

# Scholarship Personal Statement Guide

## **What Is A Personal Statement?**

Personal statements are essays that you write for most scholarship applications. They may be short essays (200-500 words) or longer essays (900 words). Personal statements should be typed, double spaced with a font no smaller than 10.

## **What Makes A Winning Personal Statement**

Unsuccessful personal statements, more often than not, resembled a laundry list of activities, awards, and accomplishments. Although these credentials are often impressive in and of themselves, reading such materials often feels like inhaling a random conglomeration of facts.

A winning personal statement should allow the scholarship donor to have an inside glimpse to your life and accomplishments. After reading your personal statement, it is important for the donor to come away with feeling like I understood the core interests, skills and values of the individual.



## **How To Get Started?**

Writing a personal statement can be a challenging task, but it doesn't have to be. This guide will help you organize your thoughts and put you in the right frame of mind as you write your personal statement. Listed below are examples of how requests for personal statements/essays are stated. These are taken from actual scholarship applications.

### Example 1

- 1) Include a typed personal statement of 500-750 words expressing how your school experiences-academics, extracurricular activities, outside activities and work experiences-are shaping your educational and career goals, why you should be considered for scholarship support, and any financial or other information you wish to share that may be of importance to the selection committee.

### Example 2

- 2) Please attach to this application a one- or two- page typed personal statement in which you address the following: a) family background; b) achievements; c) current educational status; d) career goals; e) community service/extra-curricular activities f) financial need for this scholarship; and any other information relevant to this application.

**Step One:** **Gathering information for your personal statement.**

Before you begin to write your personal statement, it is important that you collect the information you need to write it. Below are a series of questions that will help you collect details that fit under the general categories required by many scholarship foundations.

**Family Background**

1. Where were you born? Your ethnicity?
2. Who do you live with?
3. Are you the first in your family to attend college?
4. Have you overcome any personal or economic struggles?
5. Who or what was your motivation to continue your education?

**Academic Plans and Career Goals**

1. What is your major? Who or what has inspired you to pursue this major?
2. What degrees would you like to earn? (example: Associates Degree, Bachelors degree, Masters degree or Doctorates degree)
3. What are your short term and long term career goals?
4. Have you been employed in any capacity or volunteered in your chosen field? If so, what have you learned from that experience?

**Personal and Academic Achievements**

1. What awards (personal and/or academic) have you received?
2. What are your major accomplishments, and why do you consider them accomplishments?
3. Does any attribute, quality, or skill distinguish you from everyone else? How did you develop this attribute?
4. Have you ever struggled for something and succeeded? What made you successful?
5. Have you ever struggled for something and failed? How did you respond?

**Extra-Curricular Activities**

1. What are your most important extracurricular activities? What made you join these activities? What made you continue to contribute to them?
2. How do you schedule you time to include both academic and extra-curricular activities?

**Past, Current, and Future Efforts Towards Making  
a Difference in your Community**

1. How have you served your community in the past?
2. Are you currently involved in community service?
3. How will you serve your community in the future?

**Financial Need**

1. Do you have to work to pay for school?
2. How will this scholarship help you financially?
3. What will your parents have to sacrifice financially in order to send you to college?

**Step Two:** Selling yourself to the scholarship selection committee by carefully selecting the information you will include in your personal statement.

This is a very important part of the process! Here you will sort through all the information you have collect to write your 2-3 page personal statement. Please keep the following things in mind:

- ✓ A personal statement is like a 30-second commercial during the Super Bowl. You have to grab the readers' attention with your story so they decide they want to invest in you.
- ✓ Be sure to cover all aspects of the scholarship qualifying criteria, if it be discussing your financial need, community service, etc.
- ✓ Highlight your strengths. If you have great background information and financial need, but not very much past volunteer experience, then write the personal statement focusing on background information and financial need and placing less emphasis on the other areas. When you write the volunteer section, emphasize what you will do rather than what you haven't done.

**Step Three:** Editing your essay

- ✓ Review the draft yourself. Give the draft to a peer and an adult (teacher, counselor, parent) to review at the same time you are reviewing you draft even if it isn't your best work. Things to keep in mind when reviewing your draft:
  - Did I answer the questions?
  - Spell check
  - Check the writing tips against your writing
- ✓ Incorporate feedback from others; make corrections.
- ✓ Read it once more, if you have time, have someone else read it once more.
- ✓ Finalize the draft by incorporation the last revisions.
- ✓ Make photocopies as well as keeping an electronic copy. The last thing you want to do is start over if you hard drive crashes, you lose your disk or your application is lost in the mail.

## In Your Personal Statement

### DO

- Make your opening paragraph as individual as you are so you can entice the reviewer to read more! Spend time crafting your first sentence, and each sentence, until you are satisfied with the message and the style.
- **Include a brief description (not a list) of your specific achievements.**
- Give readers a taste of your daily life to make a point about yourself (multiple responsibilities, busy schedule, financial hardship, etc.)
- Identify your long-range goals.
- Find out as much as possible about your chosen field and explore the merits of particular careers before you write your personal statement.
- Use present tense when possible
- When writing your personal statement allow time for breaks and to return with a fresh perspective
- Follow the scholarship application submission rules precisely
- Proofread the essay and make a duplicate copy
- Do put your name on every page.
- Lastly, be creative. Entertain. Tell a story.



### DON'T

- Don't simply list the honor awards or achievements that you included on your application.
- Don't compliment yourself with praise that makes you seem immodest.
- Don't make too many detailed promises about what you intend to do (volunteering, initiating special projects).
- Don't begin with: "Hello, my name is....".