

Statement Writing Workshop

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Outline for today

Introduction to writing
statements

Understanding your prompt
and your audience

Good statement writing
practices

The revision process

Why do I need to write a statement?

- This is your chance to bring your unique personality into your application

Show the reviewers who YOU are and why you
are right for the program

What is a statement?

- Personal Statements
 - Who are you?
 - What is important to you?
 - Why are you applying to this program and what do you hope to get out of it?
 - How will you be a meaningful part of the community?
- Research Statements (Statement of Purpose)
 - Most often applies to Graduate School
 - What will you bring to the academic community of this university and program?
 - What do you hope to research?
 - How are you prepared to do this type of research?

Understanding the Prompt

- Prompts are your insight into what is most important to the reviewers.
- Your job is to address all aspects of the prompt while still maintaining your unique voice and creativity.

Example prompt:

- In our experience, successful graduate students take ownership of the research, work both independently and in teams, and are able to grow through constructive criticism from peers and mentors. Please use this section to explain why you think you will excel in our graduate program, keeping the above characteristics in mind. Your statement should be a maximum of two pages, 12-point font, single-spaced, and one-inch margins.

Turn the prompt into a question:

- In our experience, successful graduate students take ownership of the research, work both independently and in teams, and are able to grow through constructive criticism from peers and mentors. **Please use this section to explain why you think you will excel in our graduate program, keeping the above characteristics in mind.** Your statement should be a maximum of two pages, 12-point font, single-spaced, and one-inch margins.

Why do you think you will excel in our graduate program?

Identify key characteristics they will be looking for:

- In our experience, successful graduate students **take ownership of the research**, work both **independently and in teams**, and are able to **grow through constructive criticism** from peers and mentors. Please use this section to explain why you think you will excel in our graduate program, keeping the above characteristics in mind. Your statement should be a maximum of two pages, 12-point font, single-spaced, and one-inch margins.

In my essay I give concrete examples of:

- ☐ Taking ownership of a project and working independently
- ☐ Teamwork
- ☐ Taking feedback well and learning from it

Exercise: Breaking down a prompt

1. Turn this prompt into a question
2. Create a checklist (rubric) from this prompt

The prompt:

This essay is a self-description of your academic, research, and career goals as they are related to NOAA's mission, and how your proposed course of study and/or research will help you achieve these goals. This is your opportunity to present yourself, your aspirations and career goals in a concise manner. Include any background information that is pertinent, any graduate school plans, and provide insight into why you have chosen to pursue these education and career goals (a list of college courses alone is not sufficient). This 2 to 3 page essay will be used to evaluate you as an individual, not necessarily as a scientist, and your motivation for applying for this scholarship. The essay should demonstrate your organizational and written communication skills.

If you have conducted any NOAA-mission science experiences such as an internship, research project, or club activity, please include that demonstrated experience in your essay.

The actual rubric:

Essay: College Education Plan and Career Goals (30%)

- 1. Is the essay written clearly?**
- 2. Are the education plan and career goals related to NOAA's mission and objectives?**
- 3. Does the applicant demonstrate interest in NOAA mission areas and eligible to work in the NOAA-related workforce in the future?**

NOAA's Mission: Science, Service, and Stewardship

To understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans, and coasts; To share that knowledge and information with others; To conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources.

Good statement writing practices

**Grab your reader's attention from the
very beginning**



Writing a “hook”

- Interesting or contradictory phrase
- Detailed description
- Story or anecdote
- Clear statement of who you are and why you are applying to the program

Examples:

