



THE PERSONAL STATEMENT: GOALS AND POTENTIAL MODELS

Goals of the Personal Statement

- *Introduce yourself and supplement resume/CV*
 - Reveal motivations and demonstrate ability to reflect and share meaning with others
 - “What makes you tick”
 - This document ought to be “singular”; only you could write this. This is why we do not share other students’ personal statements.
 - Blending personal and academic voice
 - Its success rests on concrete details and authentic reflection, not sweeping commentary about the world and your ability/potential to save it
 - Avoid clichés and hyperbole
 - Be precise, descriptive, concise
 - Jump into your story quickly
 - Personal Statement is the (underlying) WHY of your application
 - Trace back passions in time and space; avoid the easy, surface-level explanation
- *Show yourself to be an interesting candidate, but also a solid, trustworthy one*
 - Array of skills, knowledge, interests; drive to succeed; awareness of self and others
 - It is NOT a diary or musings on your life or the world; it’s more focused than that
- *Define your current sense of self, for yourself and for others. IN OTHER WORDS, you need to be genuine, but in doing so, you need to try to get outside of your head and consider your readers.*

Two Potential Models (there are others)

- *Past, present, future you*
 - Past: Compact opening (“hook”); a defining (but not necessarily harrowing) life event
 - It needn’t be the time you were stranded in a rainforest. Don’t overlook the mundane!
 - Present: Discussion of 1–3 important achievements/interests that define who you today
 - Tip: Reflect on activities and write them out separately at first; see what comes to life
 - Eventually, though, transitions become crucial; you cannot simply present a list of achievements or write your CV in narrative form
 - Future: Define it. Where you hope to go, why you’re ready for it, and how the award you’re applying for fits into that trajectory. (Why you *want* to go there should be apparent by now.)
 - Contextualize it within the scope of the opportunity/award
- *Intellectual autobiography*
 - How your thinking has evolved, especially in relation to your core pursuit(s).
 - Progression from objective to reflective to *interpretive thinking* (i.e., knowledge of how a personal experience or view fits into the larger world, into an historical context)
 - Ends with “Decision” level of thinking
 - Now what?
 - How have you prepared for this next step?
 - What is your future resolve?



THE PERSONAL STATEMENT: BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

What questions do you ask yourself?

What are you passionate about? What is your “thing”? What common thread runs through your commitments?

What troubles you about the world? What are you doing about it? What *might* you do about it? (Ultimately, you’ll want to strike an optimistic tone!)

What activity, person, place has been most influential in bringing you to the point of making this application?

Why this opportunity? Why you?

How have you turned challenges into opportunities?

Why are you studying your subject, and how have you come to understand the challenges/opportunities in it?

Where have you been in the world that has shaped your sense of self and your place in the world?

What are your greatest dreams, and how are you building the foundation from which to launch them?

What is the one thing you want people to trust you with inside of your community(-ies)? How are you building that reputation among your friends and colleagues?

What reputation are you working to avoid?

What do you want to be remembered for?

What was most formative about your life up to this point?

What sets you apart?

What inspires you? Who inspires you? (Remember, the Personal Statement is about YOU, but this can still be a useful prompt.)

- As a starter, you might give a 6-word memoir a try: <https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/>
- And ... please use these resources liberally: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/applicants/application-components> & <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/applicants/application-tips>