Personal Statements, Fellowship Proposals, and More

While at the University of Chicago, you have probably learned to write excellent academic papers. However, writing a personal statement or application essay for graduate/professional programs, jobs, and internships is a different type of writing. In most cases, the reader is not looking for an academic approach or a demonstration of specialist knowledge. A personal statement is also usually not a piece of writing to tell the reader how passionate you are. Rather, you must appeal to an audience of educated people who are not necessarily academic specialists in your area, and convince them to select your application.

The ultimate questions that all personal statements should seek to answer are "Why should I care?" and "Why should we select this application from amongst the other qualified applicants?". Try to keep in mind a selection committee's perspective, reading many qualified applications for a limited number of spots. The more concretely you can make the argument about why your application will fit well and contribute to a particular program at a specific place and moment, the better.

In most cases, you are being asked to write about your strengths in a concrete, confident, and concise manner. Please consider the following tips to enhance and strengthen your application material.

TOP TIPS TO WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PERSONAL STATEMENT OR APPLICATION ESSAY

1. **Research the position or program** so you fully understand what they are seeking in a candidate.
2. **Seek advice from mentors** who have applied before you. Ask to see a copy of their statements.
3. **Give yourself plenty of time to prepare** and write your personal statement or essay.
4. **Understand what you are being asked to do**; cogently express your goals and qualifications as well as your interest in and "fit" for the program or job in question.
5. **Brainstorm.** Devote some time to reflecting on your personal and professional goals. Consider how your UChicago experience, including your academic experiences, internships, and RSO involvement has shaped and prepared you for this opportunity.
6. **Develop an outline.** Choose one to three topics or themes that highlight your background, experiences, and uniqueness in relation to the program or opportunity. Avoid merely repeating examples that you already highlight in your application material.
7. **Review the directions carefully.** It is important to address all questions or topics that are asked, while abiding by the page or word length requirements. Many schools and organizations will have different requirements or essay prompts.
8. **Write a first draft.** Using your outline and understanding of the opportunity, create a first draft without worrying about grammatical errors or length. Most essays will follow a traditional format, beginning with an introduction that grabs the reader's attention, followed by detailed supporting paragraphs that address your strengths, compatibility with the program, and answer any specific questions raised in the application.

9. **Revise and proofread your draft several times,** ideally getting other people to look at your work. Pay close attention to grammatical errors and spelling.
10. **Show me, don't tell me.** Often first drafts are written with declarative statements like "I am a hard worker" rather than supporting examples such as: "In developing my BA paper I reviewed 320 hours of taped interviews in Igbo"
11. **Seek feedback,** early in the process, not the day before something is due. Visit a Career Advancement Adviser or a faculty member to review and discuss your application material before submitting.

Writing Resources

The Career Advancement Library has a number of books on writing personal statements and admission essays for graduate and professional school, as well as books about writing style in general, and writing for grants and fellowships. Visit the Career Advancement website to view the library catalogue.

The University of Chicago Writing Program is also an excellent resource that offers undergraduate writing courses, tutors, and online resources- http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/

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