideals whenever possible. There are a million medical school applicants who want to be a doctor because they wanted to help people from an early age, but your personal story about helping your close friend several years ago is unique to you.

- Proofread, proofread, proofread. . . This does not apply to only you. Even the best writers make embarrassing mistakes. The best thing to do is to have as many people as possible proofread your paper.

- This is a personal statement and not your autobiography. It is recommendable to use your personal experience to reinforce your points, but do not make the personal experience itself the focus.

- For once, personal pronouns are not a bad thing. This statement is about you, and you can now use "I" and "me" without worry. Just remember that beginning every sentence with "I" would look rather conceited.

- If a question is asked, answer it completely with specific details and examples. It is respectful to the admissions committee and shows that you know how to follow directions. Not doing so could easily result in you not being considered for admission.

- Always write a new unique personal statement for each college you are applying for. The questions may be similar, but the intent behind them could be completely different. Give a sincere effort and find out what the college is looking for with their questions and answer them all as if it is the only school you are applying to.