

PREPARING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT AND TIMELINE REVIEW

PREP
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OBJECTIVES

Writing Statement for Graduate and Medical School Applications

- Basics of Personal Statement writing
- URMC faculty advice for writing your Personal Statement
- Further discuss applying to graduate school





**Grad school
focused**

Undergrad
focused

**TIME TO
GRADUATE**



WHAT IS A *PERSONAL* STATEMENT?

An essay(s) describing
who you are,
**what you want to do in your academic and
research career**
&
**what it is about you that makes you uniquely
qualified**
to pursue a degree at a particular institution



WHY *PERSONAL*

Every school's PhD application has their own requirements for the essay section(s)

- Personal Statement
- Statement of Purpose
- Perspectives and Experiences
- Research Statement
- Essays or Prompts

DEFINING THE TYPES OF ESSAYS

Personal statement

- Everything in one essay

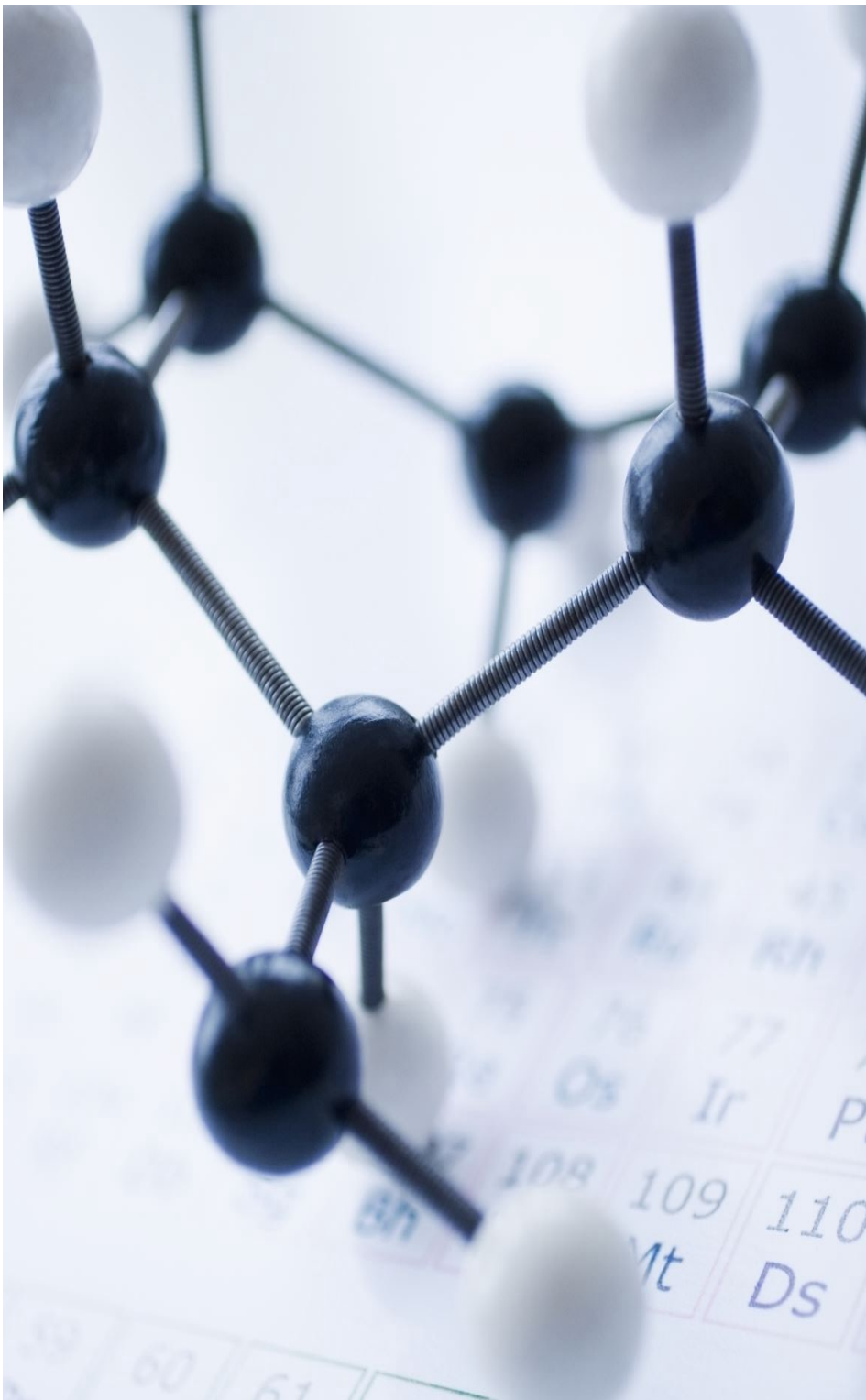
Statement of Purposes OR Research Statement

