

Statement of Purpose for Grad/Law School

The personal statement is an important part of your application package. Depending on the topic you choose, the essay you write provides additional evidence of your intellectual and creative achievement. The essay is also the only opportunity for the readers of your application to get a feel for you as a person as well as for you as a student. The essay is also the place where you can put your academic record into the context of your opportunities and obstacles.

Writing a good college essay requires a significant investment of personal reflection, thought and time. There are no right or wrong answers—you are who you are, after all. The best way to get in touch with who you are through writing is to undertake a process of self-exploration and writing that will culminate in an essay that will reveal how unique and interesting you are. Come up with a theme—a controlling idea—then analyze and reflect upon your experiences as they relate to your statement's theme.

Therefore, a good essay...

-Is thoughtful and honest

A strong personal statement is **reflective**; that is, it demonstrates that you have thought about and gained a clear perspective on your experiences and what you want in your future. It does not simply tell a reader what you think he/she wants to know. Remember that the focus of the essay is YOU--your achievements, your obstacles, your goals, your values.

-Strives for depth (quality), not breadth (quantity)

A good essay is not a list of your accomplishments. A reader will be much more interested in how your experience demonstrates the theme of your essay, not the number of accomplishments you can list. What is NOT interesting: an essay that devotes one paragraph each to a variety of different topics. This type of approach denies you the ability to give depth to your essay.

-Conforms to guidelines

If the essay instructions tell you that the essay should be two pages long, on white 8.5x11 inch paper, then the essay should be two pages long, on white 8.5x11 inch paper. Less is not more, and more is not better, either.

-Answers the question!

A good essay is the result of a writer who has examined the essay question and written an essay that explicitly addresses that question. For example, if you are asked to *describe* your greatest accomplishment or any unusual circumstances or challenges you have faced, then your reader will expect you to use vivid language that will enable the reader to visualize your accomplishment and share your sense of success.

-Benefits from several drafts and feedback from others

Revision allows an essay to grow. Revising is not editing; revising is the act of "re-seeing" and of looking for those parts of the essay that would benefit from more explication, more (or less) vivid language, or even deleting parts that simply don't work to move your primary theme forward. Similarly, feedback from others can help you identify those parts of the essay that work well--and those that don't.

-Contains a catchy introduction that will keep the reader interested

It is important to recognize that essay readers will read hundreds, maybe even thousands, of essays during the application review period. That means that an essay with a catchy introduction, one that gets right to the point and uses precise language and vivid imagery, is going to stand out more than an essay that is predictable and conventional in its opener.

-Transforms blemishes into positives

It's okay to have flaws! The essay is your chance to show how you have transformed blemishes. For example, if your essay theme is "overcoming obstacles" and you earned a poor grade in a class, but went to a community college at night to repeat the course, it is important for your reader to know this because it is an example of your perseverance. The reader does not want to hear complaints about poor grades or circumstances, but rather wants to know how you have overcome them.

-Demonstrates your knowledge of the major/college

No one expects you to know everything about the college or university to which you are applying. However, readers will want to know that you have done your homework. For example, if you write an essay that states your interest in becoming an engineer, but the college does not have an engineering program, then you haven't done your homework.

-Exudes confidence--you will be successful no matter what

A good essay doesn't beg or brag. Colleges and universities want to admit the best students, and the best students are those who can demonstrate their ability to pursue their goals regardless of where they are admitted. Think of this as quiet confidence--the kind that reveals itself through your description of lifelong interests, sustained commitment, and/or perseverance in the face of adversity.