

Writing a Personal Statement

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Questions

- At any time during my presentation, please feel free to use the chat to send me a question (privately or publicly)
- You can also email me (ssinghal@csudh.edu) with any questions after the presentation and I will do my best to respond in a timely way!

What is a personal statement?

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- A short statement that describes your interest & fit for a program or scholarship
- Personal statements can range anywhere from 300 to 2000 words
- Personal statements (unlike the essays you might have written to apply to college) aren't *that* personal
- Personal statements should focus on the personal side of your professional goals
- Personal statement requirements vary a lot from program to program
 - I will try in this presentation to give you as general advice as I can
 - But, check with professors and mentors who might know your program better

Why do you need a personal statement?

- Parts of most applications
 - GPA and / or transcript
 - Test scores (e.g., GREs, LSAT)
 - Resume
 - Letters of recommendation
 - Personal statement

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Personal statement is the only part of your application where **YOU** get to directly talk to the admissions committee.

Who is your audience?

- Most people on these committees have been doing admissions work for years
- They probably read hundreds (if not thousands) of statements in a year
- They are probably tired

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SO

- Keep it short
- Keep it clear
- Keep it specific (specific is more memorable)

What goes in a Personal Statement?

Personal statement should share three things

Your present	Explain what your professional goals are and why
Your past	Explain which experiences / personality traits / skill sets have prepared you for these professional goals
Your future	Explain how this new opportunity will help you reach your professional goals

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Explain what your professional goals are and why

- The more concrete & specific the better
- This can include more personal goals (like giving back to your community)

Needs work	Better	Best
I want to be a teacher because I like helping people. (Most jobs help people!)	I want to be a science teacher in the school district that I attended. (Why science?) (Why not move to Seattle?!)	I want to be a science teacher who uses hands-on activities to engage all students in science. When I was young, I never had the chance to do science experiments and I want to create that opportunity for other students. Ultimately, my goal is to return to the school district that I attended as a young person so that I can help support my community.

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Needs work	Better	Best
I want to study animals because I love animals and being outside. (~70% of Americans own a pet, so most of us love animals.)	I have been interested in ecology ever since I took conservation biology, so I want to study how climate change affects animals. Ultimately, I want to become a professor. (Why be a professor?)	Building on my interests in conservation of natural populations, I want to study how climate change affects populations of threatened mammals. Ultimately, I want to become a professor at a teaching-focused institution so that I can share my love of wildlife with other starting scientists.

Your turn

- In 1 year, where do you want to be professionally?
- In 10 years (after you have finished your training), where do you want to be professionally?

Take 5 minutes to write down your thoughts. Try to be as specific and detailed as you can. Be sure to answer the **why**. Why this profession and not another profession?

You will be sharing these in small groups.

Your turn

I'm sending you to Breakout Rooms of 3 people. Each person should introduce themselves and read what they wrote. Others should ask questions to clarify or get more detail as necessary.

Personal statement should share three things

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Your past	Explain which personality traits / experiences / skill sets have prepared you for these professional goals
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Which personality traits make you ready?

- What are the positives of you?

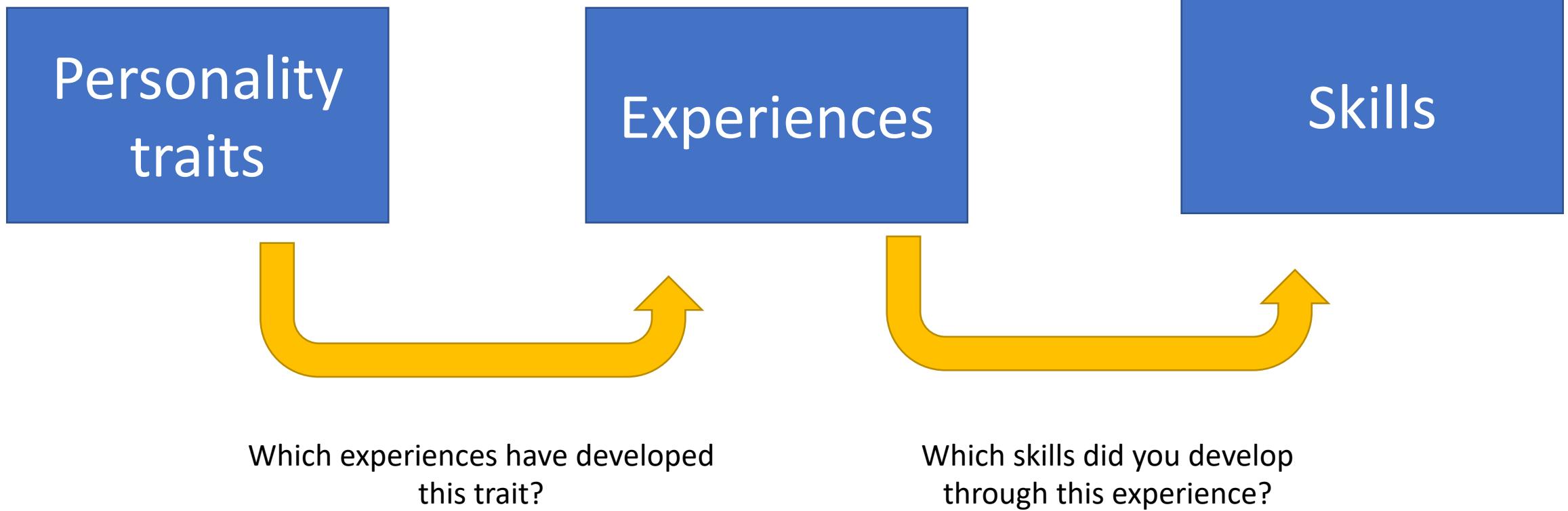
What experiences make you ready?

