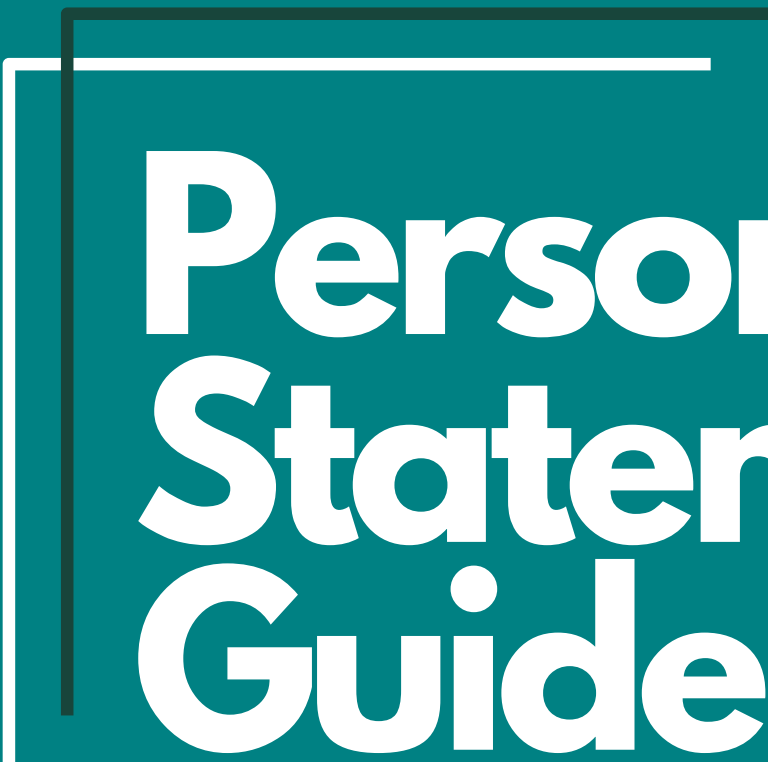




Personal Statement Guide

Graduate School Edition



5 STEPS TO A FIRST DRAFT



Lyman Briggs College
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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STEP ONE: THE BASICS

YOU SHOULD...

- **Answer the question that the program is asking:** This is often something along the lines of: “Why this profession?”.
- **Make meaning of your experiences:** Tell specific stories that highlight your skills, especially as they relate to the program you are applying to.
- **Maintain your voice:** Outside opinions can be helpful, but at the end of the day your personal statement needs to sound like YOU.
- **Say what needs to be said:** Had a tough semester? Encountered adversity personally or academically? Your personal statement is the perfect place to address any discrepancies in your application .
- **Write well and proofread:** Your personal statement helps admissions committees to see how well you can communicate.

AVOID THESE COMMON MISTAKES:

- **Don't speak in clichés/ generalities:** Let's be realistic, most people applying to graduate school “like science and want to help people”. While this is a good basic tenet to start with, your personal statement needs to go beyond this.
- **Your trauma won't get you into grad school:** Many applicants feel the need to exploit or over-explain trauma that they experienced personally, or even second-hand. While personal stories are an important component of the personal statement, you shouldn't feel pressured into talking about traumatic events if you are not ready to talk about them.
- **Avoid repeating info from your resume:** You've probably heard the phrase “show, don't tell” when it comes to personal statements. To do this, we want you to tell stories, explain thought processes and make meaning of your experiences, as opposed to just listing tasks you completed.

CONCEPTS TO INCLUDE

When preparing your personal statement, consider the following...



MOTIVATION

- *What is your “origin story”?*
- *What is your purpose - (skills, interests, values, social impact)?*
- *Where did your interest in this work come from?*



FIT & CAPACITY

- *What experiences—volunteer work, jobs, internships, research, personal—have you had that have prepared you?*
- *What did you learn from these experiences?*
- *What skills did you develop?*



VISION

- *How do you hope to create impact and live your purpose?*
- *How will this program help you to make this impact?*
- *How do your values and the program values align?*
- *What faculty do you want to work with?*





STEP TWO: LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU.

Personal statements can often feel uncomfortable because we have to talk about ourselves. But the only way for the committee to get to know **YOU** is for **YOU** to tell them all of the amazing things that **YOU** have done.

Are **YOU** sensing a theme?

These experiences could include:

- **Job/Internship:** Working in a related area of study/profession
- **Research:** Working through the scientific process in or out of the classroom
- **Volunteer:** Anything involving serving others; think about purpose
- **Leadership:** Student organizations, teaching roles, etc.
- **Personal experiences:** Close connections to program of study/career

NOTE: Fill out only the LEFT SIDE of the table for now.

