

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

BY

Priscilla Fortier

Office of Minority Student Affairs

University of Illinois at Urbana

What Is It?

A Personal Statement is the only part of the application that you totally control. It gives the faculty who are assessing your application a chance to see you as an individual. Your statement will communicate information about your motivation, your writing ability, your interests and your ability to communicate effectively.

How Important Is It?

This document can make or break you. If you are not completely happy with your grades or test scores, you should take advantage of the opportunity to gain some ground on the personal statement. On the other hand, even if you have outstanding credentials, a poorly-written or careless statement can negatively affect your application.

How Do I Start?

Actually, it is a good idea to begin drafting a personal statement as a first step in considering graduate school. Setting ideas and goals down on paper will help you to focus your thinking about what you really want to do. The statement should reflect your intellectual development.

In order to demonstrate development, list the points at which you made major decisions, such as which university to attend, how you chose your major, etc. Then cite factors and people that influenced or inspired these decisions. Examples include family members, other role models, participation in specific programs such as Upward Bound, Inroads, Ronald McNair, etc.

By this time, you will have a draft with which you can approach faculty members for recommendations. Ask for input on the statement and leave a copy when you actually ask for the letter of recommendation.

What Should Be Included?

The admissions committees reading your statement should receive a positive impression of all of the following:

- * Your motivation and commitment to a field of study
- * Your expectations with regard to the program and career opportunities
- * Previous research or work experience
- * Immediate and long-term Goal
- * Reasons for pursuing graduate education in a particular field at that particular institution
- * Your writing ability
- * Your Major areas of interest
- * Educational background
- * Your maturity
- * Your personal uniqueness

Hints: Use a laser printer for the final copy and save the disk!

Do not use tiny print to cram in more information, Instead, try to be concise.

Have friends and professional critique your work.

A Well-Prepared Statement Will Take Hours to Complete and Will Require Several Revisions