**Helpful Hints for Writing A Personal Statement:**

**Questions to ask yourself before you write:**

* 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 committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
* When did you become interested in this field and what have you 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 you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
* What are your career goals?
* Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE 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 in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
* What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
* Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
* What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

**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 for all applications. It is important to answer each question being asked, and if slightly different answers are needed, you should write separate statements. 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 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 a "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.

**Tell what you know**

* The middle section of your essay might detail your interest and experience in your particular field, as well as some of your knowledge of the field. Too many people graduate with little or no knowledge of the nuts and bolts of the profession or field they hope to enter. Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field and use the language professionals use in conveying this information. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you're suited to it. Since you will have to select what you include in your statement, the choices you make are often an indication of your judgment.

**Don't include some subjects**

* There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Don't mention potentially controversial subjects (for example, controversial religious or political issues).

**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 an 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.

**1. Pick a topic you’re passionate about.**

Your writing will be both easier and more genuine if you write about what you want to write about, instead of writing about what you think colleges want to hear. The most successful essays describe a moment of personal growth, difficulty, strength, or confidence, all of which people experience in vastly different ways.

If you are serious about your college essay, you will most likely be spending a fair amount of time brainstorming, writing, and editing until you make it as near perfect as possible. Understandably, this process will proceed quicker if you actually enjoy the topic you are writing about.

More importantly, if you love the topic you choose, your reader will see it in your writing: the more passion you feel for a subject, the easier it will be to express yourself. So if your greatest personal growth story occurred as you were picking out socks for the day, so be it. Perhaps you managed to find courage on a stage in front of two thousand, or maybe just two people.

Remember that this is your personal statement, your only chance to differentiate yourself as a unique individual to colleges apart from grades, test scores, and resumes. Write about a topic that excites you, and you will excite your reader.

**2. Engage your reader from the first sentence.**

Regardless of the topic you choose, your reader’s interest must be captured in the first sentence. Out of thousands of essays, why should yours stand out? A perfect introduction will leap out to the reader and grab their attention.

The best way to do this is through as much detail as you can muster. If you have chosen a sport or activity you excel in, show your reader through your words a split second of what participating in the activity is like. Write as if you are telling a story: what was the setting? What was the weather like? Were there other people there? What emotions were coursing through you at that exact moment?

Many students will begin their essays, “The most life-changing/important/difficult moment in my life has been\_\_\_.” Over time, admissions officers will lose steam over the constant repetition, and all essays that begin as such will fail to make an impact.

Make it easier for your reader to remember you by writing a story as your introduction. The more specific detail you add in, the more the reader will get into the story and the more sold they’ll be on you.

**3. Ask yourself “So What?”**

As with any good essay, you should spend at least a paragraph explaining the “so what?” aspect of your essay. If you have chosen a specific activity to write about, in addition to writing about the activity itself, colleges want to know why this particular activity has made an impact on your life.

So you’ve been playing baseball for the last ten years, so what? Perhaps playing baseball taught you teamwork, or made you appreciate the value of practice and determination in achieving your goals. As this is a college essay with a point to make about your character, a substantial portion of your essay should answer the “so what?” question.

Colleges want to know how you have grown as a person through your own experiences and how they have changed you, and stating why such experiences were important to you aid in convincing admissions officers that their school could use more students like you.

If your detail and story-like aspect of your essay comes at the beginning, your “so what?” moment should wrap up your essay, connecting your activity in question with the purpose behind your choice of topic.

**4. Read through your essay out loud.**

It goes without saying that you should spell-check your essay before sending it off to colleges. As your personal statement is one you will presumably be using for the majority of your college applications (if your colleges use CollgeApp), there is no excuse for sending off an essay that is not completely free of mechanical and grammatical errors.

In addition to the automatic spellcheck on Microsoft Word, set time aside to read over your paper out loud. This will allow you to catch things your mind might otherwise overlook; because you are able to hear any wrong grammar or sentence structure, you are less likely to skip over it.

It is also wise to ask for a second opinion: let your parents read it, your English teacher or your friends. Ask them to read it and tell you what they thought the central message they got out of it was; if it is the same message you were hoping to send to admissions officers, your essay has succeeded