Brainstorming for Your Personal Statement

University Writing Center
Today’s Agenda

Today’s workshop will provide strategies and practice for writing personal statements. We will:

• Discuss the personal statement genre
• Brainstorm ideas
• Talk about how the UWC can help
Dissecting the Instructions

Let’s begin by looking at some fairly common instructions. Below are UAB Grad School’s general instructions for the personal statement. [Note: You have around 600 words—roughly two double-spaced pages—to write.]

Please write a brief summary of your academic interests, career goals, and relevant background experience.
Past, Present, Future

For the sake of brainstorming, it can be useful to think about these three areas as past, present, and future.

- Your **background experiences** are your past.
- Your **academic interests** are your present.
- Your **career goals** are your future.
Brainstorming

On a piece of paper or in a Word document, create three columns (see below). Spend a few minutes listing ideas for each area. Don’t filter yourself at this point!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past: Background Experiences</th>
<th>Present: Academic Interests</th>
<th>Future: Career Goals</th>
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More Brainstorming Questions

Consider the following questions to add to your list of ideas.

- What **details of your life** have shaped it most? People? Places? Events? Circumstances?
- What **obstacles** have you had to overcome?
- What educational, professional, or cultural **opportunities** have you experienced?
- What have been your life’s and your career’s “**turning points**”?
- What are your major **interests**?
- What are your major **goals**?
Finding Your Larger Theme

Once you have a list of ideas, you need to think about it fits together to give your reader an impression of you.

• What in your lists seems most important?
• How do the background experiences (past), academic interests (present), and career goals (future) fit together?
• Do you see a larger themes emerging?
• How can you use anecdotes, “thesis,” and topic sentences to express and tie together this theme?
Other Resources

• The Purdue OWL offers many resources on writing personal statements. Their “Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls” might be particularly useful.

• Many websites offer sample personal statements. You can also find samples that are specific to your area of study and/or level.
How the UWC Can Help

The University Writing Center provides free writing consultations. For personal statements, getting feedback can be very useful. We can help you:

• Brainstorm ideas
• Develop an outline
• Begin drafting
• Revise full drafts
• Edit for clarity, correctness, and style
Thank you!

Thank you for attending today’s workshop! Best of luck in drafting your personal statements.

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