



Personal Statement Workshop

PRESENTATION DELIVERED:

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Learning Outcomes

After attending the ONSF personal statement workshop series, students will be able to:

- define the personal statement;
- identify personal statement do's and don'ts;
- identify one writing process to construct a personal statement; and
- start writing a personal statement.



Why write a personal statement?

Who's in the room

Means, purpose, method, audience constantly changing factors

Two types:

1. The general, comprehensive personal statement:

This allows you maximum freedom in terms of what you write and is the type of statement often prepared for standard medical or law school application forms.

2. The response to very specific questions:

Often, business and graduate school applications ask specific questions, and your statement should respond specifically to the question being asked. Applications for national awards commonly ask specific questions or suggest inclusion of specific information.

(Source: Purdue OWL)



What is a personal statement?



A written document including aspects of your ambitions, life experience, characteristics, and values. It should especially connect these things to the purpose of the thing you are applying to/for.

What are some of these things?



A place to showcase your passions, accomplishments, ambition, and creativity.

An indication of your priorities and judgement.



A document written for a very specific audience. They will not know you, this document should invite them to learn about you, should excite them to how this relationship makes sense



An ongoing conversation. It is not completed in one draft.

AUDIENCE and The READER



Imagine the reader: they're professionals. They have read hundreds of applications this year and in years past.

- “They distinguish easily between the sincere and the insincere, the truth and the puffery, the carefully prepared and the hastily prepared, the substantive and the superficial. Don't try to guess what they want to read. Just write honestly, simply, and clearly about yourself and your aspirations.” (Truman Scholarship website)

If you take nothing else from this workshop, take this: Consider your audience.

- Understanding who you are writing to/for will help you in any task you have ahead: classes, resume writing, personal statements, academic publishing, professional writing, email, social media, holiday cards...

A Personal Statement is not:

- An academic paper
- A list of accomplishments that reads like a resume
- A personal narrative that reads like a diary
- A justification of “why you deserve this”
- A document written to try to “sound like” what you expect the committee to want



Do and Don't:

Do:

Be yourself, be authentic

Make it interesting – find that hook

Engage the reader, let them see who you are

Answer the prompt, use examples and specifics

“Be bold but not unrealistically ambitious” (Truman)

Be thoughtful; it will show if you have not truly considered your reasoning or purpose for applying

Have it reviewed and read! Enlist professors, ONSF, Writing Studio, peers

Read your work aloud – it is THE MOST HELPFUL step

Don't:

- Repeat yourself
- Overstate accomplishments
- Use famous quotations
- Use overly flowery or overly academic language; this is not an academic paper
- Be overly casual either
- Write only to the word limit and stop – in fact, when drafting, don't worry about the word limit at all
- Procrastinate
- Be afraid to ask for feedback

Deconstructing an example

Critical Language Scholarship

Please address the following questions in your statement of purpose:

- How will increased language and cultural knowledge help you achieve your future academic or professional goals?
- Why is participation in the CLS Program appropriate for you at this point in your academic or professional career?
- Why should the CLS Program invest in you? What is it that you bring to the program?

Statement of Purpose

This summer, I chanced upon a bookstore that sold Harry Potter books written in Chinese; I, possessing a deep love of the series and a fervent desire to improve my Chinese reading ability, bought a copy of the fifth book and began mining it for four-character expressions. One of the expressions I learned while reading it was "小心翼翼" which means "very cautiously." A month into fall term, I was in rehearsal for the Chinese Music Ensemble one day, and our director used this expression while telling us how she wanted us to treat one of the pieces. That she used this expression that I had learned in my free time filled me with happiness; it was concrete evidence of how I had mastered a small piece of the Mandarin puzzle.

Others wish to study Mandarin simply because they know the language is widely spoken and potentially helpful in their futures, but for me, studying Chinese is grounded in a pure delight in words- in how these little utterances can signify huge concepts, and be involved in so many different types of grammar across languages. The CLS Program should invest in me because of my delight in words; indeed, I would bring unadulterated excitement into the program, into group activities, into classes during CLS simply because we would be employing new words.

Apart from just helping me achieve my goal of learning new words and ways to communicate, the increased language and cultural knowledge that the CLS program would bring me would help me on my path to one day become a doctor, and along the path to becoming an MSF. In past Chinese classes, I've read articles on sickle-cell anemia and CRISPR, thus gaining some familiarity with scientific vocabulary in Mandarin, but I still have a long way to go if I want to be able to speak fluently about medicine. To me, the ability to speak intelligently about science and medicine in Mandarin would signify language mastery, and I'd like to one day be a multilingual doctor. CLS would push me one step further in developing the skills I require to achieve this goal, this time in China, where I've never been before. As for one day becoming an MSF, the CLS program would help in this pursuit as it would teach me how to build relationships in a foreign country-- a skill that would be vital for me in building a doctor-patient rapport in a foreign country.

Participating in CLS is appropriate for me right now because I've put in four years of studying Mandarin in the U.S. thus far. I feel ready to tackle this language in its native context. I want to learn Mandarin for life, and learning as much as possible now at a relatively young age, is crucial for me to have lifelong fluency. I hope to attend medical school and dedicate my life to science, so I may not have as many opportunities for language study in the future.

496 words counted. Maximum of 500 words allowed.

Writing Process

There are many different processes for composing

Try out different methods to see what works best for you

