

## Content

### Structure

Is there an overall structure? Is there a reason the paragraphs are in this order? Can you combine certain paragraphs or ideas?

To check, reverse outline your essay: take your thesis and topic sentences and form an outline. Then, see if all the paragraphs work together.

For example:

*Volunteering to tutor in my last two years of college sparked my interest in teaching. I have been out of the classroom for thirteen years to raise my own children but have continued to keep up with changes in both the educational and scientific fields. Outside of the classroom, I volunteer with my children's schools and play the piano for a local retirement community once a month. After this hiatus, I am looking forward to returning to the classroom.*

The structure seems pretty good here. There is a thought progression from paragraph to paragraph. This person also seems to hit most of the major points to discuss.

### Check for good, well developed and specific examples.

Examples should show, not tell. Can you tie your examples back to you theme and/or purpose? Information should be meaningful and show you to be a person and a student.

Schall, Joe. "Style for Personal Statements." *Writing Personal Statements Online*. Penn State U, 2008. Web. 22 October 2009.

[https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/p3\\_p7.html](https://www.e-education.psu.edu/writingpersonalstatementsonline/p3_p7.html)

*As part of my master's research at Mythic College I am interested in the information overload issue—it can cause anxiety, poor decision-making, and reduced attention span.*

. . . to this:

*For my master's thesis at Mythic College I plan to focus on cognitive architectures that allow us to make simulations of and predictions about human performance in situations such as driving vehicles or piloting fighter aircraft.*

In this revision, we learn much more meaningful information about the planned research, including the practical applications of the work. Thus, we are more likely to assess that this student is indeed ready to begin his research.

## Personal Statements 2: Revising 2

Beware looking desperate or forceful.

They should **want** to choose you, not feel **obligated** to choose you.

So, for example, don't simply mention that you have a family member who is an alumnus. Instead, add a sentence explaining why you have decided to pursue the same school and what they valued about their time at the school.

Also, **never** mention that this is the only school and/or job you are applying to. That looks a bit desperate, and seems like you may not be committed to the **profession**, just to the **school**. Yes, you want them to know you want to go there, but bring that out in other ways.

Paragraph length

Paragraphs should be at least 3 sentences long. The only exceptions, in short personal statements, are the introductions and conclusions. If you have 2 short-ish paragraphs (3 sentences), see if you can combine them. A paragraph of three sentences tends to make the paragraph look under-developed.

For example:

*Outside of the classroom, I volunteer with my children's schools and play the piano for a local retirement community once a month. My main hobby is reading, mainly non-fiction history. I am looking for ways to incorporate history into my classes through showing how science has impacted history through new discoveries.*

It feels like this paragraph is missing detail, emotion, or connections to the larger essay. Work on enhancing the ideas and turning them into talking points for the essay – what does the volunteering tell us about **you** and about your future as a teacher? Why is the volunteering something to be celebrated/mentioned in the essay?

You

Are you coming across in the essay? Are you enthusiastic? Do you make clear your qualifications, desire, commitment, and skills?

## Grammar and Mechanics

### Proofread

Read the essay backwards, line by line – you can catch mistakes you otherwise wouldn't see.

Highlight every am, is, are, was, were, being that you see.

Highlight every "I".

Circle every abstract word you use (what you cannot touch): character, hope, dream, love, etc.

If you have too many of any of these, fix them.

### Sentence variety

Every sentence should not begin with "I" or have the same rhythm.

For example:

*I am a diligent worker. I have excellent listening skills, I am a fast learner, & I am familiar with Microsoft Office. I want this job because it would be a good experience for me.*

A better version would be:

*I am a diligent worker and a fast learner. While this job will be a good experience, I can also offer excellent listening skills to work better with my coworkers and with the Writing Center students, and I can offer knowledge of computer programs such as Microsoft Office to help with daily office tasks.*

Example:

*The skills that I think I can bring to the Writing Center are my organization skills. I tend to keep everything organized. I like making appointments and setting dates. I am very easy going and friendly, which I think will help me get along with the students and staff. I have done clerical work before in high school when I worked at an accounting firm and I enjoyed it.*

A better version would be:

*I can bring my organization skills to the Writing Center because I tend to keep everything organized, especially with scheduling. My nice and easy-going nature will help me cooperate with coworkers and the students who come into the Writing Center and who need to see a friendly face. When I worked at an accounting firm in high school, I did clerical work and enjoyed it.*

## Personal Statements 2: Revising 4

### Make sure every word is used correctly and idiomatically

Example: *I know that I am purposed to be a dentist.*

“Purposed” is used incorrectly here. Either substitute a better verb (“meant”, “supposed”) or change the sentence: *I know that my purpose is to be a dentist.*

### Avoid empty words and phrases: goal, dream, basically, really, etc.

Example:

*Basically, my dream for my life is to help people and make them feel better.*

Better:

*In five years, I want work in a hospital, actively helping people decide how to treat their cancer and how to cope with physical and emotional distress of such a terrible disease.*

### Avoid just listing skills and qualities you have – that’s boring.

Tie them into a story and “show” me how that makes you a good candidate.

Example:

I am punctual, dedicated, easy-going, and organized.

Better:

*I kept a perfect attendance record in college and was never tardy, because I knew that I would either miss valuable information or worse, hold up an event and waste other people’s time.*

### Replace passive voice (“to be” verbs) with active voice

The house **is struck** by lightning – Passive

Lightning **strikes** the house – Active

### Visit the Writing Center

It is best to have several different people look over your statement. It will also probably take many drafts for you and your readers to be satisfied.

Our tutors can stand in for an admissions committee. Because they do not know you, they can help you to see your essay from an objective viewpoint and find weaknesses that may be hidden to you family and friends.