Brainstorming the Grad School Personal Essay

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Overview

Defining a personal statement
Prompt examples
General writing tips
Examples
Avoidable pitfalls
How to get started
LET’S DO IT!
What IS a personal statement? Why does it matter?
Prompt examples

UT Austin’s prompt:

“Submit a ONE PAGE single space (your choice of font size and margins) Statement of Purpose describing:

Research

Academic and/or personal experiences leading to an interest in graduate study

Future career plans”

http://csd.utexas.edu/graduate/admissions-instructions
Prompt examples continued

“Discuss the qualities and experiences that make you an ideal candidate for graduate studies in speech-language pathology at X university.”

“Describe how your professional goals would be advanced through graduate studies at X university.”

Limit: 300 words for each question
General tips

Answer the prompt

Back up your claims with specific examples

Tell a story

Demonstrate your knowledge about the field

Use correct grammar and spelling

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/
Introduction example

“When I was four years old, I learned that communication differences exist. When my sister was not wearing her hearing aids, it was important for me to speak slowly, and to face her when I spoke. I felt the residual frustration when *Ashley told me about a conversation she could not fully hear at lunch or in the classroom. While learning to adapt to these changes in our household, I developed patience and empathy. These have become two of the defining characteristics that I would best use to describe myself today and will enable me to become a compassionate and caring speech-language pathologist.”

(*name has been changed for confidentiality)
“The summer after my freshman year, I observed Lauren Daniel, the Auditory Verbal Therapist who worked with my sister when she received her cochlear implants. I watched Lauren implement her own patience and empathy while working with her clients from many different backgrounds and speaking abilities, and I knew instantly that this was the field for me.”
Body

“I further pursued my interest in research by assisting Dr. Suzanne van der Feest in the Speech Production-Perception and Child Language Laboratories with data collection and analysis through eye tracking using SuperCoder. By participating in these research projects, **I have learned** that speech therapy is not a subjective field, and that thorough and sometimes tedious research is necessary in order for SLPs to provide the best possible services. I was able to witness, first-hand, the impact of clinical research on the practical treatment of patients with communication disorders through my experiences at Austin Speech Labs and the Lang Stuttering Institute. Through one-to-one evidence-based therapy, I am **continually motivated** by each client’s unrelenting determination to regain cognitive skills or to gain control of their disfluent speech, as well as the gratitude that their families and caretakers express for our services. I know that UT is the only place where I can continue to gain such **robust experience in fluency research and clinical practice.**”
“While I have had the opportunity to learn more about a variety of communication disorders through my involvement in research and volunteering, my initial experience interacting with adults with communication disorders took place when I joined Best Buddies my freshman year. This organization fosters opportunities for one-to-one friendships and mentoring for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I have become very close with Kristin, my buddy, and her family. Our friendship, however, did not form easily. Kristin has Down syndrome and an articulation disorder that initially made communication a challenge, and admittedly made me a bit uncomfortable at first. As our friendship has grown, I have realized that I hope to become an advocate for the populations that SLPs serve and that living in Austin, the heart of politics in Texas, would help make this plan possible.”
“Best Buddies inspires me to gain a well-rounded perspective of the world, which will serve me well as I continue on my path with the ultimate goal of becoming an SLP who can treat clients from all cultural backgrounds. When I studied abroad in the Czech Republic this past spring, I traveled to places where I did not speak the language and was not familiar with many of the customs. This helped me appreciate the diversity in the US and abroad and left me yearning to learn even more. I am also learning American Sign Language in order to communicate with the buddies who do not speak, as well as the prevalent Deaf community in Austin.”
“I consider the prospect of learning in the CSD graduate program at UT to be the opportunity of a lifetime. I am looking for a school where I will be exposed to diverse populations and clinical settings, as well as the chance to continue working with faculty members who are passionate about their field and molding future clinicians and researchers. After speaking to and working alongside current graduate students and faculty, I am eager to continue my studies here. I am prepared to work harder than I ever have before, and I am confident that my unique perspective, combined with my fierce determination and willingness to work hard, will be a great contribution to your graduate program.”
Keep in mind...

Use copy/paste with caution

Adhere to the page limit (PDF vs. word document)
How to get started
Questions to ask yourself

What got me interested in speech-language pathology/audiology? When did I first realize this interest?

What steps have I taken to pursue this interest?

What have I learned from my experiences?

How have I grown as a student, clinician, researcher, and/or future professional?

What do I hope to gain from graduate school? How does X school support that hope?

How am I different from other students?
KEEP CALM AND WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT
Book an appointment

Remember: The Moody Writing Support Program is here to support you!!! Visit the website to learn more or to book an appointment:
http://moody.utexas.edu/students/moodywriting