



**How to write  
a personal statement  
for college**



## Welcome to EssayEdge's College Statements!

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When applying to undergraduate programs, the time you need to write a personal statement for college can be one of the most daunting aspects of the process. It is also one of the most important, because it is your best opportunity to demonstrate who you are as a person, helping to humanize you in a manner that the other aspects of the application, such as your transcript, cannot.

Creating a great college personal statement requires much more than just 'writing about yourself'. And the amount of advice available can make it difficult to discern what things need to be included in your college personal statement. Here are some pointers to keep you focused as you work toward having a final product that is submission-ready.

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# How to Write a Personal Statement for College

Schools take different approaches to how you should compose your personal statement for college. Some will ask you to discuss specific aspects about yourself and your life experience. In such instances, it is essential that you respond to each prompt in detail. Provide not just the factual information requested, but also in a manner that offers insight into your personality and character. Other schools will offer you the chance to write a more open-ended essay about whatever you choose to discuss.

In each case, the most important thing you can do is to write in your own voice. Do not try to be overly formal. An essay that is too dry will tend to make you lose the reader's interest. Worse yet, it will cause you to blend in with the multitude of other applicants. Remember that the admissions committee is reading hundreds if not thousands of these essays, make yourself stand out. At the same time, you should make sure that your writing is grammatically sound and with a sense of purpose that reflects the seriousness with which you are taking this process.

## Open-ended Essay Prompts

In the instances where the essay prompt is open-ended, you should not try to tell your entire life story or focus too much on your academic achievements or anything else that will be covered in your transcript. Instead, you should try to convey something uniquely personal about yourself. Anecdotes that show how you overcame a challenge, accomplished something meaningful or demonstrate your strength of

character and how you have grown and developed through interesting or unusual experiences can be particularly effective in this regard. Discussing your personal interests, hobbies and extracurricular activities and how you have pursued them will also help distinguish you as an individual and set you apart from other candidates.

# How to Close an Essay

In closing the essay, there are three main things you should discuss. First, it's always beneficial to discuss the specific reasons you wish to attend the program you're applying for. Also, discuss the ways that you are a good fit for it both academically and socially. Lastly, talk about what you hope to take from your education there and what you can contribute to the school's community during your time there.

For example, you can discuss your intention to engage actively both inside and outside the classroom. You could include extracurricular activities and clubs you plan to participate in. You could also talk about the resources that the school offers which you intend to take full advantage of.

This will demonstrate not only your suitability for the school but also the fact that you have researched it extensively and are very serious in your desire to pursue your undergraduate studies there. Schools want individuals who will maximize their time there both as students and as eager participants in all that campus life has to offer. By demonstrating your enthusiasm for both, you are bound to impress the admissions committee.



# Keeping Your College Personal Statement Personal

The word *'personal'* is used in many contexts. Personal ads, personalized products, personal space, telling people 'That's personal!' – none of these are helpful in figuring out what it means to keep your college personal statement 'personal'. Personal in what way? While you'll often hear advice on how important this is, it is difficult to find information on how exactly to accomplish this.

*For this reason, many applicants just skip this altogether and create a college personal statement that is really just their resume in literary format.* This type of essay offers little value to the admissions officers. After reading it, they're no wiser to who you are as an individual or how good of a match you are for their program. Others go to the opposite extreme, telling stories that are not appropriate for the admissions process. This can make admissions officers uncomfortable, just as it would for any person to pour their heart out to a stranger. Moreover, it can make you seem like a person who does not have good boundaries, and this can greatly hurt your chance of receiving an acceptance letter.



## **“Your College Personal Statement Should Include Positive, Relevant Information That is Specific to You as an Individual**

Although it is important to include details from your life, all of the detail, anecdotes, and examples that you use in your college personal statement should be highly focused and relevant to the college admissions process. While the fact that your family’s move from one side of the country to another may have been the most significant event in your life, it is not necessarily the one that will best help the admissions committee. Even though the children at your new school may have taunted you and generally made your life miserable, that type of story is far too negative for your college personal statement. Also, it is focused on others and their wrongdoing. Your personal statement should convey information about you, your goals, and your successes thus far.

*For your college personal statement, you will need to select the accomplishments that have the most meaning to you and best express your individual strengths and character.*

Writing about taking a leadership role in a team environment and taking that team to new heights will have much more significance than just writing that you were the president of five different organizations. By offering insight into your achievements, you will have a college personal statement that helps the admissions committee get to know you as a unique person.

# Keeping Your College Personal Statement Engaging

There is much talk in the world of college admissions about 'dazzling' or (even worse) 'wow-ing' admissions officers in your personal statement essay. While your college personal statement is your chance to express yourself, avoiding trying to crowd it with too much flair. As a rule: if you are 'trying' to be interesting, you are probably going in the wrong direction. Here are some tips to keep your college personal statement from losing the reader's interest.