- Academic objectives
- Describe your research experience and academic achievements
- Career goals or aspirations
- Why is a school the right fit for you

Perspectives and Experiences

- Background, demographics, identifiers
- How have your experiences shaped who you are
- What lived experience has give you perspective on applying to grad school





RESOURCES

- <http://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2006/01/sell-yourself-guidance-developing-your-personal-statement-graduate-school-applications>
- <http://college.usatoday.com/2012/10/12/10-tips-for-writing-a-grad-school-personal-statement/>
- <https://www.ucdavis.edu/majors/blog/how-to-write-strong-personal-statement-for-graduate-school>
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/preparing_an_application/writing_the_personal_statement/index.html
- <https://ocs.yale.edu/blog/2021/02/06/writing-personal-statements-for-graduate-school/>
- <https://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement>





WHAT DO YOU THINK IS IMPORTANT?

Let's see what the faculty have to say...



WHAT DO UR PROGRAM DIRECTORS SAY - NEUROSCIENCE

- Why an ***interest*** in this field?
- Short statement on each ***research experience*** explaining the project and findings briefly -pointing out own contribution if a team project
- ***Motivation*** for PhD (future plans or why research is an interest)
- Short statement of interest in UR program - why is the program a good fit for the applicant's interests
- Mention particular ***labs*** is the applicant interested in



WHAT DO UR PROGRAM DIRECTORS SAY -IMV

- What inspired the applicant to apply for a PhD
- Why our program. Here the applicant may mention a few of our faculty or research topics. It is important that we see a match between the applicant's interests and what we offer
- **Motivation** for research and also the applicant's research interests.
- The applicant should talk about their **research experiences** in a way that we can analyze their **critical thinking skills**.
 - In other words, I am not interested in knowing how many techniques they learnt. I want to see they understood the hypothesis or overall question being asked, what they did to answer it and what conclusions they make from their results (even if the conclusion is that more experiments or controls are needed)
- a way for applicants to show passion about science is through their extra curricular activities. If they have served as mentors, tutors, volunteered to bring visibility of science to underrepresented communities etc. They should definitely mention these activities in their personal statements



WHAT DO UR PROGRAM DIRECTORS SAY - TOXICOLOGY

- How did you become ***interested*** in the field of toxicology?
 - More specifically, why do you want to obtain a doctorate degree in Toxicology?
- What ***research projects*** have you been involved in and what did you learn?
 - This encompasses methods, results, and interpretation. We want to find out how well the applicant understands why they did what they did, as well as what they learned from the experimental findings.
 - the research experience could be broadened to include other experiences like skill-building and/or technical training. More than just a description, though, we also try to discern what the students learned, both about the science/skill and about themselves. With this, the admissions committee is able to better judge the applicant's scholarly potential. What ***motivated*** you to pursue a graduate degree and how will that help you achieve your long-range goals?
- Pursuing ***experiences*** outside of the classroom demonstrate initiative and commitment, things that are sometimes difficult to pick out of an application.



WHAT DO UR PROGRAM DIRECTORS SAY - **BIOSTATISTICS & STATISTICS**

- Reasons for applying to the specific program at Rochester
- Preparation for the program (relevant coursework, performance)
- Research **interests** and **experience**
- Future career plans
- Weaknesses in the applicant's record: Best to address these up-front, if possible
- Other factors relevant to aptitude and **motivation** for graduate study: Emphasize specific examples
- Make sure that it is well-written: Have someone else critically review it and make sure it is clear and concise writing.
- Evidence of intellectual curiosity.
- **Ties to the institution / area.**



WHAT DO UR PROGRAM DIRECTORS SAY – PHARM/PHYS


- Organization- follows a logical progression
- Well written, with few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes (attention to detail)
- Talk about your **research experience** (if any), but don't repeat your CV- tell me something new about you
- Talks about their **motivation** for grad school (without being overly dramatic)
- Mention why you believe the **program is a good fit**, whether it be research **interests** or career goals
- Do your research about the school and program, **mention faculty** to talk to or potentially work with
- Discusses strengths and weaknesses - show some self-awareness, be confident not cocky!
- Talk about challenges & how you overcame them, and what they learned about themselves is a plus



THEMES

- **Interest**
- **Motivation**
- **Research experience**
- **Strengths and Weaknesses**
- **Good fit**
- **Faculty/Labs**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Well written**



A low-angle, close-up shot of a person's legs and feet running on a track. The person is wearing dark-colored athletic shoes with white soles. The background is heavily blurred with horizontal streaks of light and color, suggesting high speed and motion. The lighting is bright, possibly from a sunny day, creating a warm, energetic atmosphere.

