

# Writing Personal Statements

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**Conceptual Framework:**  
**A statement that is personal**

# What has brought you to this moment?

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- Yes - this is a brief biography.
- No - it should not encompass every aspect of your life that is of interest to **you**.
- **The reader** is a person who has a unique interpretive framework.
  - They do not know you, or share your memories.
  - They have much more knowledge about your field and about graduate students than you do.
- Imagine that you are evaluating others' statements about wanting to join your discipline. What kinds of information will help you feel confident about that applicant's capabilities and promise in the field?



# Anchor your narrative

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- The statement should include some biographical information in your introduction.
  - Where/what are you studying?
  - Where are you from?
  - Biographical aspects that may influence your direction.
- However, the bulk of the statement should form a **narrative**, and that story should be anchored by the purpose at hand:
  - Why do you want to study this discipline at the graduate level?
  - What do you bring to the table as an individual? Why do you want to study in this particular program?
- Consider what aspects of your story are emphasized by the application's prompt.



# Determining Your Narrative

# How have you experienced your pathway to this application?

There are many possibilities, here are the most common variants:

- You/your family have “always known”.
- You had a life altering experience. An epiphany or lightning-strike moment
- You have tried some different paths, or can identify different mile-markers in your path to this application.
- **Note:** *Unless you are applying to a creative-writing program, there is no need to write in a literary/dramatic fashion (nor academic) - think “journalistic” writing to set the tone.*



# Developing Your Narrative

# Option #1: Prophecy/Destiny

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- Identify when and how you became conscious of this idea.
- What and who do you associate with you becoming aware of this?
- What have you participated in or experienced to move you closer to this sense of destiny?





# Option #2: A Sudden Jolt

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- Develop the story of your epiphany
  - What was the situation?
  - Who was involved?
  - How did you recognize that something had changed?
  - How have your activities and engagements shifted as a result of this epiphany?
  - What have you done to test or confirm your new path?



# Option #3: A Breadcrumb trail

Handle breadcrumb trails...  
Like a boss :)

- Identify a sequence
  - Perhaps you've changed direction...
    - Where were you headed before?
    - Why the shift?
    - Why is this the new direction you have chosen?
  - Perhaps there have been a series of interests.
    - Describe what has attracted you to each.
    - Illustrate how you have found your way to this.
  - Looking back, you see the moments that somehow came together.
    - Happenstance experience that sparked an idea.
    - How you experimented with or developed your interest.
    - How you confirmed that this is your path.
- Try to ID 2-3 episodes along your trajectory



# Tell S.T.A.R. Stories



**Situation** - What was the background?

**Task** - What was the challenge or unexpected development


**Action** - What was your reaction?  
How did you try to deal with the situation?

**Result** - What happened? What did you learn?

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**Once you have explained “why this degree” ...**

# Demonstrate why you would like to attend that particular school/program.



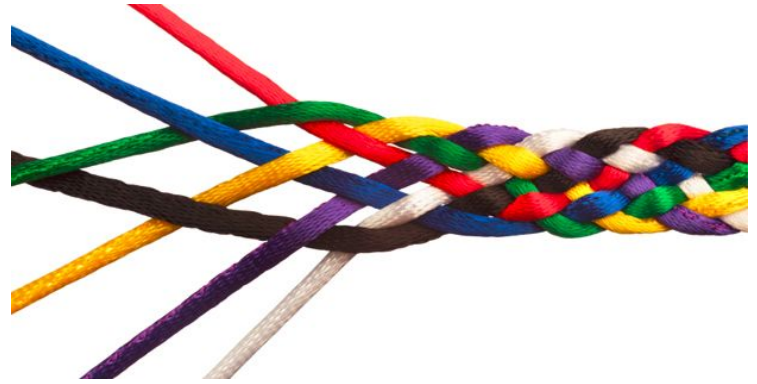
- Provide reasons that are tangible and credible.
  - If they are not genuine to you, they will not appear so to the reader.
  - Consider how easy it is to tell when you read or hear someone who clearly has no specific conviction for what they are saying.
- You might pursue your degree in a number of places, so consider:
  - Shared points of interest with faculty.
  - Novel aspects of the program structure or philosophy that appeal to you.
  - Location (good weather might not be a great 'sell', but lots of local activity in the field you are studying might be).
  - Prestige may be important, but any applicant could claim interest in that - it's not very interesting and shouldn't be the main draw.

# Don't forget to mention what you bring to the table.

- Honors/Awards
- Relevant experiences [internships, work, research, volunteer...]
- Special training or certifications you have received
- Skills you have developed that could help peripherally
  - Leadership
  - Mentorship/teaching/tutoring
  - Technical skills and certifications



# Connect your skills and experience to the demands of the program, like a cover letter.



Sample connection phrasings:

- “My internship experiences with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ allowed me to develop \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ skills...”
- “In my work with \_\_\_\_\_, I collaborated constantly with other team members to ensure...”
- “Beyond my \_\_\_\_\_ coursework, my experience with \_\_\_\_\_ allowed me to further develop my capabilities in \_\_\_\_\_...”

**Don't forget to mention particular interests you have in terms of research or specialization - particularly if those interests align with faculty or program partnerships.**



# Sample Outline

Personalize as Appropriate

- Intro
  - Biographical overview
  - Thesis or roadmap
    - Path Development Narrative #1
    - Path Development Narrative #2
    - Path Development Narrative #3
  - Interest in particular program
  - Connection of skills/attributes to needs of the program
  - What Could the future hold?
  - Summation, restatement of interest
  - Gratitude


# Don't forget to triple-check... How?



- Grammar, punctuation, spelling.
- Does your content point towards the program and the specifics of the essay prompt?
- Does your writing flow conversationally in a way that is logical?
- Walk away, then read out loud.
- Have others read it... and then to specifically evaluate these factors.
  - Ask faculty/mentors!
  - CDC will do this for you!
- All decent writing involves multiple revisions...
  - Build in time for revision.
  - Don't be unnerved by needing to revise multiple times.

# Let's critique some samples!

[for critique workshop - not exemplars!]

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- [Law School](#)
  - [Psychology](#)
  - [Psychology #2](#)
  - [Biomed](#)
  - [Social Work](#)

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