



# How to write a **STELLAR** personal statement!

CSUDH Office of Undergraduate  
Research



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# Why do I need a personal statement?

- When applying for graduate school, scholarships and some grants, internships, etc.
- This is a chance to tell your personal story and why YOU are the perfect person for this is opportunity
  - But it is not a cover letter, which is a similar genre of writing, but focuses on your fit for this job
  - A personal statement is about why you as a person are worth investing in—why you, why now?

# Classic essay structure: Which parts apply here?

- Introduction with clear thesis statement
  - What is the question you are asking? The reader should be able to predict what is coming because you told them what to expect
- Each section is unique, builds on the previous one, and adds something new
  - New ideas don't come out of left-field though; you prepare the reader and then tell them why it is an important idea afterwards
  - "Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them"
- Conclusion connects the ideas presented and tells the reader what they should take away from the piece
  - It is not the introduction repeated

# Why are outlines so important?

- How can you make a map if you don't know where the destination is?
- An outline is a roadmap for you and helps you make sure what you are writing is contributing to the journey
- Making an outline helps overcome writer's block and helps you when you are feeling lost in a piece
  - With every paragraph/section, ask yourself: "Is this part of the outline? Is this getting me towards answering my thesis question?"
- Outlines can be revised, but they should be well considered before you start writing
  - I read many student pieces where I think "there was no outline"

# Writing style (this advice applies elsewhere too)

- Each sentence needs to deliver a new and unique idea
  - Repetitious sentences tell your reader that you either don't know where your argument is going or you are desperate to meet a word/page length minimum
  - Neither option makes the reader excited to read more
- Only use words that are adding to your meaning
  - Writer's Diet: <https://writersdiet.com>
  - Some writers use too many adverbs, useless clauses, and/or complicated structures
  - Do you ever need the word "of"???
    - "A giant pile of cigarettes" or "Cigarette mound"?
- Avoid colloquial phrases and grandiose statements
  - NO: "The Red-headed stepchild of...", "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth"
  - NO: "Since the beginning of time", "Man has always sought the answer to this question"

## How to make essays longer

Like -> Along the lines of

In fact -> as a matter of fact

Because -> due to the fact  
that



# NOOOOOOOO!

This is trash, and he are not clever. We know what you are doing, and it makes us miserable to read your work. When the professor is miserable reading your paper, do you think you will get an A or win the scholarship?

Play (k)

## How to make essays longer

When -> On the occasion of

Now -> at this point in time

Twice -> On two separate  
occasions



# Writer's Diet

## The Test

Is your writing flabby or fit? Enter a text sample of at least 100 words, then click "take the test" to see your diagnosis. (Don't like the diet and fitness theme? Click the Settings wheel to change it). To shape up your sentences and sharpen your style, start your customized writing workout [here](#).

Then, I will bring back the high eating of fat because it will help me and the people maintain the right body structure. Millions of years ago, humans will hunt their own food by hunting animals and remember there were not as much carbohydrates or sugar food that can be found. Recent studies states, "High fats diets makes you burn fat." I agree with this. I have notice early humans kept a slim body figure while today era there is a lot of people struggling with obesity. In a government report explains, "More than forty percent of people in the Unites States are obese." The high carnivore diet will help people loose weight and to stay healthy. This century there is a diet that known as keto it is the same as the early human eating habits. The living of ancient humans is natural, they figure things on their own be experiments different ideas that help them make their life easier in the future.

run the test

NEW! Download the free Writer's Diet add-in for MS Word

get the app



	😊	😐	😞	😞	😞
<input type="checkbox"/> be-verbs					
<input type="checkbox"/> zombie nouns					
<input type="checkbox"/> prepositions					
<input type="checkbox"/> ad-words					
<input type="checkbox"/> it, this, that, there					

**FLABBY**

This sample has 164 eligible words.

Then, I will bring back the high eating of fat because it will help me and the people maintain the right body structure. Millions of years ago, humans will hunt their own food by hunting animals and remember there were not as much carbohydrates or sugar food that can be found. Recent studies states, "High fats diets makes you burn fat." I agree with this. I have notice early humans kept a slim body figure while today era there is a lot of people struggling with obesity. In a government report explains, "More than forty percent of people in the Unites States are obese." The high carnivore diet will help people loose weight and to stay healthy. This century there is a diet that known as keto it is the same as the early human eating habits. The living of ancient humans is natural, they figure things on their own be experiments different ideas that help them make their life easier in the future.

# Writing style specific to a personal statement

- Make yourself stand out!
  - I had two students write the exact same anecdote into their personal statements one year
    - Yes, it was their experience, but it was VERY CLICHÉ
    - I am an archaeologist and every student writes about Indiana Jones—boring!
  - Why are you in your field of study?
  - What makes you a unique person for this experience?
    - Is this an Ivy League school with few students of color? Call it out
    - Is this an international travel opportunity and you have never left Southern California? Tell us!
    - What experience or perspective will you bring that others might not?