**EXERCISE:
REFLECT ON
YOUR OWN
ESSAY**



WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL JOURNEY IN SCIENCE

What in your life story makes you special, unique or impressive?

What unique perspectives have shaped your journey and decisions?

What lived experience(s) have informed your goals?

What interests you about the field of study for which you are applying to graduate school?

What are your relevant work experiences?

What are your skillsets (such as problem-solving, adaptability, leadership, and communication) and can you provide a specific example?

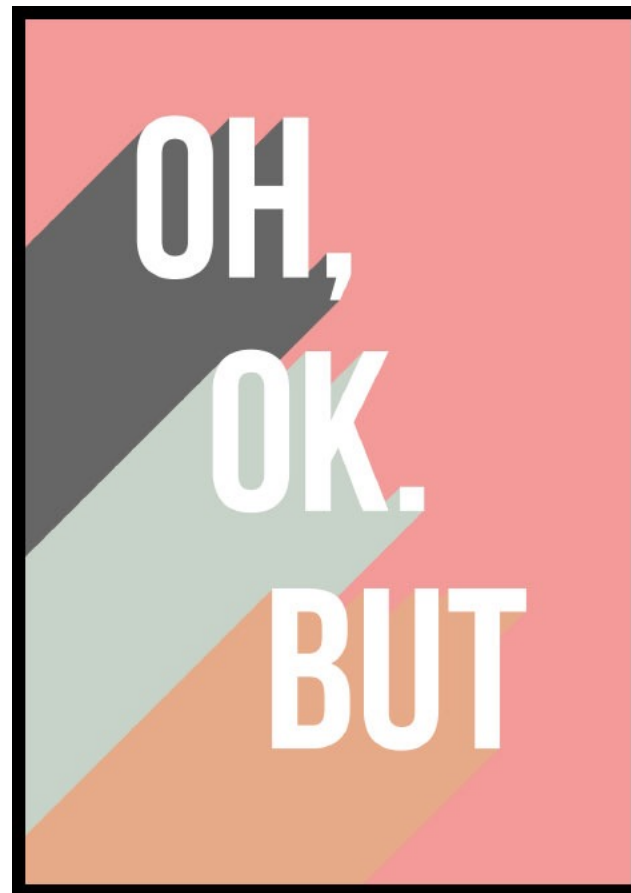
What characteristics do you possess (e.g. integrity, resilience, persistence) and can you provide an example?

What obstacles have you overcome?



AVOID USING THESE PHRASES WITHOUT MEANINGFUL ELABORATION

- I like helping people
- It is important
- I am excited to be a
- I like challenges
- I will contribute



... by comforting

... to understand mechanisms

... a neuropharmacologist b/c

... troubleshooting experiments

... leadership and involvement





TIPS FOR FRAMING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Suggested Framework

- Paragraph 1 – HOOK (*Perspective and Experiences; Diversity*)
 - Introduce yourself – starting the narrative of you who are
- Paragraphs 2-3 (*Research Statement; Statement of Purpose*)
 - Describe your current research/specialty of interest and what skills you have developed that have prepared you for graduate school
- Paragraph 4 (*Research Statement; Statement of Purpose*)
 - Describe why you are seeking admission into the specific institution/program/lab and what particular characteristics or points attracted you.
 - Personal characteristics that make you well suited for the program
- Paragraph 5
 - Your future goal after graduate school (*Statement of Purpose; Perspective and Experiences*)



THIS IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS

Tips to help you write a great personal statement

- Journal
- Carve out time each week to focus
- Outline (use the suggested framework)
- Give your draft(s) to at least three people to read who will give you constructive feedback
- Network
 - Reach out to faculty, program directors and coordinators, and students
 - Email
 - LinkedIn
 - Stay in contact with your mentors



WHAT TO CONSIDER : THINGS TO CONSIDER AND GET INTO A SPREADSHEET EARLY!

Research and
faculty

Location

Urban vs
Suburban

Cost of living

Community

Faculty to
Student ratio

Stipend

Where are
their alumni

Professional
development
resources



TIMELINE

