Application Documents

When you complete an application, often you are required to include a written statement or letter, sometimes referred to as a "Personal Statement" or a "Letter of Intent." These documents call for specific information and evidence of good writing skills. Most academic programs involve much writing, and applicants are expected to be able to handle the writing required. Good writing skills are also associated with good thinking skills. School or program officials reading your document will be looking carefully at your writing to determine whether or not you are likely to succeed in the particular program.

ALLOW ENOUGH TIME TO REVISE CAREFULLY

Usually, you obtain a copy of the application packet in ample time to allow you to write multiple drafts of your statement or letter. Your reader will expect you to revise your work until it is polished, representing the best writing you can produce.

ANALYZE THE ASSIGNMENT

These written documents are required in order to assist school or program officials in deciding whom to choose among many applicants. Your document can make you stand out as a real person for the reader, with a distinct personality and identity.

Remember

- Application reviewers usually have numerous documents to read, so include specific information which will create a favorable impression of you.
- Your document should indicate to the reader that you are a candidate who will be successful in the program, and that you will be a credit to the program you are seeking to enter.
- Be as specific as you can about your career goals. You may not have thought through them as thoroughly as you indicate in your document, but you need to project an image of someone who has clear ideas about where he or she plans to go in life.
- Through your document, you need to persuade the reader that you
  - have sincere interest in the specific program
  - possess sufficient qualifications to complete the program
  - plan productive uses for what you will gain from the program after you complete it.

NOTE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Pay close attention to any guidelines or instructions given for format and content.

- What is the length requirement/recommendation? Is there a page/word limit? If you need to place your document on the application form itself, make sure it fits in the space provided.
- What aspects about yourself are you specifically asked to discuss? What aspects are you specifically asked not to discuss?
- If there are several specific aspects you are asked to include, a handy method of organizing your document is to present the required information in the order of the aspects listed in the guidelines.
Throughout your revision process, keep checking to make sure you are fulfilling all the requirements in the document guidelines.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Since the writing in the document is about you, it is appropriate to write in the first person, using such pronouns as I, me, and my.
- Throughout your drafting and revising process, consult with other people about your progress, asking them to read your drafts and respond to your specific questions.
- Provide information about your distinctive qualities, talents, successes, achievements, and life experiences.
- Vague statements about society and life in general will not be useful. Try to avoid making your document generic, one which any applicant might produce. Back up general statements you make about yourself with specific examples/support. If you say you have always liked working with children, provide a concrete example of work you have done in that area, perhaps in a local daycare center or as a camp counselor. Be specific about where your experiences have taken place, the amount of time you spent in such activities, and the duties for which you were responsible.
- Try to convey that you are a candidate who is sincere, honest, realistic, talented, and qualified for the position you are seeking.
- Avoid being too informal or conversational in tone.
- Make sure your document is organized well, with smooth transitions between paragraphs and between sentences within paragraphs to connect your ideas clearly and logically.
- Help your reader go through your document easily, with an effective introduction, logically arranged paragraphs, and a conclusion which provides adequate closure for your reader.
- Check to see that your sentences are varied in length and organizational pattern, providing interest.
- Provide enough detail, but be concise.
- Don't include irrelevant information.
- Don't be too snazzy, seeking to impress the reader with your verbal gymnastics or lofty vocabulary.
- Don't be boring: use active, not passive, verbs; use varied vocabulary; avoid repetition of the same words.
- Be neither too modest nor too boastful. You want to present the best possible picture of yourself, so be complimentary, but avoid misrepresentation, falsification, and arrogance.
- In final drafts, check for errors in spelling, punctuation, and usage. Use a plain type face, preferably a 12-point font. Double space unless otherwise indicated.