

Writing Personal Statements as Undergraduate Researchers




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Why Personal Statements Matter

- ☐ Used in admissions, fellowships, and research programs
- ☐ Communicates your story beyond the resume
- ☐ Demonstrates motivation, preparation, and fit

Before You Write: Reflect



Motivations
Experiences
Goals

Structure of the Statement

Opening: Motivation, Background, Goals

Body: Academic prep, Research/Scholarship, Skills

Conclusion: Summary and program fit



Opening Paragraph Strategy



Start with your motivation ('Why')



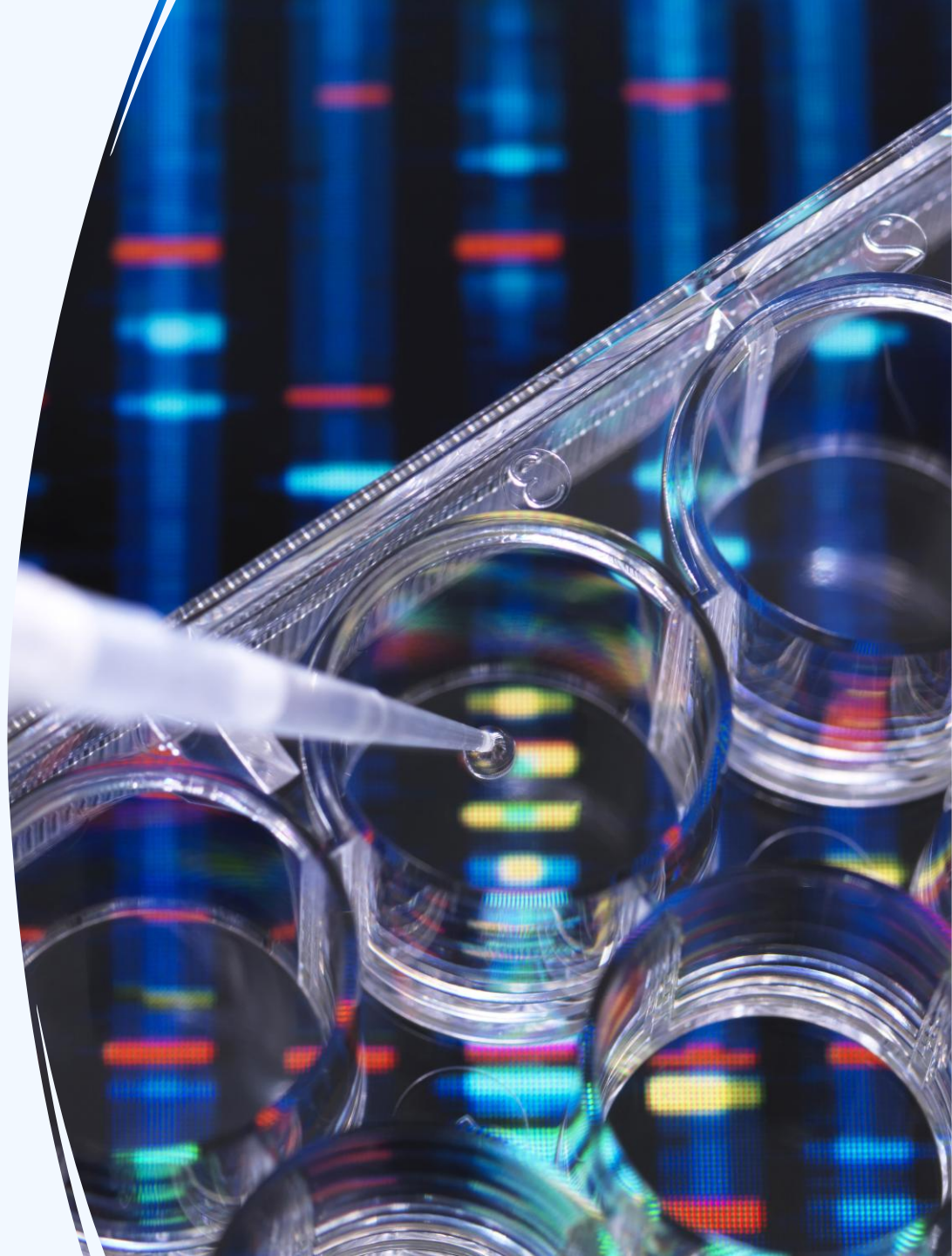
Include relevant background and field of interest