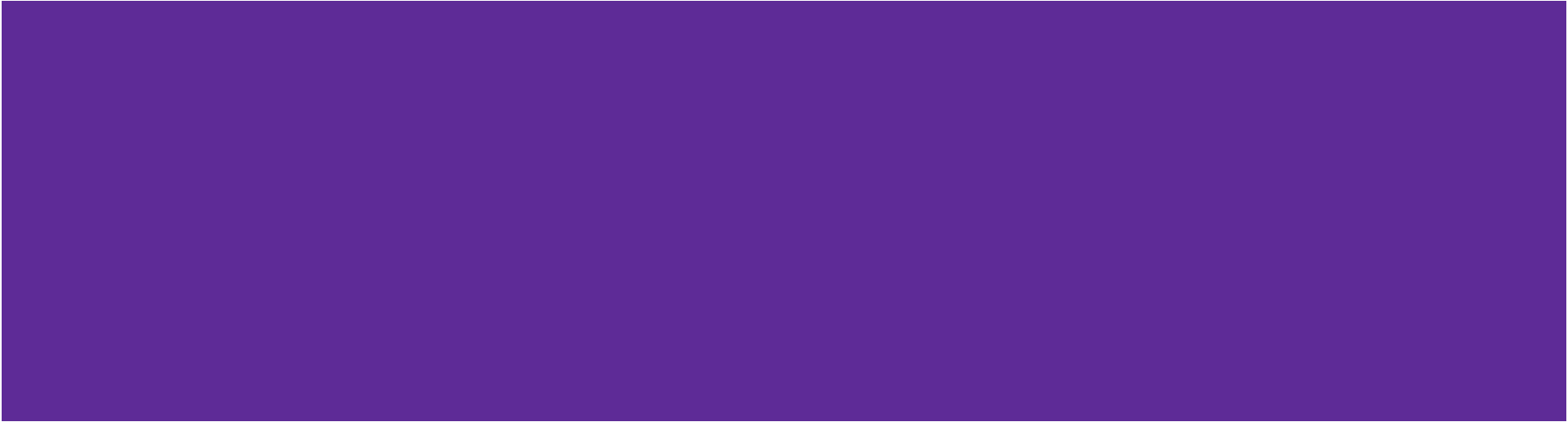
Sally Edwards — triathlon pioneer—has said, “If we’re not willing to settle for junk living then we certainly shouldn’t settle for junk food.” When I graduated from college and moved to New York City, I was settling for both.

No classes for an entire year? I could not wrap my head around the idea.

From the time I was in fourth grade until I entered college, my goal was to become an orthopedic surgeon.

Only 30 minutes have passed since our bus left the hotel in Seoul, but the view from my window is already losing the capital city's vibrancy. The warm hues emanating from its electric skyline have given way to a steel-gray overcast; the neon spectrum of small stylish cars I've gotten accustomed to vanishes, and now convoys of armored infantry trucks stretch along lanes of the highway on both sides of us. Just beyond the barbed wire fences that line the road to Panmunjom, the vegetation abruptly stops, revealing the barren surface on the other side. There are no trees, our tour guide begins to explain, because the North Koreans have cut and burned them all for fuel.

Be detailed



Write an essay only YOU can write

- If your application also includes a resume, CV, or transcript, you don't need to restate everything that is on there
- Instead, talk about specific details of those experiences
 - What did you learn from them?
 - What did you bring or add to them that had a lasting impact?
 - Do you have experience that seems unrelated? Talk about the specific skills you gained that ARE relevant to the opportunity.

Write an essay only YOU can write

- Don't be afraid to bring your lived experience into your essay
 - Personal/social/cultural experiences that have shaped your academic journey or career goals
 - Facing challenges/barriers can demonstrate perseverance and leadership
- How has your lived experience given you a unique perspective?

Why THIS program?

- Don't restate the program description. The reviewers know what you are applying to.
 - What specific experiences you hope to get out of the program?
 - How will this program benefit you?
 - What will you have after this program that you wouldn't get without it?
 - Is there someone specific you would like to work with?
 - How does this fit in with your future plans?

How to structure your essay



Two main ways:

- Persuasive essay
 - Similar to the “5-paragraph essay”: Intro, main ideas, conclusion
 - Your answer to the prompt is your “thesis statement” then you back up that argument with evidence from your life
 - Each main idea paragraph has a “mini” argument about particular kinds of skills or experience and uses evidence from your life to back it up.
 - The conclusion reminds the reader of your thesis statement and also talks about the future in the program and beyond.

