Do’s

✓ Write for each specific school.
✓ Analyze and answer guidance statements completely.
✓ Keep in mind the audience members are professionals in the field; you are the amateur.
✓ Give your essay a direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate.
✓ Put the most important points at the beginning.
✓ Use concrete examples from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants.
✓ Write about what interests you and excites you.
✓ Write clearly, succinctly.
✓ List strengths and play down your weaknesses. Turn a weakness around and make it positive.
✓ Embellish simple ideas but keep it straightforward.
✓ Get to know yourself, like what compliments you receive and why.
✓ Revise, review, revise, review, revise, review...
✓ In addition to your edits, ask someone else to critique your personal statement.
✓ Save some good information for the interview.

Don’ts

✓ Pass up information that doesn’t support your thesis.
✓ Exclude generic statements and platitudes.
✓ Do not tell your life story. Avoid phrases like "I was born in...,” or "My parents came from...”
✓ Avoid using clichés: “I’ve always wanted to be...” This is not an autobiography, itinerary, or resume in prose.
✓ Avoid weak excuses for your GPA or test scores.
✓ Exclude experiences and awards if already in application.
✓ Avoid getting too personal because it is a professional document.
✓ Avoid humor because it’s hard to interpret
✓ Don’t try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
✓ Beware of relying exclusively on your computer to check your spelling.
✓ Stay away from make boasting or exaggerate; the lie could come up in the interview.
✓ DO NOT be afraid to start over if the essay just is not working out.

Topic Suggestions

There is usually no set topic for a personal statement. The length of the paper can range from two paragraphs to two pages. Check with each college for specific requirements.

These are suggestions, not mandatory topics.

1. Your purpose in graduate school
2. Area of specialization
3. Intended future ambitions
4. Reasons for inconsistency in a bad semester
5. Why you want to attend each specific school

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Words and Phrases to Avoid without Explanation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Appealing to me</th>
<th>Meaningful</th>
<th>Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Appealing aspect</td>
<td>Helping people</td>
<td>I like it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascinating</td>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Feel good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important</td>
<td>Remarkable</td>
<td>Appreciate</td>
<td>Incredible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can contribute</td>
<td>Rewarding</td>
<td>Invaluable</td>
<td>Valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting/excited</td>
<td>Stimulating</td>
<td>Enjoyable/enjoy</td>
<td>Gratifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meant a lot to me</td>
<td></td>
<td>I like helping people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My mother made me begin piano lessons when I was eight years old. Desiring to get her money’s worth, she required me to practice for 30 minutes every day. Until I practiced for 30 minutes, she strictly forbade me from doing anything I liked. No sports. No friends. No Nintendo. This “30 minute rule” would haunt me for years, always confronting me at the most inconvenient moments: immediately before basketball games, birthday parties, and my favorite television shows. As I would sneak into the television room or out the front door, my mother would somehow perceive—from the opposite end of the house—that I was rebelling. Subsequently, she would stop me, assert her authority, and send me to the ivories. Infuriated, I would rant about her cruelty and about how much I despised the piano. To this very day, my mother and I have argued about nothing else nearly as much. Nothing else was so boring, so tedious, and so enslaving to me. Despite such adamant feelings, I later discovered what a wonderful gift my mother’s “30 minute rule” would yield. I developed a passion for music and I cultivated a virtue that has forever enhanced my life: diligence.

Having consigned myself to the fact that my mother would not budge, I began to cooperate. Consequently, I actually started enjoying the piano. I learned several popular tunes, I discovered it was fun, and the ladies seemed to appreciate me. When I was about thirteen, my piano teacher noticed how big my hands had grown and she suggested that I take advantage of their size by pursuing a difficult Rachmaninoff prelude. She lent me a recording of it and I listened to it for hours, falling in love with Rachmaninoff’s music. However, as a young musician who was by no means prodigious, if I wanted to master that prelude, I could not somehow perceive—from the opposite end of the house—that I was rebelling. Subsequently, she would stop me, assert her authority, and send me to the ivories. Infuriated, I would rant about her cruelty and about how much I despised the piano. To this very day, my mother and I have argued about nothing else nearly as much. Nothing else was so boring, so tedious, and so enslaving to me. Despite such adamant feelings, I later discovered what a wonderful gift my mother’s “30 minute rule” would yield. I developed a passion for music and I cultivated a virtue that has forever enhanced my life: diligence.

In one dictionary, the term “diligence” describes “careful, steady effort.” Invigorated by Rachmaninoff’s music, I began to carefully and steadily practice. I learned to learn that piece—and I did. Years later, I realized that consistently exerting effort for only 30 minutes a day could produce results. My diligence superseded my mediocre musical talent and facilitated learning numerous challenging compositions. These compositions impassioned me and the “30 minute rule” subsequently became a self-imposed “two hour rule.” Moreover, when I was learning Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue,” the “two hour rule” occasionally became the “12 hour rule.” At age eight, I would sometimes take my mother’s timer and divide a practice session into 30 separate one minute practice sessions to pass the time more quickly. Now, at age 24, I cannot seem to find enough time to practice!

Whether learning a classical masterpiece for a recital or arranging a punk rock version of “Allouette” for BYU’s “French Idol” competition, careful and steady effort has elevated me above and beyond my natural abilities.

To me, few things ring truer than Ralph Waldo Emerson’s words concerning diligence. “That which we persist in doing,” he insists, “becomes easier for us to do; not that the nature of the thing itself is changed, but that our power to do is increased.” Diligence has increased my “power to do” anything I choose to pursue. I have conquered mountains, run countless “5ks,” competently learned French and Spanish, achieved academic excellence, and successfully completed enormous, tedious business projects. During an internship with a natural gas marketing firm, I worked closely with accountants and a software programmer to retool an invoicing system. I previously knew only a little about accounting; however, by carefully and steadily working, I eventually learned how to manage this company’s receivables. I would even substitute for the official accounts receivable representative when she was out of town. One day, after creating over two-hundred invoices, I realized I had made a small error in each one that invalidated them all. Because they needed to be mailed as soon as possible, I stayed late that night, corrected each mistake, and successfully finished the job.

Carefully and steadily working hard at the piano has taught me to carefully and steadily work hard everywhere else. Ultimately, my mother’s “30 minute rule” assisted me to cultivate diligence, which has empowered a man of ordinary ability to accomplish extraordinary things.

As a research assistant, I studied how certain congressional automobile regulations influence the mortality rate. In a philosophy of law course, I studied controversial court cases and theories of constitutional interpretation. I acknowledge that these experiences do not even skim the surface of a legal education. I find these topics so enthralling, I know I will diligently apply myself in studying and learning the practice of law. Whenever necessary, I will personally enforce the “however long it takes” rule.