

Getting Started: Personal Statement Writing

This is a free-writing exercise, one in which you write to explore and generate ideas that you might use in your personal statement essay for transfer. Write for at least 15-20 minutes per question. Do not censor yourself. Allow yourself to write about whatever comes to mind in answering these questions. Explore by allowing yourself to write about unexpected tangents that may emerge here. You can always cut or rearrange later.

1. Brainstorm a list of your most important specific experiences, talents, accomplishments, contributions, and experiences.
2. Choose one thing from this list --your talent, or a specific experience, for example—and write in moment by moment description about this element.
3. Tell the story of the sparking of your interest: was it a class, something you read, a life experience, an internship, belonging to an organization, a mentor? How did the interest in your field begin and develop?
4. Now tell the story of what you gained/ learned about yourself from this developing interest.
5. Narrow in and get right to the “good parts”—avoid lengthy introductions, unnecessary contextual information and write everything that comes to mind about it. Write more specifically first from the writing you have in response to question 2. Then do the same for question 3; keep focusing in on the key “aha” moments, moments where you were transformed or learned something important about yourself/ and or about your interest/ field of study.
6. Mine this writing for gold. Highlight the parts in this free writing that you want to include in your first draft.
7. Make a strategic outline. Where will you put your writing to have the greatest impact on your reader? Pay attention to the part in your writing that moves you most. This will most likely move your reader most, too. Consider starting with this part.
8. Write your first draft.