Writing a Personal Statement

The personal statement, your opportunity to sell yourself in the application process, generally falls into one of two categories:

1. The general, comprehensive personal statement:
   - This allows you maximum freedom in terms of what you write and is the type of statement often prepared for standard medical or law school application forms.

2. The response to very specific questions:
   - Often, business and graduate school applications ask specific questions, and your statement should respond specifically to the question being asked. Some business school applications favor multiple essays, typically asking for responses to three or more questions.

Questions to ask yourself before you write:

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school—and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

General advice

- Answer the questions that are asked
- Tell a story
- Be specific
- Find an angle
- Concentrate on your opening paragraph
- Don't include some subjects
- Do some research, if needed
- Avoid clichés