

***A PERSONAL GOAL STATEMENT FORMAT  
FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION***

The first paragraph of your personal statement, one or two sentences, should make clear the purpose of your writing: to present an interpretive summary of your background, academic interests, and future goals as justification for your admission to a program of graduate study.

The second paragraph interprets your background for the graduate admissions committee. This paragraph should establish your academic preparation for the program to which you have applied. If you have been a strong student throughout your undergraduate years, you may call attention to what you believe have been strong combinations of courses, which seem to fit your prospective graduate program well. If you have had ups and downs as an undergraduate, you may call attention to progressive improvement in your studies: i.e., the difference between your junior/senior GPA and your freshman/sophomore GPA or your record in selected course work that is directly related to the kinds of course work that you will undertake as a graduate student. If you scored well on whatever graduate examination that you took, you may want to cite that fact as well. Keep in mind that graduate admissions committees want assurance that you will be a successful student. If you have had relevant experiences, you may mention them here, too. Some graduate programs such as applied sociology or social work or resource development, etc. look for evidence that you have already sought out ways to translate your academic background into practical, professionally oriented applications. In short, this paragraph should assure the graduate admissions committee that you have matured during your undergraduate years, that your intellectual and professional interests have taken shape, and that you have begun a conscientious progress toward professional development.

In this example format, the third paragraph will be a description of your professional goals. (This paragraph and the next, however, could be reversed.) Though your letter takes the general shape of a summary of your interests and background, it also builds an argument for your admission to a particular graduate program. The logic of this argument runs this way: I know what interests me; I know that I would like to engage in this work as my profession; and I believe that the necessary, most logical way to assure me of success in this profession is to earn this graduate degree. This paragraph describes what you know about the professional careers to which this course of graduate study may lead. Generally, people who pursue graduate degrees tend toward any of four professional occupations: academic, public service, private industry, or self-employment (i.e., writers, lawyers, physicians, etc.). Though you do not have to commit yourself to one career only, you are best served by presenting to the admissions committee as specific an idea as possible about what you intend to do with their degree. If you know that you would eventually like to be a business consultant specializing in labor market analysis, say so. Such a statement indicates to the committee that you are goal oriented, that you are capable of identifying what you want and of developing a systematic means to attain it. This paragraph, in conjunction with the previous one, assures the admissions committee that you are an applicant with a purpose.

The fourth paragraph, which describes what you intend to study in graduate school, should tighten your argument. Now that you have made clear your interests, background, and professional goals, you must make the case that the best way for you to bridge your undergraduate years and your successful performance as a professional is to study what this particular graduate program offers. Be as specific as you can. Learn what courses this graduate program offers. Identify its faculty members and what research they are conducting. Know the program's reputation, its strengths and its weaknesses. Your undergraduate professors can be of very great assistance in this regard. As you describe your reasons for applying to a particular program try to link your interests with what you know is available through that program and its parent college or university. If you know that it encourages practicum experience, something you want, say so. If some of your undergraduate texts or assignments have utilized materials produced by that program, say so. Offer suggestions about combinations of courses or faculty advisors that you think might be especially imaginative or productive. This paragraph, thus, accomplishes two ends: you place this graduate program in the continuum of your own professional development and you demonstrate that you have applied to it as the result of an informed, reflective selection process of your own.

Your personal statement should close with a brief summary of your background and goals, again just a sentence or two. This last statement reaffirms both your preparation and your confidence that your choice of this graduate program is right.