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Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls

Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules

1. Strive for **depth rather than breadth**. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences
2. Try to **tell** the reader **something that no other applicant will** be able to say
3. Provide the reader with insight into **what drives you**
4. **Be yourself**, not the 'ideal' applicant
5. **Get creative and imaginative** in the opening remarks, but make sure it's something that no one else could write
6. **Address the school's unique features** that interest **you**
7. **Focus on the affirmative** in the personal statement; consider an addendum to explain deficiencies or blemishes
8. **Evaluate experiences**, rather than describe them
9. **Proofread** carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style
10. **Use readable fonts**, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins

Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Pitfalls

1. Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application
2. Do not complain or whine about the "system" or circumstances in your life
3. Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme
4. Do not talk about money as a motivator
5. Do not discuss your minority status or disadvantaged background unless you have a compelling and unique story that relates to it
6. Do not remind the school of its rankings or tell them how good they are
7. Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions
 - "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is..."
 - "This question asks me to discuss..."
 - "I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application."
 - "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school."
 - "In sum, there are three reasons why you should admit me..."
8. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages
9. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
10. Do not get the name of the school wrong
11. Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words

Stewart, Mark Alan. Perfect Personal Statements. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996. Copyright ©1995-2010 by [The Writing Lab](#) & [The OWL at Purdue](#) and [Purdue University](#). All rights reserved. This material may not be published, reproduced, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed without permission. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of [our terms and conditions of fair use](#). Please [report any technical problems](#) you encounter.