

Ten Steps to Writing the Personal Statement

1. Begin cutting and pasting the prompt to the top of the page on which you're writing. Then write a draft without editing, without worrying about format, organization, or grammar. Get to the end and make sure you've hit the character or word count. It's fine to go over at this point.
2. Let it sit for several days.
3. Go back to the draft. Read it aloud. Write down what you like/dislike about it. Note: Many people find very little to like about their first drafts!
4. Rewrite using a fresh document; it's always more effective to write new than try to fix a flawed document.
5. Let it sit for several days.
6. Revisit it with fresh and critical eyes, the eyes of an editor, not a writer. Evaluate its efficacy; what works, what doesn't? Be looking at how you support your candidacy, how strong your argument is, how well you address the points in the prompt. Note: At its most basic level, the PS must answer the questions posed!
7. Continue this process. You may want input at certain points. Ask a roommate to listen as you read the statement, a friend, or parent. If you know someone who has gone through the application process, ask that individual. If you don't like one introduction, write another. If you cannot decide between two approaches, write both and see which one you like.
8. Edit. Never edit until you are certain that the content is finally where you like the story you have told. Now use a scalpel. Cut out extra, unnecessary words; edit to assure all paragraphs have unity and cohesion; read aloud to hear the flow and to find awkward phrasing, repetitive use of the same word or phrase; make certain that you know the denotation (definition) of the words you have chosen and that those words are being used correctly. Edit for punctuation and spelling.
9. Let it sit. Stop thinking about it. See how you feel about it, but when you do return to it, you will know it is done if what you now read represents the best PS you can write. It should feel "right," like when you put the final puzzle piece into the puzzle.
10. Do a final edit. Nitpick. Read the statement aloud to catch any awkward sentences and to hear repetitive phrasing. Start at the bottom of the page, and using a ruler, read one line at a time for spelling and punctuation. Make sure you do a word or character count before uploading the statement.