

10 Tips on Writing a Personal Statement

- 1. Avoid clichés.** Let them hear your voice.
Example: Describe a specific volunteer experience rather than saying you like to help people.
- 2. Be entertaining.**
Example: You could begin the statement with a captivating snapshot. Notice how this blunt, jarring sentence creates intrigue and keeps the reader's interest.
“I was six years old, the eldest of six children in the Bronx, when my father was murdered.”
- 3. Stay focused. Don't wander.** One image, one experience, or one idea.
- 4. Details, details, details. Show. Don't tell.**
Example:
(Before) If it were not for a strong support system which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.
(After) Although my grandmother and I didn't have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than did the other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.
- 5. Be concise.** Avoid wasting space and confusing your reader.
Example:
(Before) My recognition of the fact that we had finally completed the research project was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.
(After) Completing the research project gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.
- 6. Start early. Don't wait until the last minute.** The earlier the better.
- 7. Vary your sentences and use effective transitions.**
Ex: Longer sentences can be used when building a specific image while shorter sentences can draw attention to important ideas.
- 8. Use action verbs; avoid passive voice.**
Passive-voice: verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb.
Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as was or were.
Example:
(Passive) The lessons that have prepared me for my career as a doctor were taught to me by my mother.
(Active) My mother taught me lessons that will prove invaluable in my career as a doctor.
- 9. Seek multiple opinions.**
Find trusted, knowledgeable readers. Avoid overwhelming yourself with too many opinions. I suggest three: one to read for content, one for organization, and one for grammar/mechanics – in that order.
- 10. Revise.** Give yourself plenty of time to revise but know when to stop.

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