



# Grad School Personal Statements



CAREER CENTER  
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

# Today's Goals

- Familiarize yourself with types of questions asked in graduate school applications
- Provide general tips on writing personal statements/application questions
- Provide suggestions on how to tell your story/structuring essay
- Answer questions you may have



# Personal Statement vs Statement of Purpose

## **Personal Statement**

Background of who you are and how your experience has shaped your interests

## **Statement of Purpose**

Highlight academic preparation, career goals, and why you want to obtain a graduate degree.

**Some programs will require one over the other or a combo of both.  
Ultimately, the written statement addresses your interests, skills, experiences,  
and how graduate school will prepare you for your career goals.**



What thoughts and feelings are you experiencing when writing personal statements?

# Acknowledgements

## It is normal to feel awkward writing about yourself.

- We often do not write in first person in academic settings
- Some fields require more writing than other fields and some of us need practice
- Some of us are not socialized to write about our skills and accomplishments

## You are Enough

- Practice self compassion. You are enough. You do not need to be perfect to be accepted into graduate school.
- **There is no one ideal candidate.** Admissions are looking for diverse cohorts. They want students who have diverse degrees, backgrounds, ideas, experiences, and goals.

## Your Personal Statement will always be a work in progress



# Elements of a Personal Statement

Every program will ask you to address specific prompts or topics.

**Remember to answer the question(s).**

## **Common Questions ask:**

- What experiences informed your decision to pursue a graduate degree in XYZ Field?
- **Why** that field?
- What skills or experiences have you gained that prepare you for the field/grad program/ and how will they contribute to the field?
- General career goals
- Why this specific program?



# Telling your Story

- 1. What experiences informed your decision to pursue a graduate degree in XYZ Field?**
  - Conversations with a stranger
  - Internship experience
  - Classroom Dialogue
  - Family background
- 2. Write down a memory and why it was impactful to your journey (5 minutes)**



# Skills and Experiences

- **What skills or experiences have you gained that prepare you for the field/grad program? What did you learn about the field or yourself?**
  - Internships
  - Research
  - Capstones
  - Class projects
  - Shadowing
- **Do not list everything that you have done.** Name in detail one or two experiences.





# Name your Goals

~~I want to help people.~~

I want to support children through art therapy.

~~I want to make the world more sustainable.~~

I want to be apart of finding solutions to eliminate plastic waste in our oceans.

## **Ask your self.**

Who do you want to support?

What solutions/research/ initiatives do you want to be apart?



# *Why XYZ Program*

**Write a paragraph on why the specific program.**

- Learn their Mission and Values
- Programs offered
- Faculty
- Classes
- Research



# Why XZY Program

- I chose Seattle University as the place to pursue my graduate studies for several reasons; I want to challenge myself academically and professionally. In speaking with Garick Sherburn in graduate admissions, I learned about the many benefits of the SDA program. As a social learner, I feel I will benefit greatly from the cohort model and the assistantship program. The theory to practice experience is an important component of student affairs work, and the additional internship requirements will allow me to hone my skills. Furthermore, I feel Seattle University is an institution that greatly supports its students. When speaking with Mr. Sherburn, he kept mentioning the strong connections that are built within the program and after graduation



# Supplemental Questions

**Undergraduate Performance:** If you do not think that your academic record or accurately reflect your ability to succeed in a graduate program, please tell us why.

- **Briefly** explain what impacted your academics (COVID, disability, working multiple jobs, single parent, commuting long distances, original major was not academically stimulating, not knowing campus resources etc. )
- Shift focus on what you have learned about yourself and what have you done to manage or navigate challenges? **Describes successes.**



# Supplemental Questions Example

In addition to my work experiences, I believe my grade point average and my course of study reflect my ability to academically succeed in a graduate program. Once I realized my interest for XYZ field, I changed my major from business to social science and started exploring graduate programs. I graduated with 2.9 GPA, however, looking at the last 6 quarters of my undergrad, I had an average GPA of a 3.6. My interest in study and my motivation to attend graduate school were the reasons for my improvement.



# Personal Statement Structure (options)

- Past
- Present
- Future

- Present
- Past
- Future

- Future
- Past
- Present
- Future



# TIPS

- Have at least two people review your personal statement for content and grammar
- Answer the prompt
- Read your personal statement out loud
- Have an accountability system
- Block 30 minute on writing your essay with no edit. Just write. Edit later.
- If discussing hardships, Focus more on your energy writing how you over came the hardship.
  - Protect your energy and your story.
- Read the mission and values of the program
- Convert to PDF
- Don't know something, contact the department and ask!

