

Personal statements

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Brainstorm

- What sets me apart from other applicants?
- How did I learn about this field?
- Why am I interested in this field?
- What experiences have stimulated and reinforced my interest?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in my academic record?
- What skills or personal characteristics do I possess that would enhance my chances for success in this field?
- Have I overcome relevant obstacles in my life?
- What are my career aspirations?
- Why this school & program?



General thoughts

- Answer the questions that are asked
- Tell a story
- Give concrete examples
- Personalize each essay
- Concise is better than long-winded



The general structure

- The hook
- The substance
- The future



Polish your draft

- Use the Writing Center at your school
- Use training directors, mentors, OITE career staff at NIH
- Have it read by someone who serves on an admissions committee



Common mistakes

- Poorly written
- Passive voice & wordy
- Trite
- Too long - too short
- Not enough intellectual depth
- Failure to answer the question asked
- Failure to explain weaknesses in your application
- Trying to impress the committee with big words
- Too much humor (or drama)