



Writing a Personal Statement or Essay

Imagine that you are choosing someone for a scholarship, internship, or job opportunity. Which of the following sentences grabs your attention?

1. “I’ve known since I was six years old that I wanted to be a veterinarian.”
2. “During my internship at a small animal veterinary clinic and through my volunteer experience at a local animal shelter, I have learned that being a veterinarian requires not only knowledge of medical procedures, but the ability to effectively communicate these procedures with those making decisions for their animals. These opportunities further cemented my desire to open my own practice after graduation. “

Though the first may be true, it is probably true for many veterinary medicine students. The second statement shows a circumstance and learning outcome that is unique to that person. The art of the personal statement or essay is to make yourself stand out— it should include concrete details that will separate you from another applicant. It is also an opportunity to further demonstrate how your skills and expertise align with and meet the expectations of the company.

Helpful Tips

1. **Answer the questions that are asked**—and make sure you answer all components.
2. **Show a story**— don’t just *tell* a story. Use real examples from your own personal experiences that will add an interesting perspective to your essay that others might not have. *I always wanted to be a veterinarian* only tells the reader one thing. Having examples *shows* the reader why you are a good fit and what your experiences have taught you.
3. **Concentrate on your opening paragraph**—this will make or break your application. If the reader is bored, it is unlikely that they will read past the first paragraph.
4. **Tell what you know**—a personal statement is just that, *personal*. Don’t make up something you know nothing about; it is better to find a creative way to tell about your experiences than create experiences that did not truly happen.
5. **Don’t include some subjects**—it is best to leave out anything from high school or before. Also stay away from potentially controversial subjects, such as politics or religious issues.
6. **Do the research**—you should know the goals and mission of the company before you sit down to write.
7. **Write well and correctly**—spelling and punctuation errors will most likely disqualify your essay. Have someone read over your essay before submitting it and read it out loud to yourself several times. If there are word count guidelines, make sure you follow them.
8. **Avoid clichés**—you want to be a veterinarian because you love animals? Great, so does everyone else writing their essays.

It is also helpful to organize your essay around your past, present, and future:

- Your past: your preparation and/or qualifications.
- Your present: how and why you are compatible with the program or company; what will you bring to the table?
- Your future: your long term career goals and why this opportunity is a good fit for those goals.

If you need help getting started, ask yourself these questions:

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- If you worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the reviewing committee to be interested in you?

Resources:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFLibDGVtj8&feature=youtu.be>