

# Organization for Personal Statement with Prompt

Once you have your more general personal statement, you will need to tailor it for specific audiences. This means that whenever you are asked to submit a statement, you make adjustments to your personal statement to fit the requirements, expectations, or tone of the unique situation.

## Specific Prompts

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There may be times when you will need to start from scratch because there is a specific prompt or the circumstance renders the general statement irrelevant, but you will usually have at least some part of the general statement that you can use as a starting point. This will typically be the case when the person or organization requesting the personal statement is looking for specific information that would not be included in a resume that is necessary for the applicant.

Examples of information they would try to find through providing a specific prompt would be:

- How you respond to challenges
- Your philosophy on a topic and whether or not it aligns with their own
- Intentions and long-term perspective
- Signals that indicate how well you would mesh with an existing team

When you face a specific personal statement prompt, be sure to look at each part of the question and consider:

1. What does the reviewer expect to learn from my answer?
2. How would my answer separate me in a positive way from other applicants?
3. How to I show myself in the best light in this question?
4. What information is not included in my personal data and resume that they already have access to?

## **Brainstorming**

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Before you begin writing, break down the prompt into the individual pieces. Make sure that you fully understand what it is asking and that you include answers to every part of it. Once you have the prompt broken down into pieces, begin your brainstorm. Your brainstorm should give you a chance to write down all ideas you have about each section.

At this stage, nothing is good or bad. The only purpose of the brainstorm is to get all of the ideas out of your head and onto paper. Then you can begin to look for patterns and evaluate the strength of the different points. You may want to mark the ideas you like so that they stand out. Then, review your general personal statement and identify any parts of it that would be useful in responding to this particular prompt.

## **Development**

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Once you know what the reviewer wants to know and have brainstormed your ideas of your response, you need to consider how to develop those ideas further. To do this, consider the points in your brainstorm in terms of your motivation, your qualifications, and the expectations of the reviewer. Choose a limited number of items from

your brainstorm to include. Because a personal statement is so brief, you want to thoughtfully construct your ideas.

As you develop your ideas, you may find yourself writing much more than you can actually include in your final product. This is ok during the drafting stage. You want to fully build a mental image for your reader, but you also want to discard the irrelevant points later. After you have drafted your ideas, think about these questions to eliminate the extra thoughts.

1. Does the reader *need* to know this?
2. Is anything here sufficiently included in the materials I have already submitted?
3. How does this sentence add to the reader's understanding of me?
4. Is the information memorable and unique?
5. Do I fully answer the question?

Your supporting ideas should be relevant to answering the question.

## Cohesion

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The most important thing to remember as you finalize your personal statement is that it should feel very clear and direct. It should be obvious to the reader why you included specific details. Every idea needs to point back to the prompt. The response should show unity in the tone and content. You do not have room for any stray ideas in this short of a writing task. After you think you have answered the question as completely as you can, give yourself time to look over it again for cohesion and/or ask for someone to review it for you.

## Exercises

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## Exercise 1: Analyze the Prompt

*Before you begin writing, you always need to be sure you fully understand the question so that you include all of the necessary details. Use the questions below to analyze the prompt.*

Prompt: Our college aims to have small class sizes and to promote mentoring between faculty and students and between peers. Explain how you will contribute to and benefit from those mentorships.

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2. How would my answer separate me in a positive way from other applicants?
3. How to I show myself in the best light in this question?
4. What information is not included in my personal data and resume that they already have access to?

## Exercise 2: Most Relevant

**Part A:** A student is applying for a college that uses the admissions essay prompt shown below. She has already decided to highlight her enthusiasm and passion for science. Now she is deciding what anecdote would be most relevant to her main idea. Read the options she brainstormed and choose the one you find the most relevant.

**Prompt:** "Write about a time when you did not achieve a goal. How did you respond to that setback?"

**Goal:** Illustrate my enthusiasm and passion for science helped me to recover from a setback

1. Entering a science fair again after losing the year before
2. Not getting a teaching job and deciding to volunteer in an elementary science classroom instead
3. Taking an extra online class to learn more about physics
4. Being rejected from one college program, but choosing to keep applying
5. Struggling to work with a lab partner and asking to be reassigned

**Part B:** Discuss your decision with a partner.

- Did you choose the same option or different options?
- Why did you choose the option that you did?
- How would you use it in an essay?

(Prompt excerpt from <https://edtechbooks.org/-AHdW>)

### Exercise 3: Give Feedback on Development

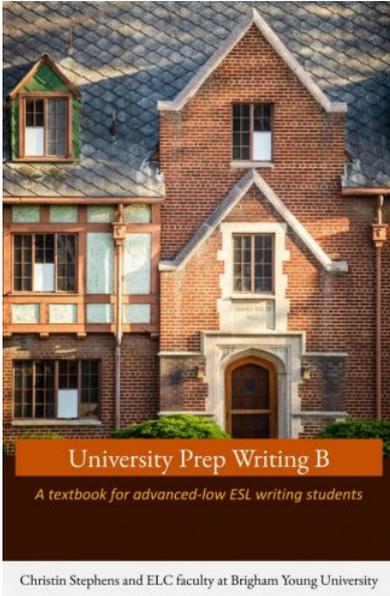
*Here is an example body paragraph from a student's application essay describing a time when the student did not achieve a goal or experienced a difficult challenge. Use the questions from the development section of this chapter to give feedback to the writer about the development of this idea.*

I have had experiences that helped me to reach difficult goals. At that moment in my life everything was unclear because nothing that I was doing to improve was working. I think that occurred because I was expecting for something to magically fix my problems. However, that was not going happen. For example, our muscles are not built through something magical. We have to work out. So those small goals that my boss suggested for me to do helped me to find a path I could follow to reach that goal.

## Exercise 4: Give Feedback on Cohesion

*Here is an example body paragraph from a student's application essay to a music major. Be prepared to discuss how the writer effectively creates cohesion in this paragraph or how the writer can improve this paragraph to clearly tie it back to the prompt (Why do you want to study music at this university?).*

Many years passed and the environment of art was very tough in my country. I went through a lot of challenges because in [Country] the competition is intense. Rather than being a supportive environment, it was more like a competition to see who was the best, fastest, or who could play the most difficult music. The only thing I wanted to do was play music to fill my soul. My mom noticed how this competition was causing me to feel depressed. One day she told me the music program at [University Name] and how she heard it had a positive environment. Everything changed for me when I became aware of this new opportunity.



Ward, J., , Lutz, S., Freeman, S., & Woffinden, K. (n.d.).  
*University Prep Fall Writing B*. EdTech Books.  
[https://edtechbooks.org/up\\_writing\\_fall](https://edtechbooks.org/up_writing_fall)