

# Top 10 Tips on How to Write a Personal Statement

1. Don't solely use the information on your resume to distinguish yourself. Talk about the **impact** of those experiences and choices.
2. Don't worry that you don't have "unique enough" experiences (like you started an eye clinic in Katmandu). Focus on the experiences you have had and demonstrate why those experiences have prepared you for the future.
3. Don't apply to 10-15 schools (unless you are in clinical psychology). It's way too time intensive. Focus on the 6 schools you really want to attend and work hard on those applications. **Make sure your personal statement answers the questions they are asking for, be sure to type your applications and always use spell check!!**
4. Send in your applications EARLY. If you wait until the deadline date the review committee has read too many other personal statements and it's harder for them to be enthusiastic about yours.
5. Don't focus on what you think they want to hear. Don't try to be someone that you're not - tell them WHO you are and why you will be an asset to their program and their school.
6. Be concise. Know that the admissions committee is reading hundreds of essays. Stick to no more than 2 pages – MAX!!
7. Make sure you're tailoring the essay to the individual school. Proofread your essay and make sure when you say in the end "I'm really dying to attend Columbia" that you've really written Columbia and not another school's name by mistake.
8. Avoid the "British Understatement Problem". This is the person who is so low-key as to not tell the committee very much. If you don't say much, the committee cannot tell if it's because of modesty, lack of expressive ability, or because you haven't given much thought to the essay or application in general. On the other hand, do not become too self-glorifying. What they are looking for is a realistic picture of strengths and weaknesses.
9. Don't take the process so seriously you become paralyzed. Schools look for reasons to admit people, not for reasons to deny them.
10. Edit, do rewrites and have your essay proofread by a faculty person or the McNair office!!

On average, there are 3 readers for your essays. In addition to the admission committee, faculty, top-level administrators, alumni and/or graduating students may participate in the admission process.

Material adapted from: How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School by Richard J. Stelzer, 3rd Ed., Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.