STEP THREE: TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT!

You're still not done talking about yourself. I know, I know, I know.
But this part is important.

Being able to talk about **WHAT** you did is a good start. But in order to **REALLY** convey your story, we need to talk about **WHAT YOU LEARNED**.

Consider the following:

- What skills did you develop? What values did you embody?
- If you were shadowing, what behaviors, skills, or values did you observe from the professional you were with? How do you demonstrate those?
- Review the program website for their values, or even industry lists of competencies/skills that are needed for this work. Where do you align?

STEP FOUR: CONNECT THE DOTS.

Review the lessons learned on the chart. We're looking to develop a theme. A theme is a way for us to clearly define the story you are trying to tell. You may notice that you have identified values you want to embody as a professional: this could be a theme. You may have talked about several competencies that you have that align with the profession: this could be a theme. Maybe you've shown a commitment to a specific cause/population that you'd like to serve: that's a theme, too!

What themes do you see emerging in your story?
Highlight, circle or star the things that go together.



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Tell us about what you learned from this experience. What values/skills did you develop? Be sure to think about demonstrating how your values/skills align with program values and/or industry competencies.



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ON THE LEFT:

ON THE RIGHT:

Tell us about what you learned from this experience. What values/skills did you develop? Be sure to think about demonstrating how your values/skills align with program values and/or industry competencies.

[illegible]

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STEP FIVE: BRING IT ALL TOGETHER.

This is the fun part - promise!

What experiences did you have the most to say about? What themes and competencies are represented in those experiences? Try to limit yourself to 3-5 stories to highlight throughout your statement.

Now, let's take those themes and put them into a thesis statement. This will be the last sentence in your intro paragraph. Your thesis statement introduces your themes and is the sentence that says: "In this essay I will talk about..." without saying that.



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FEELING AMBITIOUS?

Use these next pages to go beyond the first 5 steps and build an outline for your personal statement. An outline can be an incredibly helpful starting place when you meet with a career advisor.

Let's start to organize your stories

Go back to your experiences, and your thesis statement. What experiences and/or stories best highlight the themes that you want to discuss in your statement? This could be a personal story, a research experience, or maybe even a story about shadowing a professional that embodied the values/skills that you want to incorporate into your own practice.

This will become the anecdote we use in your introduction.

Your introduction paragraph should end with your thesis statement. As a reminder, this is the sentence that says: "In this essay I will talk about...", without saying that.





OUTLINING YOUR STATEMENT

Now, let's work on your body paragraphs.

Each of your body paragraphs should represent one of the themes that you highlighted in your thesis statement. This is where we'll start to use your other experiences to tell stories that highlight your skills/interests/values.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1

THEME:

A STORY IN WHICH YOU DEMONSTRATE THIS THEME:

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL USE THIS THEME IN YOUR WORK:



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OUTLINING YOUR STATEMENT

Now, let's work on your body paragraphs.

Each of your body paragraphs should represent one of the themes that you highlighted in your thesis statement. This is where we'll start to use your other experiences to tell stories that highlight your skills/interests/values.

BODY PARAGRAPH 2

THEME:

A STORY IN WHICH YOU DEMONSTRATE THIS THEME:

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL USE THIS THEME IN YOUR WORK:



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OUTLINING YOUR STATEMENT

Now, let's work on your body paragraphs.

Each of your body paragraphs should represent one of the themes that you highlighted in your thesis statement. This is where we'll start to use your other experiences to tell stories that highlight your skills/interests/values.

BODY PARAGRAPH 3

THEME:

A STORY IN WHICH YOU DEMONSTRATE THIS THEME:

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL USE THIS THEME IN YOUR WORK:





LET'S WRAP IT UP

Your conclusion can be short, sweet, and simple. Use this space to make references back to your anecdote in the beginning, reiterate your thesis statement (and themes!), and overall bring the essay to a close.

CONCLUSION

YOUR OUTLINE IS DONE - CONGRATS! NOW WHAT?

You're ready to write your first draft! Remember: don't let the character count dictate your writing too much. Tell us the story; we'll make it more concise later.

Book an appointment on Handshake with a Career Advisor.

- Log on to msu.joinhandshake.com
- Click on Career Center, then select Schedule an Appointment
- Select your appointment group (we suggest choosing your college or Interest Area Advising: Health Sciences)
- Select your appointment type
- Choose a time and date that works for your schedule

Questions? Contact us at **LBcareer@msu.edu**