Why do you think you will excel in our graduate program?

In my essay I give concrete examples of:

- ❑ Taking ownership of a project and working independently
- ❑ Teamwork
- ❑ Taking feedback well and learning from it

Example Thesis Statement:

I will excel in the UW School of Aquatic and Fisheries Sciences graduate program, because of my experience working independently in stressful environments, my belief in the importance of collaboration, and my passion for learning.

- Chronological
 - Tell your story in order
 - Start from the beginning, maybe the first time you knew you wanted to do research, or the first time you knew you wanted to study marine biology, etc.
 - Then tell us about your experiences and skills as you develop them throughout your life.
 - How have these experiences led you to apply to this program?
 - Can sometimes be an easier approach if you aren't given a clear prompt for the essay.

Why do you think you will excel in our graduate program?

In my essay I give concrete examples of:

- ❑ Taking ownership of a project and working independently
- ❑ Teamwork
- ❑ Taking feedback well and learning from it

These are still important!

You still need something like a thesis statement but it might be at the end of your essay.

Don't make your reader work too hard to get the information they want!

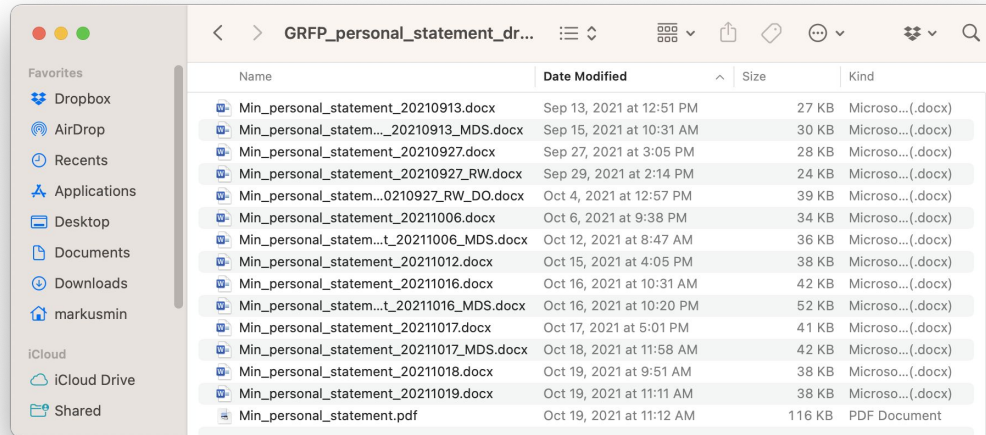
Exercise: Read an example statement

Discuss:

1. What did you like?
 2. Did they have a hook? Was it effective?
 3. How did the writer show their unique voice and personality?
 4. How was the essay structured?
 5. Was it clear? Did it address the prompt?
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The revision process

- The best essays go through many drafts (and your most important essays will go through even more)
- Start early!!



^ First full draft >one month before submission, 14 drafts

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Strategies for self-revision

- Make a reverse outline
 - Take your essay and create an outline from what you've written. Do your ideas flow together? Are your main points coming through?
 - To test the flow: Print your essay, cut it up, and see if you can put it back together
- Make sure to check for spelling/grammar/clarity
 - Read it out loud!
 - Read it backwards!

Strategies for getting revisions from others

- The more people that you can get to read your essay, the better!
Different levels of familiarity with your field is a +
- For busy people (e.g., faculty): give them plenty of time if you want them to read your essay (>2 weeks)
- Take revisions in stride
 - Filtering feedback is an important skill that you develop over time. You don't have to accept every suggestion, especially if it doesn't feel like your voice!
 - Compartmentalize your feedback to your essay (don't take it personally)

UW Resources for Revisions

- Office of Merit Scholarships, Fellowships, and Awards (OMSFA)
 - [Book an appointment with an adviser](#)
 - Primarily focused on scholarships and fellowships
- Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment (CLUE)

Writing Center

- [Drop in tutoring](#)
- General writing help

Please take three minutes to fill out this survey and help us improve this workshop!

