

# Application Personal Statement and Essay Resources and Tips



Apply Missouri

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Before writing your personal statement/essay for an admission application, ask yourself these questions:

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the admissions committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre ACT/SAT scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success at college? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, and analytical) do you possess?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

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## General Advice

### Answer the questions that are asked

- If you are applying to several schools, you may find questions in each application that are somewhat similar.
- Don't be tempted to use the same statement/essay for all applications. It is important to answer each question being asked, and if slightly different answers are needed, you should write separate statements/essays. In every case, be sure your answer fits the question being asked.

### Tell a story

- Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is to bore the admissions committee. If your statement/essay is fresh, lively, and different, you'll be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself memorable.

### Be specific

- Don't, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

### Find an angle

- If you're like most people, your life story lacks drama, so figuring out a way to make it interesting becomes the big challenge. Finding an angle or "hook" is vital.

### Concentrate on your opening paragraph

- The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement/essay.

### Do some research, if needed

- If a school wants to know why you're applying to it rather than another school, do some research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.

### Write well and correctly

- Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many admissions officers say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.

### Avoid clichés

- A medical school applicant who writes that he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought. Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements.

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## Rules

1. Strive for depth rather than breadth. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences.
2. Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say.
3. Provide the reader with insight into what drives you.
4. Be yourself, not the 'ideal' applicant.
5. Get creative and imaginative in the opening remarks, but make sure it's something that no one else could write.
6. Address the school's unique features that interest you.
7. Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them.
8. Proofread carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style.
9. Use readable fonts, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins.
10. Focus on the positive in the personal statement/essay. Do not be negative; it can give the reader the wrong impression of you.

## Pitfalls

1. Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application.
2. Do not complain or whine about the "system" or circumstances in your life.
3. Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme.
4. Do not talk about money as a motivator.
5. Do not discuss your minority status or disadvantaged background unless you have a compelling and unique story that relates to it.
6. Do not remind the school of its rankings or tell them how good they are.
7. Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions
  - o "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is . . ."
  - o "This question asks me to discuss . . ."
  - o "I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application."
  - o "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school."
  - o "In sum, there are three reasons why should admit me . . ."
8. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages.
9. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested.
10. Do not get the name of the school wrong.
11. Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words.