

As you write your personal statement:

DO:	DO NOT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep your audience in mind• Be accurate and be yourself• Let the reader know who you are, what motivates you, what characteristics come together to make you unique• Use the active voice and avoid passive verbs; using "I" is to be expected in a statement that is about YOU• Make connections between your experience and the resulting value or meaning to you• Use specific examples to illustrate connections you have made, conclusions you have reached, and insights you have gained from your experiences• Point out specific features of the school that attract you• Include academic distinctions (publications, study abroad, internships) related to your goals• Include information that puts your achievements into perspective (such as working full-time during your undergraduate education)• Include any special skills that may make you a preferred candidate for acceptance into the program (e.g., research, computer, laboratory, foreign language skills)• Put creativity and imagination into your opening remarks to capture the attention of the reader• Make your point early and be sure to focus on the positive• Follow the school's instructions TO THE LETTER• Keep your statement concise - two pages or less (and within the word-count limit)• Consider the personal statement a persuasive essay• Use your conclusion to pull everything together and make a final attempt to sell yourself to the graduate program• When it is absolutely necessary to explain shortfalls or deficiencies, consider using an addendum rather than including this in your personal statement• Enlist others to proofread your essay for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style• Use a highly readable font with conventional spacing and margins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write your autobiography or simply reiterate information from your application or your resume• Fall into the trap of "I've always wanted to be..."• Compose a list of your achievements and personal qualities• Generalize, lecture, whine, or present yourself as an expert in the field of study• Pretend to be the "ideal" applicant• Include anything that you cannot substantiate or anything that is untrue• Talk about money as a motivating factor in your plans for the future• Discuss your minority status or disadvantaged background unless you have a compelling and unique story that relates directly to it• Remind the school of its ranking among the various programs of its type• Waste your personal statement opportunity with a silly introduction or conclusion• Use a gimmicky style or format• Submit supplemental materials unless the school requests them• Get the name of the school wrong• Use clichés and common information. Almost all applicants are intelligent, hardworking, and have a strong desire to pursue an advanced degree.• Include high school accomplishments, as they are almost always irrelevant at this point in your professional development.• Risk writing about a controversial topic. Consider your audience. If you feel passionate about a topic, it is certainly your right to express your feelings about it. Just be aware that your audience may not share your strong opinions.• Address problems or weaknesses in your personal statement. Keep the personal statement positive, even if the subject is overcoming adversity.• Disclose aspects of yourself (personal, medical, religious, etc.) which you are uncomfortable sharing.• Use sensationalistic stories that are unrelated to your program of interest.

