So, what do they **REALLY** want in a PERSONAL STATEMENT?

How to craft an authentic, original personal statement for graduate school apps, fellowship competitions and research proposals

Today we are digging into the (sometimes) dreaded topic of personal statement development. We’ll start with the basics, like “what is a personal statement?” and consider why this kind of personal narrative is a part of most application processes. From there, we’ll talk about what experts **want to see** in your personal statements and what they **DON’T want to find**.

We’ll close with a useful list of strategies for getting started from recently successful applicants and advisors from our own campus and beyond.
So, what IS a personal statement?

An essay that reveals:

who you are, 
what you care about, and 
what you intend to contribute to this life.
No big deal.
What is the purpose of including this kind of personal narrative in an application package?

A personal statement is your introduction to the selection committee. What you choose to tell them will demonstrate your values, beliefs and curiosities.

Think of it as a conversation.

It won’t be perfect, but you are the only person you can be inside of it.
FIVE THINGS readers DO NOT want to see in YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Chronological storytelling

Cliché

Taking full credit for collective work

Emotional Manipulation

No specific or distinctive connection to the opportunity or institution
FIVE THINGS readers **DO** want to see in YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Evidence
- Detail & Specificity
- Meaning

A cohesive **theme** that demonstrates a pattern of **action** and **belief**

**Your humanity**
Strategies to GET STARTED

Make TIME

Do your homework

Let go of the idea of “just sitting down writing it”

Use your resources

Identify THE IDEA

Work with other people

Meet your own expectations
Electronic Resource Guide

Definition of a Personal Statement | Mary Hale Tolar
Tolar is a Truman Scholar, Rhodes Scholar, founding member of the National Association of Fellowships Advisors and co-author/editor of "The Lucky Few and the Worthy Many: Scholarships and the World's Future Leaders."

Composing A Personal Statement: Invitation to Frustration | Kyle Mox
Kyle Mox is currently working with the University of Chicago’s Honors Program as their Senior Adviser for Scholarships & Fellowships.

Writing Personal Statements Online | Joe Schall
Joe Schall was the Giles Writer-in-Residence for the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences at Penn State from 1988 until 2008. He received an M.A. in English from Penn State in 1988 and a B.S. in English Education from Juniata College in 1981. He has won numerous honors for his writing and teaching, including the Bobst Award for Emerging Writers from New York University and the Wilson Award for Outstanding Teaching from Penn State’s College of Earth and Mineral Sciences. His publications range from short stories to style guides (Writing Recommendation Letters Online and Style for Students Online)

Resources for Undergraduate Researchers | ICRU
ICRU promotes undergraduate involvement in mentored research and creative projects at the University of Iowa.

Scholar Development Resources & Support | UIHP Scholarships & Fellowships
UIHP Scholarships & Fellowships assists undergraduate scholars at the University of Iowa in their pursuit of university, national, and international scholarship, fellowship, and grant opportunities.

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