## Hold the Reader's Attention by Making Your College Personal Statement Sincere and Succinct

In reality, keeping your college personal statement engaging is actually not that difficult to do. Be yourself, but within the context of a relevant and polished college personal statement. This is the information that admissions officers are looking for to help them decide if you belong in their program. It is too much to ask of other people to figure you out for you, and it takes time to find the right words and phrases that will best express your purpose and potential to others. Keep the admissions officers engaged in your essay by being honest, getting to the point, and demonstrating enthusiasm.



### Overuse of Adjectives

Being descriptive is excellent. Writing about the 'snowy, dark, early morning hour' where you had to wait at the 'desolate, poorly-lit bus station joined by only a few other isolated souls braving the cold' is tedious. It's fine to state directly that it was a challenge to wake up so early, but your enthusiasm for your job, project, etc. made it worthwhile.





## Awkward Vocabulary Choices

While it is desirable to demonstrate that your vocabulary is at the level it needs to be (SAT, GRE, etc.), you don't need to use every word you know in your college personal statement. Instead, just write what you have to say. During the revision process, if you can substitute a synonym, then do so. Simple writing is always better than asking the admissions officers to muddle through a string of words to figure out what it is you are trying to say.



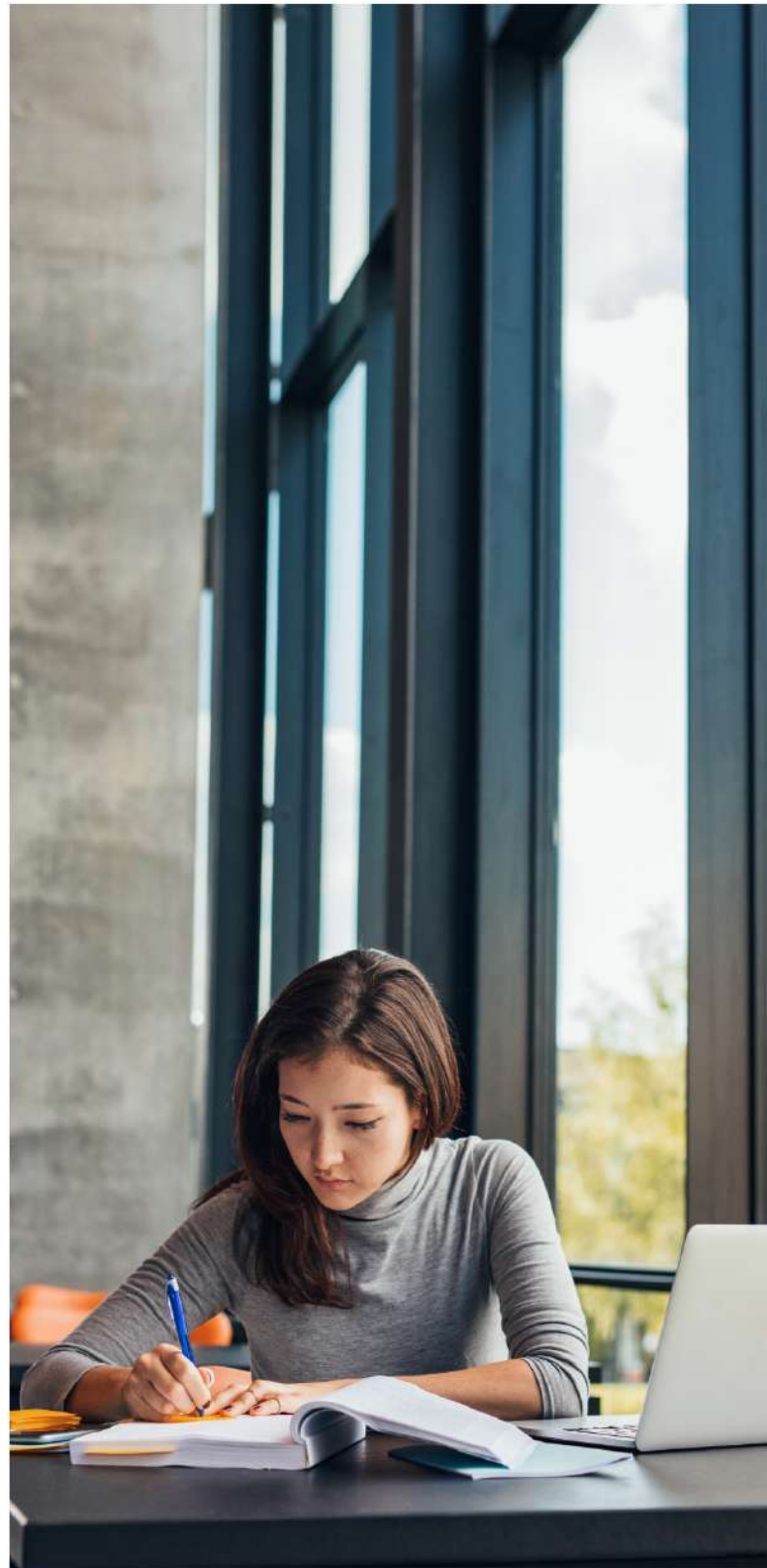
## Irrelevant Life Events

Stories that are great at the dinner table are not necessarily the ones that are going to most useful for your college personal statement. Make sure that you are relaying not only anecdotes about your life that are exciting, but also ones that reflect your goals, skills, and quality of character that the admissions officers are seeking.



