Tips on Writing a Personal Statement or Admissions Essays

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Why a Personal Statement?

• Only chance you have to talk to the Admissions Committee.
• Goal: clear, concise, and persuasive
  – academic or research interests
  – reasons for wanting to pursue graduate study
  – reasons for choosing a certain institution
  – career goals
  – Personal background/extracurricular activities
3 Questions to Answer

• Every university asks a different question – but it all leads to the same answers:
  1. Who are you?
  2. Why do you want to study here?
  3. Why should we (the university) want you to study here?

• Answer the questions directly for each university. Don’t try to recycle your essays....
Basic Essay Structure (1000 words)

1. Introduction
   - concrete event
   - Connect real world to research/study
   - >100 words
Basic Essay Structure

2. Academic history
   – how you got interested in your subject
   – how you are pursuing that subject now
   – >400 words
Basic Essay Structure

3. The program
   – Why this program? This university?
   – Know the program! It will show.
   – >200 words
Basic Essay Structure

4. The future
   – what you want to do in the future
   – why this is important to you
   – >200 words
Basic Essay Structure

5. Conclusion
   – Tie everything back together with your opening paragraph
   – >100 words
What Are They Looking For?

Complete picture of the student:

- Motivation, focus, goals
- Academic ability
- Communication skills: reading, writing, speaking
- Potential for success
- Personal qualities: readiness for graduate study, self-discipline, work habits, teamwork, independent study, commitment, originality of ideas, maturity, adaptability, initiative
Online Resources

• **Yale University** – advice to students: [http://www.yale.edu/yalecol/academics/fellowships/application/essays.html](http://www.yale.edu/yalecol/academics/fellowships/application/essays.html)

• **Boston University** – sample essays: [http://www.bu.edu/bufellow/successf.htm](http://www.bu.edu/bufellow/successf.htm)

• **Personal Statements online**: [https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/node/1984](https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/node/1984)
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