

How to Write Your Personal Statement

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Adapted from presentation materials from The Grace
Bernhardt MSU Writing Center and the Purdue
Online Writing Lab.

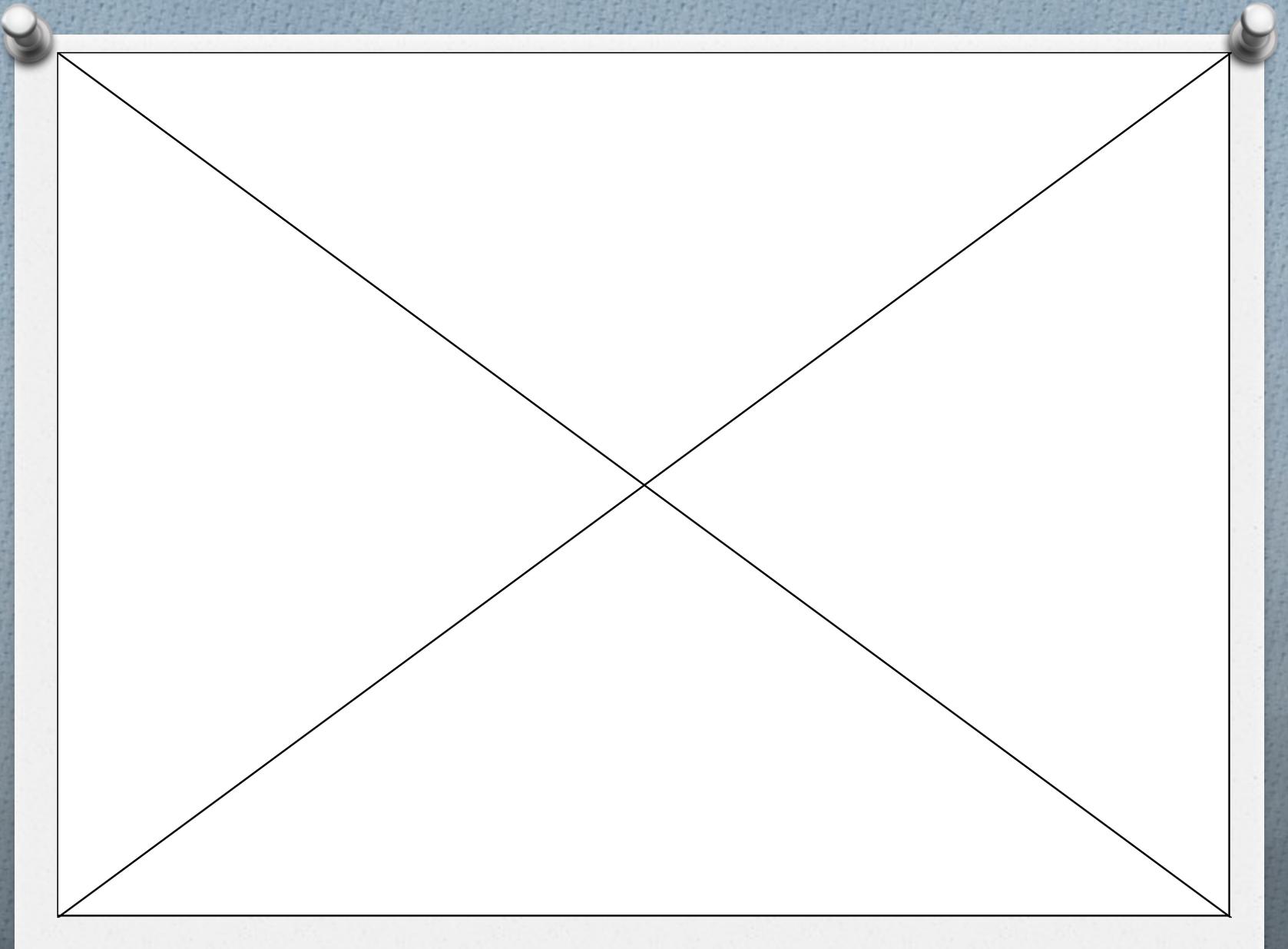
Presentation Objectives:

McNair Scholars and SSS Participants will:

- o Learn what a personal statement is all about;
- o Become acquainted with the many names for a personal statement;
- o Understand what to do before the writing begins;
- o Acquire the tools to write a personal statement with confidence.

What is the Personal Statement?

- o A way to express yourself during the application process.
- o You should view it as a personal interview on paper (this is your chance to let the schools know who you really are).
- o There are two main categories of personal statements.
 - o General, comprehensive
 - o Response to specific questions



What's in a Name?

- o A “personal statement” is also known as:
 - o Essay
 - o Letter of Intent
 - o Statement of purpose
 - o Letter of Introduction
 - o Statement of Career Goals
 - o Statement of Professional Interests
 - o Graduate Admission Essay

Who Do You Think You Are?

- Before you begin writing your personal statement, you may want to ask yourself a few questions:

Workshop Activity

MAPS Tool

- o MAPS is a tool to help you through the writing process. It is a tool for thinking, planning, writing, evaluating, and reflecting.
- o **Mode (Style)**
- o **Audience**
- o **Purpose**
- o **Situation**

Mode (Style of Statement)

- o What are the characteristics of your personal statement?
- o Are there standards for the formal features of a personal statement? What format would be most effective?
- o How might you organize/structure your document?
- o Does it have a title? Does it need a title?
- o What language is most appropriate?
- o How can/should examples be used?