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# Keeping Your College Personal Statement the Right Length

Achieving an ideal college personal statement length can make the difference between a personal statement that is read in its entirety, one that is skimmed, or one that is quickly dismissed. This is something that many applicants struggle with as they work to create their personal statements. And it is completely understandable. In an effort to fully convey a story or to explain complicated situations, people often end up with a college personal statement that is significantly longer than what is allowed for the application process.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for applicants to write out their entire essay, only to realize that they will need to cut one-third or more of the essay to bring it within the personal statement word or character count limits.

*However, this situation can be avoided through careful planning so that you can keep your college personal statement the right length.*

The most amazing anecdote, the story of your above-and-beyond most significant accomplishment, or the explanation of the most challenging experience will not work in your favor if it does not fit into the length of the essay. Therefore, brainstorming your essay ideas and creating a basic outline will prove helpful in the creation of your college personal statement. If you know you only have 500 words to work with, decide in advance how much space to devote to each paragraph and stick to it when you are in the actual writing process.

## What questions you should ask yourself before writing

The hardest part of any piece of writing is the moment when you try to start. The most helpful decision, in such case, would be to use a template or a format that can help you quickly create a roadmap of how the finished application essay should look like. It is always a good idea to get a starting point and define the general direction of your writing. Also, you should think about the questions related to your main academic area of interest, activities, and life-events.

## What questions you should ask yourself before writing

Programs are increasingly imposing hard word count or character count limits, especially for centralized application systems. This is true even if there are no set word counts or character limits for your college personal statement. However, other programs offer guidelines, approximate, or 'ideal' lengths while still allowing you to submit a college personal statement that is the length that you choose. While your application will not be rejected outright if you include a personal statement that is significantly longer, take your program's guidelines very seriously. They're telling you what they want. They're just also giving you some leeway to say what you need to say.

## What is the difference in length for Law, Medical, MBA, and College Personal Statements?

Generally, personal statements are short. Most schools require approximately 1-2 pages, but you should take extra care to the instructions you get from the particular Law school, Medical school, MBA program or college. Don't view 'soft' guidelines as a free-for-all. Not going over 10% of the recommended length is a good rule. Therefore, if the program asks for a single-spaced personal statement of approximately one page, think carefully before submitting a college personal statement that is longer than one page and one paragraph. The admissions committee will be happy to read an extra paragraph for a strong essay, but not an extra page or two.

*If you want to write an outstanding personal statement, take a look at these articles and remember that our professional editors are always ready to help with your writing.*

# College Personal Statement Secrets&Tips

Creating a great college personal statement requires much more than just 'writing about yourself'. And the amount of advice available can make it difficult to discern what things need to be included in your college personal statement. Here are some pointers to keep you focused as you work toward having a final product that is submission-ready.

## Focus on the Fundamentals to Ensure that You Submit a Winning College Personal Statement

At the end, an excellent college personal statement is far more about what isn't there than what is. Set yourself apart by submitting a personal statement that aces the fundamentals, allowing the admissions committee to focus not on your writing, but why you are applying to the school's program.



### Outstanding Content

A plainly-written college personal statement that conveys meaningful information will win the day over a highly-literary essay that doesn't tell very much. College admissions officers are intelligent, sophisticated people. If your college personal statement is vapid, you won't fool them by being loquacious. It's time to put aside your great rhetoric skills and write something personal and insightful.



### Impeccable Organization

College personal statements that jump around or have unusual presentations of information are very difficult for reader's to follow. Moreover, the purpose of the personal statement for your application to college is not to

showcase your literary talents (applications to creative writing programs notwithstanding). Make an outline before you begin writing to ensure that your college personal statement has a logical path from one idea to the next.



## Smooth transitions

The paragraphs in your personal statement are not islands unto themselves. They need to work together to create a unified whole. Think of transitions as bridges between each paragraph. These can be located at the end of the paragraph, at the beginning of the next paragraph, or both. However, they must be there. Otherwise, your personal statement will seem choppy and unfinished.



## A Solid Conclusion

This is without a doubt the part of the essay that most challenges people as they create their college personal statements. However, it genuinely is your last chance to get your point across to the reader. Take the time to summarize what you most want the admissions officer to take away from your personal statement.



## Error-free Presentation

If your college personal statement has technical errors in grammar, punctuation, and word choice, these will stand out to the admissions committee – in the worst possible way. Errors compete with your message.

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