THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Goals of the Personal Statement

- **Introduce yourself and supplement resume/CV**
  - Reveal motivations and demonstrate ability to reflect and share meaning with others
  - “What makes you tick”
    - This document ought to be “singular”; only you could write this
  - Blending personal and academic voice; for many/most, this is tricky
  - Its success rests on concrete details and authentic reflection, not sweeping commentary about the world and your ability/potential to save it
    - Avoid clichés and hyperbole
    - Be precise, descriptive, concise
    - Jump into your story quickly
  - Personal Statement is the (underlying) WHY of your application
    - Trace back passions in time and space; avoid the easy, surface-level explanation

- **Show yourself to be an interesting candidate, but also a solid, trustworthy one**
  - Array of skills, knowledge, interests; drive to succeed; awareness of self and others
  - It is NOT a diary or musings on your life or the world; it’s more focused than that

- **Define your current sense of self, for yourself and for others**

Two Potential Models (there are others)

- **Past, present, future you**
  - Past: Compact opening (“hook”); a defining (but not necessarily harrowing) life event
    - Don’t overlook the mundane!
  - Present: Discussion of 1–3 important achievements/interests that define who you today
    - Tip: Reflect on activities and write them out separately at first; see what comes to life
      - Eventually, though, transitions become crucial; you cannot simply present a list of achievements or write your CV in narrative form
  - Future: Define it. Where you want to go and why you are ready to go there. (Why you want to go there should be apparent by now.)
    - Contextualize it within the scope of the opportunity/award

- **Intellectual autobiography**
  - Progression from objective to reflective to interpretive thinking (i.e., knowledge of how a personal experience or view fits into the larger world, into an historical context)
  - Ends with “Decision” level of thinking
    - Now what?
    - How have you prepared for this next step?
    - What is your future resolve?

You might also give a 6-word memoir a try as you get started: [https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/](https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/)
THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Brainstorming Questions

What questions do you ask yourself?

If you had one more hour in the day, what would you use it to do?

What are you passionate about? What is your “thing”? What common thread runs through your commitments?

What troubles you about the world? What might you do about it?

How have you turned challenges into opportunities?

What do you want to be remembered for?

What was most formative about your life up to this point?

What sets you apart?

What inspires you?

Who inspires you?

Why are you studying your subject, and how have you come to understand the challenges/opportunities in it?

Where have you been in the world that has shaped your sense of self and your place in the world?

What are your greatest dreams, and how are you building the foundation from which to launch them?

What do you hope to contribute to your personal circle, to your local community, to your state and country, to the world?