

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER
20+ years of student success
www.csulb.edu/uwc
(562) 985 – 5162
SSC - 245

Personal Statements

Overview: Personal statements (sometimes called statements of purpose) are commonly an important part of applications to start a new degree or program. You may need a personal statement if you are applying to graduate school, a certificate program, an impacted major, an internship, or a study-abroad opportunity. Make sure to follow any instructions given by the program very carefully when writing your personal statement, but what follows are a few recommendations if you aren't sure what to include.

Every personal statement should address two major questions:

1. Why is this a good program for you?
2. Why are you a good candidate for the program?

Depending on the nature of the program you may also address some or all of the following:

3. Will this program help you reach your career or personal goals? How?
4. What about you makes you a good candidate? This may be work experience, volunteer experience, academic interests, classes you have already taken in the field, etc. Explain specifically how these experiences have prepared you for this program.
5. Why is this particular program a good fit for you? Why are you applying to this program instead of a similar one elsewhere? Your personal statement should be tailored to each application you are submitting. Are there specific people you are hoping to work with? Are there resources available at this program that would not be available elsewhere?
6. Any areas of interest that are especially important to you. For example, if you are a nursing major and you are especially interested in diabetes research, mention that, and explain how this program could help you begin/continue that research.
7. Research, projects, or work experience that directly relates to the field and supports your application.
8. Who you are as an academic. If you are applying to an academic program, you want to give the admissions committee an idea of who you are as a colleague in the same field.
9. Any other information that you want to emphasize from your application packet that supports your admission. Remember, this statement is your chance to directly argue that you are a good candidate.
10. If there is anything in your application that you feel may negatively affect your admission, this may be a good place to briefly explain it. However, don't bring it up unless you feel you **MUST** say something, and there is no other good place to do so. Even then, don't spend too much time

explaining any deficiencies or oddities. You want the committee to stay focused on the positive aspects of your application. For example, if you had to leave school for a year because of an illness, you might write: “My education suffered a setback in Fall 2011 when I took a year-long medical leave of absence from the university, however I was able to return the following year and finish my degree with honors.”

Remember, always be honest and straightforward in these essays. There are usually very strict word limits for personal statements, so use the limited space wisely. Don't spend it on flowery language, extended anecdotes, or humor.

Practice: Once you've finished writing the basic content of your personal statement, take a moment to analyze how it works as a cohesive piece. Does it flow smoothly? Does it have a clear purpose that all the sentences work towards? Are there any word choices that you should re-think? Is the tone appropriate?