

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

When you are applying for admission as a new college freshman, it is recommended that you submit a personal statement with your completed application form. It is a very important part of your application and could be read and reviewed by both admissions and scholarships offices of campuses to which you apply.

Why is the personal statement so important?

The personal statement gives you an opportunity to tell the admission committee circumstances in your background that may not be evident in other parts of your application. The personal statement allows the committee to discover and evaluate distinctions among applicants whose academic records often show only minor differences. Reviewed together, your academic record and your personal statement, along with your resume of accomplishments and activities, help the admissions committee gain insight into your level of academic, personal and extracurricular achievement. Consider the personal statement as an opportunity to reveal the real person behind the grades, test scores, and recommendations. It's your chance to distinguish yourself from those equally as qualified.

What do they look for in my personal statement?

Often, admissions committees will look for the following characteristics: Creativity; intellectual curiosity and achievement; exceptional personal or academic recognition; unusual talent or ability; initiative; motivation; leadership; persistence; service to others; special potential; substantial experience with other cultures; and your ability to overcome or manage unusual circumstances, challenges or hardships. Your personal statement helps the committee to discover a sense of you as an individual and to envision the contribution you might make on a campus setting. Your personal statement need not include all of the characteristics listed above; you may wish to focus on one or two aspects of your life as a student, or describe one value or goal. You may also write about the way in which an activity or experience changed your attitude about something, crystallized a conviction, or helped you to establish a goal. It is an opportunity for the quality of your individual character to emerge. No matter what you choose to write about, remember that it is a chance to tell them *who you are*, and to give them a sense of your character and vitality.

What is a good personal statement?

There is no single "good" personal statement. A carefully composed, reflective personal statement that tells the committee about you is much more likely to be effective and to make a favorable impression than a hastily written one. Overall, correct grammar, spelling and sentence structure can contribute to a good personal statement, as can providing specific details and effective examples. The committee is interested not only in what you have done, but also in the choices you have made and what you have gained as a result of those choices.

What makes a personal statement unsuccessful?

In general, ignoring the prompt or failing to give adequate thought or preparation to your statement will most certainly cause it to be less successful. Additionally, there are particular types of statements that are often ineffective. Here are some examples:

- **The List**
The list usually repeats information that is found elsewhere in the application; for instance, mentioning AP or Honors courses or listing activities, honors or

awards listed elsewhere would add little to the committee's understanding of your individuality and tells them only what you do, not who you are.

- **The Attempt at Humor**
Some applicants try to be funny or rely heavily on a gimmick such as a poem or an unusually creative essay. While a sense of humor is a valuable quality and may add a positive dimension to a personal statement, most attempts to be exceptionally clever do not succeed and do not help in the competitive admission process.
- **The Other Person**
Other applicants choose to write about someone who is important to them—a grandparent, parent, teacher or friend. This kind of essay can be compelling and very moving. Nevertheless, to be effective, you must demonstrate in the statement, the way this person influenced your life, your response to that influence, or the ways in which he or she contributed to your development. Your essay may reflect a significant level of insight into the life of the other person, but it is important to remember that the admissions office is considering YOU for admission, not the other person.
- **The Past**
For some students, the entire focus of their personal statement is an experience from early childhood. In order to have any relevance or to be useful at all, the information you share must reflect more recent activities or events and explain the ways in which these experiences have helped you grow, learn or mature. To recount childhood events—however traumatic—without putting them into the context of your current life fails to take advantage of the opportunity afforded you by the personal statement.
- **The Revelation**
Many applicants choose to write about a turning point in their lives. To be successful, however, this type of personal statement must clearly and convincingly show the way this experience formed your life or related to your current goals and aspirations, especially if the experience occurred early in your life.

Do I have a better chance of being admitted if I write about unusual circumstances or hardship?

Not necessarily. Unusual circumstances or hardship alone do not make a personal statement more effective. In fact, it is far better to reveal your character and display your intellectual vitality rather than to describe a hardship or unusual circumstance just for the sake of including such an experience, particularly if the hardship seems forced or superficial. If you do choose to write about difficulties you have faced, focus on what you learned or achieved as a result of the circumstances, *not* on the specific hardship.

You can certainly succeed in your personal statement if you decide to incorporate any of the approaches or subjects mentioned here. Bear in mind, however, the problem with an unsuccessful essay is rarely the topic itself, but the manner in which the topic is presented.

For further assistance, refer to www.collegeboard.org/collapps/essay, www.petersons.com/uqrad/application, or www.collegequest.com