State your future goals and connection to the opportunity

Body: How to Talk About Your Research

- What's the big picture or larger significance/importance?
- What question did you address?
- What did you do, and what did you find?
- What did you learn, and how does it shape your goals?





Conclusion

- Summarize your goals
- Reaffirm your preparation
- Express confidence that this program is right for you – how will this program help you achieve your goals?

Do's and Don'ts





Do: Be specific, revise carefully, connect to goals

- Define Your Aspirations:** Clearly articulate your professional goals and explain what drives you toward them. Describe the kind of professional you aim to become and why.
- Reflect on Research Experience:** Highlight key lessons from your research experience and how it has shaped your development—as a scholar, a team member, and an individual.
- Align with the Opportunity:** Connect your goals directly to the program or position you're applying for (e.g., summer research, grad school, postdoc). Explain how this opportunity will help you grow and move closer to your aspirations.
- Showcase Your Value:** Demonstrate what you bring to the table—skills, perspectives, experiences—and why the organization or program would benefit from selecting you.
- Be Specific and Distinctive:** Use vivid details and concrete examples to illustrate your experiences, motivations, and strengths. Make your story memorable.
- Polish and Perfect:** Review for grammar, clarity, and tone. Seek feedback from at least three people, revise thoroughly, and tailor your writing to the specific program.



Don't: Reuse your resume, write last-minute, use clichés

- Don't use vague goals like "helping people" or "cure diseases."
- Don't fabricate or exaggerate experiences.
- Don't submit a **first draft**.
- Don't **procrastinate**—avoid writing it the night before.
- Don't **plagiarize** or copy others' work.
- Don't make it **too long or too short**—follow length guidelines.
- Don't ignore the **specific questions** asked by the program.
- Don't use **clichés**, humor, or overly casual language.
- Don't **repeat your resume**—expand on it with insight and reflection.
- Don't use **abbreviations** or jargon.
- Don't include **negative or overly personal stories** that don't support your goals.

**Tell us about a challenge you overcame
in your academic journey.**

Sample Prompts

Submit a statement of purpose, include your research experience and career goals.

Letter of intent summarizing your background and outlining your short- and long-term training and research goals in this discipline.

In the statement of purpose, briefly explain why you want to pursue an advanced degree. This is your opportunity to explain

- why you have chosen to go to graduate school
- what your particular interests are
- why you have chosen [university name]. Clearly express your thoughts in an organized and focused way.

A personal statement, of approximately 400-500 words, highlighting information (such as training, areas of particular interest in graduate study, and career objectives) that will help provide the Admissions Committee with a descriptive picture of the total student.

Tell us about your academic background and future goals. What have been your major achievements in the past? What do you hope to accomplish in the future? How do you see this program helping you achieve these goals?

The statement should be single-spaced and should not be more than two or three pages long. A clear statement of your intended research interests is the central part of this statement.

Discuss:(a) past experience or research training relevant to your doctoral research interests ; (b) papers, publications, or relevant courses taken ; (c) awareness of the current literature on your field of interest [though citations should be used selectively];

(d) how or why you feel this area is of special intellectual and/or practical importance.

Final Tips

Get feedback from mentors and peers

Avoid jargon; write for an educated general audience

Be honest, reflective, and intentional



Q&A / Resources

Visit your university writing center

Check program websites for examples and expectations

Reach out to mentors for review and support

