

How to Write a Personal Statement

What is a Personal Statement?

Many award applications will require students to submit a “Personal Statement” which is basically an essay in which you are the main subject. Selection committee members will read personal statements as a way to help them make their selections for award recipients. Therefore, you want your personal statement to stand out and set you apart from the competition in a positive way. In the Student Awards Management System (SAMS), applicants will write one personal statement that is used for all awards that require a personal statement. We suggest that you try to stick to one page in length, or 300 words maximum, as a guideline.

Where Should You Start?

Start with a bit of personal reflection. What personal experiences, motivations, challenges, or achievements stand out to you? What volunteer or extra-curricular experiences do you have? You might want to jot down or type up a few notes in point form to track these ideas. Think about your personal qualities and characteristics and what adjectives you may want to use to be as descriptive as possible. Are there certain causes, areas of study, or ideas that spark passion in you, and why? Try to think about what your goals and future plans are (list these in point form) and how you plan to achieve them. Next, you want to review the criteria of the award(s) and jot down what key points applicants are required to demonstrate. For example, does the award indicate you should demonstrate leadership, or volunteerism in a certain area? If the award indicates that recipients must demonstrate these qualities, then you need to be sure to cover them in your personal statement.

How Should You Structure Your Personal Statement?

How you write your personal statement is completely up to you, and you can be as creative as you like. A traditional personal statement will have an introductory paragraph where you can introduce yourself to the reader or say some key points about yourself. Some personal statements start with a clear statement or catchy line to try to catch the reader’s attention right away. Your personal statement should be as individual as you are.

The main body of the personal statement will likely include a combination of showcasing your achievements, demonstrating your leadership experiences, and/or outlining your skills and qualities. Again, make sure you read the criteria of the award(s) on your application, and tailor your personal statement to ensure you have provided all the necessary information to demonstrate you are a qualified candidate. If the award indicates that you should demonstrate community involvement, you would want to list specific organizations you were involved with and what your particular role was. It is important to be as specific as possible, and indicate how your personal qualities contributed to the success of that role. If the award indicates that you should demonstrate leadership, you would want to list specific roles that you have held in which you engaged with a team and influenced a collective outcome in a positive way.

A personal statement is written from your perspective, so you will write in the active voice (for example, “I gained a new understanding of...”). Remember, the selection committee includes professors who will be reading your personal statement, so grammar, punctuation, and clarity are all very important.

Lastly, you may want to have a conclusion paragraph where you can summarize the key points of your personal statement and remind the reader of your strengths. You can also mention here what your goals and ambitions are, and how your studies will fit into your future plans.

What is the next step?

We always recommend that you ask someone you trust and who knows you well to review your personal statement. This can be a teacher, principal, guidance counsellor, coach, member of an organization you volunteer with, a member of your family, a friend, the options are unlimited. They may see something you missed or think of an activity you were involved with that you forgot to include. A second set of eyes is always helpful.

If you have time, leave the statement for a couple of days after you write it and then review it again before submitting it. You may think of something else to include or decide to change the flow of it.

In the end, your personal statement should demonstrate to the reader a clear sense of your personal qualities and characteristics, how you meet the criteria for the award(s), and what you imagine your future will look like. You want to be authentic and honest as you convey your story in a logical and understandable way. While we have given you some tips in this document, your own personal statement will be entirely unique to you, and that is just how it should be!

For more information, contact the Student Awards & Financial Aid office at 306-585-4591 or safa@uregina.ca.

Student Awards & Financial Aid

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