- work, internships, research, volunteering & mentoring, course work, school groups, family & other community activities (like church), personal challenges, free time activities (hobbies and sports)
- It is okay if the experience does not obviously connect to your goal
 - a job in retail CAN prepare you for a career as a scientist
 - it all depends on what the experience has taught you
- The more recent the experience, the better
 - Avoid childhood experiences (unless they were super super important)

Which skills make you ready?

- Communication skills (speaking, writing, etc)
- Creative skills (video making, art, graphic design, etc)
- Data skills (Excel, MatLab, R, etc)
- Financial skills (developing and managing budgets)
- Management & leadership skills (managing teams)
- Mentoring & teaching skills
- Research skills (microscopy, fieldwork, etc)

Unite across these three areas to show how you are ready.



It can be hard to brag on ourselves.

- One way to avoid bragging: “show don’t tell”

TELL	SHOW
I have great time management.	While I was pursuing my undergraduate degree in Accounting, I worked 25 hours a week at a doctor's office, helped my parents manage their small business, and volunteered with my church.

It can be hard to brag on ourselves.

- One way to avoid bragging: “show don’t tell”

TELL	SHOW
I am passionate about English literature.	I regularly visit my professors during their office hours so that I can learn more about their research in different fields in English literature. This has inspired my love for this field and helped guide my interests in graduate schools.

It can be hard to brag on ourselves.

- I like to think about it this way: what would our best friends say about us?
- When I asked my best friend why she thinks I am good at my job, she said: conscientious



TRAIT	EXPERIENCE	SKILLS
Conscientious: I try to do the best job I can, always.	I seek out new opportunities to train to be a better educator, such as joining the DEITIES Faculty Learning Community. This opportunity has inspired me to change the way I grade my classes to make things fairer for my students.	Through this program, I have learned new teaching skills, such as how to create more equitable classrooms.

Your turn

- Identify one important experience in the last five years.
 - Identify one skill that you developed through that experience.
 - Identify one positive personality trait that you exhibited through that experience.
-
- If you aren't sure, text your bestie or whomever else in your life is your fan.

Your turn

Drop in the chat (either anonymous or publicly)

- The trait
- The skill OR
- The experience

that has prepared you for your professional goal

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Think about this way

- There are hundreds of grad schools
- Why this program and not the one down the street?
- This requires you to take time to research the school
- Figure out WHO is there (what faculty)
- Figure out WHAT is there (what resources)
- Figure out their WHY (what is the school's mission, and does it fit yours)

Explain why this program is right for you

- The more concrete & specific the better

Needs work	Better	Best
I want to go to USC because it is a leader in the field. (Trust me, they already think they are great.)	I want to go to USC because researchers there focus on using the most recent advances in chemistry to help better treat human disease. (This is better. But who? And what?)	My research goals are to apply developments in chemistry to the treatment of human disease. This is why I would be excited to work at the Bridge Institute at University of Southern California, which is actively working to bridge the gap between these fields. I have communicated with Dr. Stacey Finley about joining her research program to model human disease.

Your turn

- What is your dream graduate school?
- Go on their website and research
 - WHO is there?
 - WHAT is there?
 - What is their WHY?
- Why is this the right place for you?

Your turn

- Let's share on this jamboard our dream school & one thing that makes it a good fit for us
- https://jamboard.google.com/d/12a7qcMTq9mAOcaOrvOS6_Tcj-KxGH0G_X2FZUy7Tf4w/edit?usp=sharing

Things to Do While Writing a Personal Statement

Self-reflect

- The best personal statements are authentic
- You have to honestly know what your professional goals are and why before you can write your statement
- Questions to consider:
 - When did you initially become interested in your chosen major or career?
 - How did that interest develop?
 - When did you become certain that this is what you want to do?
 - What attracts you to this discipline or career?
 - What kind of work or projects that are related to your interests and/or this discipline and/or career have you found rewarding?
 - What do you expect to get out of this program/experience/degree?

Get feedback

- Friends & family (they don't need to be in your profession!)
- Your professors & mentors & advisors at DH, your community college (if you transferred, your high school, or your job)
- Make a virtual appointment at the DH Writing Center:
<https://www.csudh.edu/writing-center/appointments/>

Explain any blips in your academic path

- Did you have a bad semester?
- Did you have to take a year off?
- Did your grades start out so-so but then improve as you went along?
- The personal statement is a great place to explain what happened
- Avoid blaming others here – even if the fault isn’t yours, it rarely comes off well in writing

Check your grammar and spelling

- You wouldn't go to a job interview with uncombed hair and spinach on your teeth
- You want to look good for an interview
- In the same way, you want your personal statement to look good
- Make sure the spelling and grammar is on point
- (This is where getting feedback can help!)

Keep it simple

- You are not writing a short story, or a personal essay, or a poem
- You can be creative, but remember, they are reading tons of essays – so keep it simple

Be specific

- Everyone wants to help people, everyone loves learning – saying this is sort of meaningless
- What makes you & your goals special?
- (This goes back to self-reflection)

Your turn

- [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mEwzj29IxUhO0An1NtPWGG
BMV6tsh7nYELVdM-9LxUw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mEwzj29IxUhO0An1NtPWGGBMV6tsh7nYELVdM-9LxUw/edit?usp=sharing)