Audience

- o A personal statement can be written in a more effective manner if we have a clear understanding of the audience we are writing for.
- o Who will read your personal statement?
- o How much do you know about the department to which you are applying?
Research!
- o What are their expectations for your personal statement?

Purpose

- o What is the purpose of a personal statement?
- o What is the department's purpose in asking you to submit this document?
- o What do you expect your personal statement to accomplish for you?
- o What impression do you want to leave with your reader(s)?
- o How does personal statement function within the application process?
- o How does it relate to other materials, like forms, cover letters, references, CV, etc.?

Situation

o Strategy:

- o What do you know about the particular school and program you're applying to (that maybe other applicants may not know)?
- o What is it about your skill set, experience, or interests that sets you apart?

o Planning:

- o What resources are available to you that might help you write your personal statement?
- o How can you build in time for feedback and revision?

o Implementation:

- o What are the university guidelines?
- o When is your application due?

What Might an Actual Personal Statement Look Like?

- o Introduction:
 - o Catchy example that shows your interest in the field.
 - o Mention the program you are applying for.
- o Supporting paragraphs detailing your background and skills that relate to the program:
 - o Address questions they asked.
 - o Summarize your qualifications and establish fit.
 - o Detail your long term goals.
- o Conclusion:
 - o Tie together loose ends.
 - o Reiterate your interest in the program.

Writing Triggers

o University of Nevada Las Vegas:

<http://music.unlv.edu/admissions/graduate.html>

A 500-word essay defining career goals and explaining how graduate studies in music will advance you toward these goals.

o <http://mft.unlv.edu/admissions.html>

Personal Statement: Write a brief, autobiographical essay outlining your interest in becoming a marriage and family therapist. Please include a discussion of your personal and family background and how your experiences have led to your decision to pursue a career as a marriage and family therapist. Please also include a discussion of your professional goals. (Please type – four-page double-spaced maximum)

Essay on the Family: Write a brief essay in response to the following questions: “What is your definition of family? What is the biggest challenge or issue facing families today? (Please type – two-page double-spaced maximum)

Writing Triggers

- o <http://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/24/SocialWork-GraduateApplicationForm.pdf>
- Trace the development of your interest in the field of social work.
- Describe what you consider your personal strengths and areas in need of development in relation to becoming a professional social worker.
- What do you see as the most pressing issues facing our society today? In what ways should we as social workers respond to these issues? If applicable, discuss your personal involvement in working on these issues.
- What are your career objectives as a professional social worker and how do you see your graduate studies as preparing you to meet those objectives?

Writing Triggers

o **University of Nevada Reno:**

<http://www.unr.edu/geology/student-resources/graduate-programs>

A two page personal statement of interest stating why UNR is their school of choice, why they wish to pursue the desired degree (M.S. or Ph.D.), and what specialties and/or faculty the applicant is interested in.

o **Syracuse University:**

<http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/anthro.aspx?id=36507222832>

Applicants should not feel bound by the page limit implied in the graduate school application for the statement of interest. Write a careful, thoughtful statement showing how anthropology at Syracuse relates to your goals and interests.

Keep in Mind

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.**

Keep in Mind Cont.

6. Address the school's unique features that interest you.
7. Focus on the affirmative in the personal statement; consider an addendum to explain deficiencies or blemishes.
8. Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them.
9. Proofread carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style.
10. Use readable fonts, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins.

Just Say “No”

1. Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application.
2. Do not complain or whine about the 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 try to be funny.

Just Say “No” Cont.

8. **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 you should admit me..."
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.
12. **Do not get too personal.**

Time to Revise

- o During the writing process, you are writing to discover and/or reacquaint yourself with you; so, it may be critical to weed out some information that is not too interesting or have no relevance.
- o Did you answer all of the questions asked?
- o Be specific.

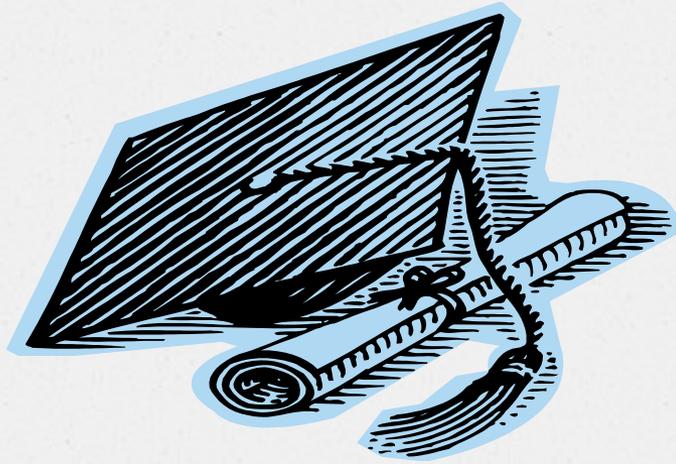
Time to Revise

- o Managing Length
 - o Staying within the guidelines.
 - o Add or subtract.
 - o Does your personal statement flow?
- o Save everything!!
- o Read your statement aloud.
 - o Quality of writing reflects you.
 - o Awkward phrases or sentences.
- o Have someone else read your paper.



Questions??

Thank You



Bibliography

Works Cited

- o <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/04/>
- o www.msu.edu/~graceb/professional/letters_of_intent.pdf

Images/Videos

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