

How to Develop a Personal Statement for Summer Research

Purpose

- To share your interest and enthusiasm for the specific work you are applying to do
- To demonstrate what you can contribute to the program to which you are applying
- To state the specific lab you want to work in and why
- To state your professional goals and what or how you hope to contribute to this program

First Steps

- Read the personal statement question carefully and analyze what it is asking for
- Visualize your audience: will this be read by a scientist? A physician? An administrator?
- Make yourself as desirable to the selector as possible while being honest about yourself

The Basics

- Your research interests as they relate to the work you are applying for
- Year of study and current major, related academic and career goals, impressive academic credentials

Experience in the Field

- Any special connection to this work such as prior experience or family background
- Something unique about your research interests or an idea that fuels your own research interests.

Your Proposed Contributions to the Program and Benefits of the Program to You

- Personal qualities that would benefit the program, demonstrated through examples
- What you can do for them; what you seek to gain from the opportunity
- How this specific work fits into your academic and research goals

Writing and Mechanics—*correct usage conveys your attention to detail*

- Use strong word choices, particularly verbs and adjectives
- Use the more powerful “I am,” rather than “I have always been”
- Make positive statements: “I have experience in...” not “I don’t have experience in x, but do have...”
- Craft clear, engaging opening and closing sentences
- Check that the opening statement is supported in the body and consistent with the closing statement
- Organize the statement so it flows from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph
- Proofread for grammar, spelling, paragraph breaks, and correct punctuation

Ask Yourself

- Does this statement show my interest in this specific program, or could it be sent to any program?
- Does this statement describe me specifically, or could any good student in my field use this?

Additional Suggestions:

- Reread the personal statement multiple times out loud for clarity, logic, and flow
- Have someone else read the statement. UMBC writing center: <https://academicsuccess.umbc.edu/writing-center/>
- Share your finished personal statement with the faculty member writing your recommendations
- Limit the statement to one and a half to two pages with at least one and a half spacing
- Include a header with your name on each page, which will be numbered as well

Avoid:

- Restating the question/topic, Rewriting your transcript or resume
- Clichés such as “to make the world a better place”; instead, explain exactly how such a lofty goal will be achieved
- Providing unrelated information, e.g., explaining when you learned you were not interested in computers
- Using phrases like “this opportunity will be fun and interesting for me”; focus on what you can contribute
- Any background earlier than high school