

Writing a Personal Statement

The personal statement is the single most important component of most scholarship applications. Your application has a much better chance of standing out from the crowd if you have a strong personal statement. This is your only opportunity to highlight your strengths and tell them about yourself, tell them why you're studying your chosen subject, what you would like to achieve professionally and why you think this academic experience/how the scholarship would help achieve your goals. Writing personal statements can be challenging but you will find it is a useful learning experience. You will need to be somewhat reflective and begin to answer questions about what matters to you the most, and why.

There is no single right way to write a personal statement, but the following tips should help you formulate your ideas and set you on the right track to being granted your scholarships:

- Read the instructions for the specific scholarship, and follow them. Most scholarship instructions are open-ended which leaves you plenty of room to structure your statement as you please. You must, however, address the requested topics, a statement that fails to include the pertinent information is unlikely to succeed.
- Expect to put in hard work and write several drafts. Try a variety of styles and structures that best fit your writing skills and don't worry about length limits at this stage. It is always better to write too much than too little.
- Contact your faculty mentors or the Academic Success Centre for feedback on your personal statements.
- Most personal statements are expected to be brief and concise. It is not necessary to write formal introductions and concluding paragraphs.
- It is important to focus on your academic achievements but you can briefly include any non-academic achievements should it be relevant.

Questions to consider:

- What personal/professional/academic goals are you wishing to accomplish?
 - What qualities do you have that would make you an asset?
 - What are your long-term career goals?
- A personal statement should not be a rendition of your resume. Avoid vagueness and clichés, they won't help!
 - Find a unique angle from which to approach your story
 - Answer the questions that are *asked*. You may assume that individual scholarships are asking similar sounding questions, however, it is important to figure out what is different about each question so you can respond accurately.
 - Research the scholarship, make sure you are applying to scholarships that apply to you and do *not* cut and paste the same letter to all scholarships. You must individually tailor each application.

- Your personal statement should be grammatically flawless and free of any typos. Your subject matter should be relevant and chosen carefully and the essay should have a natural flow. Once you have finished, make sure to check the word limit, you must show you can easily follow instructions.
- Make sure you are genuine in your writing, let your personality show and try to be as original as possible.
- Do not ever forget to proofread your application. Check spelling and grammar yourself, this doesn't mean spell check, this means read it through aloud to yourself, give it to friends and family to proof or take it to the Academic Success Centre. Ask people for their honest opinions, this will give you the opportunity to omit or change things so you can write an application that stands out from all the other thousands of applicants.
- Give yourself a few days without looking at your application. Go back to it and make sure you are happy with it before sending it off.
- Finally, make sure you spend time researching that external documents you may need to complete the application. Give yourself plenty of time to gather transcripts or letters of recommendation, etc.