

Writing a Personal Statement

(Questions below are from *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement* by Richard Setzer.)

Many types of applications—college, graduate school, jobs, internships, and scholarships to name a few—may ask you to include a personal statement. Selection committees are looking for a sense of who you are as a person through your voice, completeness of thought, evidence of maturity, and reflection on your life. A personal statement should be completely free of any mechanical errors. The questions listed below are designed to help you develop your personal statement.

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story? What details of your life might help your reader better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants? These could include personal or family difficulties and challenges, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals, achievements you have made.
- When did you originally become interested in this field and what have you since learned about it—and about yourself—that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
- If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has the work contributed to your personal growth?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain? Did you, for example, earn an average MCAT score but have outstanding grades? Did you take a year off from school to work or pursue some other activity?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life? These could include economic, familial, or physical difficulties and challenges.
- What personal characteristics do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in this field or profession? For example, integrity, compassion, or persistence. Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills do you possess? For example, leadership, communicative, or analytical?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate—and more successful and effective in the profession or field—than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the reader to select your application?