

Developing Your

# PERSONAL STATEMENT AND RESPONSES TO SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

for STEM Undergraduate Research Program Applications

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# WORKSHOP AGENDA

## TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED

- What is a personal statement?
- What is the format and structure of a personal statement?
- What should the personal statement contain?
- What are examples of typical supplemental questions?
- Who might be able to provide feedback on my personal statement?

# WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Free-form opportunity for you to:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain how you are a good match for a particular program
- Provide background about how your experiences have shaped your interests
- Share relevant information that the selection committee can't find in your other application materials





# OVERALL GUIDELINES

## ACADEMIC ESSAY STRUCTURE

Introduction, body, and conclusion that flows from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph that uses strong verbs and adjectives

## PAGE REQUIREMENT

Generally, 1-2 pages, single spaced, using a readable font. Review each application, as some applications have specific character, word, or page counts.

## BE PROFESSIONAL

Avoid contractions, email/text message speak, clichés, oversharing intimate details of your life experiences, unrelated information, etc.

# PERSONAL STATEMENT CONTENT

## **WHO ARE YOU?**

Include your year of study, current/transfer major, and related academic and career goals. Other info you might share include but are not limited to are: your attendance at a community college, accolades, if you identify as underrepresented in STEM. (i.e., BIPOC, people with disabilities, underrepresented sexual/gender identity, etc.), first-gen, low-income financial status, military/veteran status, non-traditional student, etc. Share what you feel comfortable with and why it is important for them to know that. Explain how these things about you are a strength and how it will allow you to succeed.

## **WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED? HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT?**

Explain why you want to do research, how you got to that point, why you like that particular field, and how that research program is the next logical step. Share any personal, educational, and/or professional experiences that have contributed to your interest in them. Look into the research work. Don't give a generic statement, instead include specific projects/topics, curriculum, equipment, etc. offered through the research experiences that excite you and why? Answer, why you, why them.



# PERSONAL STATEMENT CONTENT (CONT 1)

## HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM ALIGN WITH YOUR ACADEMIC AND CAREER GOALS?

Share how will you use what you gain from participating to reach your goals.

## WHAT QUALITIES, SKILLS, CHARACTERISTICS, ETC. WILL YOU BRING TO THE PROGRAM?

Highlight your strengths. Share concrete reasons as to why you are prepared for the research experience. Include your ability to study and work on your own and as a team. Share how your skills align with what they need for their research. Are there any courses/labs, projects, volunteer/employed experiences, etc. you had in that subject area? Describe things such as your role, any results, the skills you utilized, what you learned, etc. Include any IT/programming skills, research/lab techniques, etc.

# PERSONAL STATEMENT CONTENT (CONT 2)

## **EXPLAIN ANY GAPS OR WEAKNESSES IN YOUR APPLICATION**

Explain but don't list excuses. Focus on what you've learned and how you dealt with the challenge, turning the gap/weakness into a strength. Don't forget to include any skills you learned during that time. Always keep the tone positive.

## **DISCUSS YOUR INTEREST IN MENTORSHIP**

Share areas where you are looking for mentorship and why you are looking for mentors. What do you hope to learn and what you can contribute? Share how having a mentor can help you build and develop as a STEM student and future professional.

# SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTION EXAMPLES

## **INDICATE WHICH RESEARCH AREA SOUNDS MOST INTERESTING**

Be specific about the research position/positions that sound most interesting to you and state why.

## **WHY DO YOU WISH TO CONDUCT RESEARCH?**

First explain why research in general, then move to how conducting research, specifically that program's research project, relates to your overall interests and goals. Things to connect it to might be your transfer plans, intended major, future career, etc. Be specific.

## **DESCRIBE A CHALLENGE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED?**

Describe a challenge you encountered in your life. Follow the STAR method

## **DESCRIBE ANY PRIOR RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

This can be a combination of multiple examples (i.e., formal research program, independent studies, a class paper, lab course where you learn wet and dry techniques)



# ADDITIONAL TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

1

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Thoroughly read through the program's website, application requirements, and any other program information available to you. Tailor your personal statement/supplemental questions — and entire application — to that particular program/opportunity. One size does not fit all.

2

## SPEAK TO THE AUDIENCE

Your personal statement/supplemental questions — and entire application — will be read by a committee: faculty from that program, graduate and possibly undergraduate students involved in the research project, program staff, etc. They are trying to decide if you will be successful in their program.

3

## BE SPECIFIC

Communicate what distinguishes you from other applicants. Share any relevant academic preparation, skills, interests, achievements, experiences, professional, and/or academic goals, etc.

4

## PROOFREAD

Review for grammar, spelling, clarity, logic, flow, correct punctuation, positivity, etc. Share with your faculty, academic counselors, career advisors, career counselors, references, etc. for feedback before submitting your application.



# CAMPUS RESOURCES



## CAREER CENTER

Assist with major/career exploration and employment related resources

## ENGLISH 1E ONLINE WRITING CONSULTATION

Noncredit, free, online course that offers students feedback on rough drafts

## COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

23 unique programs available to provide counseling support services

## STEM/MAS PROGRAM

Program specifically geared to support your STEM goals

## INSTRUCTIONAL FACULTY

Ask faculty you are familiar with to review your application

## WRITING AND HUMANITIES TUTORING CENTER (WHTC)

Writing support in any subject and at any stage in the writing process

# HOW DO I CONTACT THE CAREER CENTER FOR MORE INFORMATION?



[APPOINTMENTS WITH THE CAREER CENTER](#)



[CAREER CENTER CONTACT INFO](#)



[CAREER CENTER SOCIAL MEDIA](#)



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