# Writing style specific to a personal statement

- Where are you a leader in your life?
  - It is always exciting to read about young people taking on responsibilities and new skills
  - It can be outside of the university
    - “I am the night manager at Chick-fil-a and it is my responsibility to make sure the shift runs well, my co-workers know what they need to do, and the store gets cleaned and shut down properly for the morning crew. I sought out this promotion because I am a self-directed person looking to develop new skills, and this is why I am also applying for this internship.”
  - If you have not had these opportunities yet, what is your potential?

# Writing style specific to a personal statement

- What are your goals for the future?
  - Your resume/CV tells me about what you have done in the past—it does not tell me why you did something and how you hope it will get you towards goals
    - This is the job of the personal statement
  - Many students just document their credentials, but I want to know where you are going
- Why is this graduate program/grant/internship a good fit for you?
  - How will this opportunity get you towards those goals?

# Writing style specific to a personal statement

- Are there any broader impacts?
  - How will your life be changed?
  - How will your community be changed?
  - How will the world be changed? I am serious...think BIG!



# Writing style specific to a personal statement

- Don't be afraid to talk about the challenges you have overcome
  - This makes you seem resilient and different than the majority of other applicants
  - It is not a source of embarrassment—it is your story and the fact that you are on the other side of it should be a source of pride
  - Usually, you would not mention your background, race/ethnicity, immigrant status, sexual identity, socio-economic status, disabilities, etc., but you can here and should if it is under-represented in higher education or your discipline

# Writing style specific to a personal statement

- This is the place to explain and justify gaps/problems elsewhere in your application
  - Is your GPA a 2.9? Why?
    - You had to work full time? Care for children or siblings?
    - You failed at the community college three years ago, but your GPA over the last two years is a 3.7? Point that out!
  - Did you drop out of school for a while? Why?
- Don't hope they won't notice. Take on the issue directly since it a chance to show how you handle difficulties

# Example

Growing up as a child of immigrants, my mom always stressed how important schooling was for future success. She made the dangerous border crossing outside legal channels, but has since worked to gain her US Citizenship. My mom continued to go to night classes to influence us to do better in school. My parents' struggles have motivated me to study forensic anthropology along our southern border. Although I always knew I wanted to help other migrants, I did not know in what way. I went into community college directionless. I jumped from major to major, but once I took an anthropology class and realized I could use it to help migrants, I stuck with it. Anthropology grew into a passion of mine, and since then, I have excelled in all my classes.

Prior to finding anthropology, I was living alone in Fresno. I moved out at a young age and was floating through college. I was unable to complete some courses and did not realize until after the drop date. Although this period set back my transfer date and overall GPA, I was still able to overcome it and get back on track.

I reset my college career by moving back to Los Angeles where most of my family lives and enrolling at Cerritos College and then transferring to CSU Dominguez Hills. This has given me the familial support to focus more on school, and now my CSUDH GPA is 3.65. I have been able to become involved in school organizations such as the Anthropology Club and The Electronic Student Journal of Anthropology. Independently I have taken the initiative to catalog and curate the Anthropology Department's fossil cast and comparative zooarchaeology collection (described elsewhere). It is important to note that many undergraduate departments do not have access to zooarchaeological comparative collections. I gave a conference presentation at the Southwest Association of Anthropology on how other departments could replicate what I have done at Dominguez Hills and build their own collections. My student collaborators and I value science outreach and have been sharing the progress of our growing specimen collection on an Instagram account, @something. Here we share images of our current successes and get suggestions from other departments and individuals that may be interested in building their own zooarchaeological collection with the beetle method.

# How do you become a better writer?

- In one word: READ
  - Reading the kind of writing you want to be doing is critical
  - We read academic writing in class to learn information, but also writing style
- Practice, practice, practice
  - Do you journal? Do you compose thoughtful communications via email and text?
    - I get emails that look like text messages
  - Do you dislike writing or do you make yourself miserable when you need to write?  
You won't get better at a habit you hate. Reframe your position on writing.
- Read your paper out loud to yourself - it may help you recognize clunky phrasing, awkward run-on sentences, and general grammatical problems
- **Get feedback regularly and give feedback regularly**

# Recognize what works for you...

- Writers have different methods and schedules that work best for them
- Some write best early in the morning, others in the middle of the night
- Some prefer every paragraph to be perfect before moving on to the next, while others prefer to get everything down on the paper first and then worry about editing later
- Try to find a method that works best for you and follow it
- This is especially important for those of you headed to graduate school or professional jobs with lots of writing needed



# Ask for feedback

- Faculty don't always write edits on papers because students so rarely read them
- If you tell us you want feedback, we will happily give it
- Use that feedback to improve a piece before submitting to an application or just for your own personal reflection
- If the faculty member writes feedback on a paper, PLEASE READ IT! They only did it to help you



AND SUBMIT YOUR  
APPLICATION BEFORE THE DUE  
DATE!!!



Questions??