

Career Corner: Climbing the Mountain – Writing an Effective Personal Statement

A personal statement is a document that many colleges, universities and professional schools require as part of the admissions process, including several NSU programs. Personal statements are generally used to determine a student's interest in a certain program of study, ability to overcome obstacles, achieve goals, think critically and write effectively.

Writing a personal statement can seem like climbing a mountain, in which the goal seems thousands of miles away and the challenge itself is discouraging. The best way to get the ball rolling is to have a brainstorming session, in which you write down all ideas, good and bad, to later reflect upon. The brainstorming session is an efficient manner of tracking all of the themes that you'd like to include in the personal statement and helps you organize your thoughts to develop an outline.

An example of some of the key elements found in a personal statement include short-term and long-term goals, past experiences, research, accomplishments, transferable skills, community involvement, shadowing experiences and the development of an overall journey that led to your decision to apply to that program.

All students writing a personal statement must reflect on the various events or interactions that led to their interest in a particular field of study. For example, a student applying to medical school will want to create a timeline that showcases the progression taken that resulted in the self-realization that the field of health care was the right fit. Creating a timeline is important, because unlike in a Quentin Tarantino movie, you'll want the statement to create a story that doesn't bounce around various experiences and easily confuses the reader. Creating an outline will help guide you as you work on each individual paragraph, making the statement easier to tackle.

Remember that a personal statement is most effective and memorable when it includes detailed individual stories, as opposed to general statements. Just put it this way. Imagine if Abraham Lincoln's autobiography read "helped a lot of people and made some tough decisions" then it probably wouldn't be that memorable. Rather, an interesting autobiography would include vivid and specific details that made Lincoln's life journey so interesting. Like all good storytelling, the key is to tie the whole paper together by creating strong transitional sentences that wrap up each paragraph, but at the same time introduce new concepts in each paragraph.

A mountain cannot be climbed in one day, but setting up shorter goals for yourself and approaching the personal statement paragraph by paragraph will lead to a much stronger result. A personal statement can present many challenges, but it is essential to brainstorm and reflect upon past experiences, in order to ensure that it will peak the interest of the reader, while showcasing your passion for the program of study.