Organization for Prompted Personal Statement

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

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 irrelvant, 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

Before you begin writing, break down the prompt into 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

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

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

Exercise 4.10: 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: Describe a topic, idea, or experience that you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. What have you done to learn more or engage further in the topic, idea, or experience? What resources do you use to learn more?

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?

(Source for the prompt: https://edtechbooks.org/-AHdW)

Exercise 4.11: 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 ability to work with a team. 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: "...How will you contribute to our university community?"

Goal: Illustrate my ability to work on a team which can contribute to the university community

1. Working with my siblings as a team to clean and decorate the house for Mother's Day
2. Creating an educational boardgame for the tutoring center I worked at despite not being asked to
3. Working with my classmates, professor, and people from another department to complete a research project at my previous college
4. Maintaining a high GPA by turning in every assignment
5. Coordinating with my coworkers and boss to prepare for a farmers market when I was a part-time gardener

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 4.12: 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.

Three years ago, I tried out for the soccer team at school and thought everything was going to be fine since I had been practicing for a long time to be accepted. Nevertheless, I wasn't chosen for the soccer team, and this put me in a place of uncertainty, doubting myself and worrying about my performance in sports which I have always been good at. This experience was hard and complex because being accepted was what I wanted the most. This caused my life to be badly affected in many aspects.

Exercise 4.13: Give Feedback on Cohesion

Here is an example body paragraph from a student's application essay to a US college. 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 at this university?).

My previous education in [country] helped me to study and learn new things by myself. Since the tuition was expensive, I tried my best to be a person who has the highest grades in the field I was studying to get scholarships because only the person who has the highest grades can get full scholarships. What I have done to get good grades on the test is to reduce sleeping time, preview and review every day, and teach my classmates. Teaching my classmates allowed me to be prepared for the test efficiently because preparing for teaching helped me understand better what we had learned from class and make what I had taught into my own knowledge. Eventually, my goal became true. Even though I did not like the education system, it has helped me develop some good learning and studying habits to transfer to a new learning environment. Furthermore, it has taught me that I can do whatever I plan and work hard.