

Name: _____

What You're Applying For: _____

Brainstorming Exercise 1:

Write at least 2 responses for each prompt.

What are your strengths?	What drew you into this field or research interest? What sparked that interest? What kept/keeps you interested over time?
Make a short list of things you are proud of (academic or professional accomplishments, internships, study abroad, student and community organizations, etc.).	What are your near-term career goals? Think about your "Next Five Years"--what does that look like?

Brainstorming Exercise 2: Tell Your Stories

Personal statements are strongest when they are tied to specific life

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experiences. Anecdotes are specific stories that exemplify a point you are trying to make.

In the space provided, free write a few anecdotes about yourself.

- The anecdotes should somehow relate to something that you wrote in one of the boxes from Exercise 1.
- Remember: this is low-stakes writing, so write anything that comes to mind.
- Aim to write two short stories (a paragraph each). Try to choose subjects that convey something about you--that demonstrate your passion for the subject, your ability to overcome challenges, your determination.
- Think of *specific* moments or details that really made you feel excited about the work that you do/want to do.

Reflect On What You Wrote:

Now that you have some ideas sketched out, it is time to reflect on what we've written and identify the best way to communicate it in your personal statement. Revisit each of your bullet points from Exercise 1 and your two stories from Exercise 2 and ask yourself the following questions about *each* item you wrote.

1. Does this detail directly connect with the prompt?
2. Does this detail directly communicate that I've considered my reasoning and purpose for applying?
 - a. Be sure to make those connections for your reader (rather than implying the connection and leaving it for the reader to realize).
3. Am I overstating or understating the importance or relevance of a specific accomplishment?

- a. Are big, noteworthy accomplishments being buried under a list of smaller, less significant accomplishments? Are smaller accomplishments being exaggerated in order to seem more "impressive"?
4. Am I relying on vague language or flowery, overly academic language to communicate my points?
 - ✗ Vague Example: The program will help me to achieve my dream of becoming a doctor.
 - ✓ Clear, Focused Example: I intend to take advantage of opportunities within the program such as _____, which will help me to expand my knowledge in _____.
 - ✗ Flowery/Overly Academic Example: I am galvanized by a profound desire to manifest my skills in your program.
 - ✓ Clear, Focused Example: I seek to hone and utilize my _____ skills while actively participating in your program.
5. Am I using desire-based language (I *want* to do _____) or intent-based language (I *intend* to do _____ and here is how I plan to do it)?

After you think about **what** you want to say within your personal statement, then it becomes time to think about bringing that content into a cohesive essay. Use the below space to come up with a Writer's Checklist of action items to complete as you move into your first draft of your personal statement.

You've already:

- Indicated your strengths, accomplishments, interests/motivations, and 5-year plan.
- Wrote two anecdotes/stories to represent you in your and your experience.
- Reflected on what you've written and considered it against some of the expectations for this genre of writing.

Next you will:

**Think achievable tasks that you can work through in the next few days/writing sessions. Sometimes it can be helpful to set personal deadlines/dates to keep you on track!*

- Begin building an outline for my essay that includes some of the brainstorming notes (by ___/___/___)

- _____
- _____
- _____

Consider the below "What to Do & What Not To Do" list as you integrate your notes into a composed essay. Hint: Some of the "What To Do" items are good "checklist" items to consider; and some of the "What Not To Do" items are good items to consider as you continuously reflect on what you write.

What To Do & What Not To Do

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, OURF, Writing Studio, peers
- Read your work aloud or run it through an e-reader software.

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