In order to write a successful personal statement, you need to be knowledgeable about the institution and program to which you are applying. You will need good writing skills and sufficient time to prepare a thoughtful and concise statement. It’s important to understand what’s being asked in the application questions. Also, consider important information to highlight when answering the questions.

In preparing a personal statement, it’s important to...

- Present your information in a logical order.
- Provide proof to support the content.
- Unify points around an underlying theme.

Some common personal statement mistakes include:

- Not conducting research about the program before writing.
- Not fully understanding the meaning behind the questions asked.
- Providing a lengthy explanation of experience without showing its value.
- Failing to have a clear career goal.

Below are the steps to follow in creating your personal statement.

**Step One: Understand the objective of the process**
The admission committee’s objective is to find applicants who demonstrate clear potential for completing the program and succeeding in the workplace as graduates.

**Step Two: Do your research**
To write an effective personal statement, an applicant must research the following:

1. The requirements of the career that the applicant wishes to pursue.
2. The organization and structure of the program and school to which the application is being made.
3. The relevancy of the applicant’s experience, qualifications, and qualities in relation to the program.

**A. Researching the Career/Profession**
Setting aside the time to research the career/profession will help you to identify the necessary skills and characteristics for success. Furthermore, it will help clarify whether this career is a good fit with your interests, personality, values, and lifestyle expectations.

To begin your research, consider the following activities…

- Review job descriptions to determine themes in requested skills.
- Contact professionals in the desired field to gather additional information about career requirements.

**B. Researching programs & schools**
Schools require personal statements to determine if an applicant will be a good addition to their programs. Therefore, it is important, as an applicant, to gain clarity and insight into the program to which you are applying and to increase your knowledge about that program.

To accomplish this task, consider:

- Reviewing information provided by the programs.
- Speaking with program staff, faculty, students and grads.
As you begin writing your personal statement, consider:

- Reading alumni publications and school newspapers to find current information on campus issues, strategic direction, new research grants and resource allocation.
- Reviewing articles and books that provide program rankings.
- Arranging a personal visit.

C. Assessing yourself
Completing a thorough, systematic review of school, work, and extracurricular experiences provides the detailed data necessary to answer application questions. Assessing yourself can be instrumental in developing insight into the value of these experiences as evidence of your skills, abilities, strengths and suitability to a given career and program.

To begin the process of self-assessment, first, construct a detailed, comprehensive list of activities over the past five or more years, broken into categories such as Education, Employment, and Extracurricular. Next, analyze each experience by writing answers for each of the following questions:

- Why did I choose to participate in this activity?
- What did I do?
- What did I learn?
- What did I enjoy?
- What did I contribute?
- What did other people say I did well?
- What did I accomplish or achieve?

Having answers to these questions will enable you to effectively express the relevance of your experiences in relation to your career goals.

Step Three: Develop your strategy
Reviewing autobiographical information to develop an application strategy and determine one’s qualifications is the final step before beginning to write. It is the pairing of past experiences with an understanding of the skills, knowledge, characteristics, and experiences a program considers vital to success.

To develop your strategy, first review the personal statement instructions and determine what the program is asking you to explain or address. Then, examine your answers to choose the best examples to include in your statement. Choose to write about experiences that showcase your strengths as an applicant.

Step Four: Now you are ready to write
As you begin writing your personal statement, consider the following:

- Remember to be insightful and focus on what you learned or demonstrated through a situation, rather than simply listing the details or duties involved.
- Be sure to make the links between the skills and the experiences clear by showing proof. Before you write about any experience, be sure of your purpose in including it. A simple formula to consider is: “Through _______ (an experience) I demonstrated/learned ________ (a skill, an insight) which resulted in ________ (a successful result).”
- Be selective with examples, rather than comprehensive. The reviewer often reads several personal statements and has to consider quality over quantity.
- Remember to focus on the achievements and outcomes of your experiences.
- Be sincere, concise, and to the point. Don’t over or undersell yourself.
- Wherever possible, in writing about your experiences, include the situation/task, the action you took (be specific, especially if you worked in a group), and the result.
- Review your personal statement for organization and accuracy in grammar and spelling.
Final tips on writing an excellent application…

- Start early! Give yourself plenty of time.
- Approach it like a research project on the topic of “My Qualifications.”
- Research before you begin to write.
- Know why you are including an experience before you begin to write about it.
- Be clear about your goals and your reasons for requesting admission.
- Remember to be analytical rather than simply descriptive – it is your job to identify and communicate the value of your experiences.
- Be selective. Choose the best examples of your past experience to highlight.
- Be yourself. Use your own words and your own style.

Adapted from: http://careers.mcmaster.ca/tools/fyi/writing-your-personal-statement