**Writing the Personal Statement**

The personal statement is often one of the most critical parts of an academic or employment application. It is your opportunity to reveal yourself as a candidate in ways that wouldn’t necessarily be reflected in transcripts and general forms. This chance to demonstrate what makes you a unique applicant is crucial.

The writing prompt is a primary occasion to use your own voice to highlight yourself as an applicant. It is the time to express what cannot be detected through objective questions.

It is important that your personal statement reflects your distinctive experiences. What do you possess that would make you an asset to the institution and the field? Avoid general descriptions such as *dedicated* or *enthusiastic*. Instead, let the examples you present demonstrate those qualities.

Make sure you are specific in your discussion. If your interest in the field began when you were very young, instead of saying you have always been interested in a field, tell a story of your first memories connected to your interest in that field. Trace the steps of the affirmations you felt towards your career choice at whatever point the process started.

The personal essay is also an opportunity to explain any particular obstacles you have overcome. Don’t be afraid to include relevant explanations for weaknesses or gaps in your application or unusual circumstances that impact your experiences. This is an opportunity to explain, for example, circumstances behind a period of low grades or withdrawals from school or professional work. Be careful at this point to offer valid explanations, not excuses.

**Questions to get you started!**

Elementary School years

How would you describe yourself as a young child?

What kind of personality did you have?

Do any memories of this very young age connect with your career choice?

How did you spend your time outside of school?

Were you focused on any particular career choice as a young child?

Middle School years

How would you describe yourself in your middle school years?

What kind of personality did you have?

Do any memories at this age connect with your career choice?

How did you spend your time outside of school?

High School years

What kind of personality did you have in high school?

What personal interests did you have in high school? What did you like to learn about or explore or keep up with?

What activities were you involved in through high school? Community activities? Extra-curricular activities? Jobs?

What were some of your toughest challenges in high school?

What are you most proud of achieving during the high school years?

College years

What has been the toughest part about college for you?

Have you had any particular challenges in college that are unique to you or that not all students have to face?

Did you start out majoring in your career field, or has that changed? If you have changed majors or careers, what triggered the change?

When were you first aware of your interest in your career choice? Did it start very young, or did it come later in life?

Was your career choice a gradual evolution, or did it hit you suddenly? If it was a gradual evolution, try making a timeline of the events that led you toward your career choice. If a particular event triggered your decision, give yourself permission to free-write about that event—recall as many details and feelings as you can.

If free-writing doesn’t feel comfortable, you might try a mind map going as broadly as you can. Start with you career choice in the center of the page, and branch out with each age group and thought.

Life experience

Elementary school years

Important

event

Event such as personal

or family illness

that impacted your **Career Choice** Middle School years

career choice

Activities Interest

College years Important event High school years Activities

Interest

Important How that event Other experiences

event impacted you

Give yourself permission to explore as you branch off freely into each section. Stay with those branches in as much detail as possible when you see a connection to your career choice!

Once you have explored some general experiences regarding your career choice, read your application prompt again very carefully. Use the broad thoughts you have as a collection of resource information to begin answering the particular question asked of you!