

# GUIDE TO writing personal statements & letters of intent

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ONLINE INTERACTIVE BOOK 



# what is a personal statement?

A personal statement is a document commonly required for admission to a school or scholarship program. It is an opportunity to provide a more complete picture of yourself and why you deserve to be admitted, and illustrate your writing capabilities. Overall, it can help you land an interview or an offer!



# myth

***“I can use the same personal statement for all the programs I’m applying to, I just need to change the school name.”***



# truth

**To be a strong candidate, you need to adjust your personal statement for each application. Schools want to see why you're interested in their program specifically, compared to others. Also, different schools will have different prompts. It's important you answer the questions you are given.**

Starting a personal statement is often challenging. Don't worry about getting a perfect draft the first time; you'll be revising again and again before submitting. Because of this, it's best to start early. To get ideas flowing, try answering the prompts below:

**What sparked your interest in this career path?**

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**List two ways you have gained knowledge or experience in this field (classes, jobs, conversations, research, volunteering, etc.):**

1. 

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2. 

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**What was a challenge you had to overcome? How did you persevere and what did you learn?**

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**List three relevant strengths you want to showcase in your personal statement:**

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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## HOW TO *GET STARTED*

List two reasons why you are interested in this program specifically.

What makes it a good fit for you?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

What are your future goals after this program, and how will it help you get there?

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*Wait, my school is asking for a letter of intent though. Is that the same thing?*

Personal statements, professional statements, personal essays, statements of purpose, and letters of intent are very similar documents. However, letters of intent are written in a standard letter format whereas the other documents are written in an essay format. Regardless of the wording a university chooses to use, what's most important is that you answer the prompts and meet the length requirements (if given).



# Putting it all together

In this example of a personal statement, the student is applying for their Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering at CU Denver. No prompt was given to them, so they had the ability to choose the length and the content. In this case, we recommend using the questions you answered in the 'How Do I Get Started?' activity as prompts for your personal statement. If prompts are given by the school, be sure to clearly address every prompt within your statement.

- 1 Provides action verbs and descriptive images to paint a picture.
- 2 The applicant discloses personal information here. Although personal information such as our identify or background can strengthen a statement, it should only be used if it is relevant and you feel comfortable disclosing.
- 3 Explains a trouble point in their application (low GPA) without taking up too much of the statement and also highlights a challenge they had to overcome and how they persevered.

Rachel Johnson  
University of Colorado Denver  
College of Engineering, Design, and Computing

## Personal Statement

1

My grandmother has always been my inspiration. As a child I fawned over the faded photos of her horseback riding in Kentucky, head tilted and smiling at the camera as she rode beyond the hills. Her youthful spirit has never left her. A few years ago, at age 67, she completed a half-marathon and was the fastest in her age group. For her 70th birthday she and my grandfather went caving in Belize. I still see this energy and glow within her now at age 78, but her body has become a trap that it can't escape from. Osteoporosis has seized control of her bones, and whereas she used to stand tall, her frame is now shrunken. The days of us racing each other through the hills of Kentucky are over, and I can see in her eyes how much she longs to cast off this disease and run barefoot through the grass again.

2

Although seeing my grandmother through this lens was my biggest inspiration for pursuing a career in biomechanics, I didn't recognize it at the time. I entered the University of Colorado Denver in 2020 pursuing a B.S. in Biology, convinced that my career interest in reducing patient pain was steering me toward physical therapy and working interpersonally with patients. However, I found the subject matter of my classes unfulfilling, and my grades suffered in General Chemistry II and Organic Chemistry. I want to acknowledge that although my GPA may be lower than those of other applicants, it does not reflect a lack of hard work or devotion to academics but is rather a representation of the hurdles I faced on my personal journey toward biomechanics.

3

4

A look at my transcripts will reveal that I received no lower than a B+ in all of my other classes throughout undergrad while simultaneously working as a student ambassador in the Office of Undergraduate Admission, conducting independent research on orthopedic biomechanics, and volunteering at the Saint Paul Health Center. The capacity to juggle these experiences and overcome the GPA challenges presented from my past biology major illustrate my tenacity to tackle the rigorous curriculum of the M.S. in Mechanical Engineering program.

5

It was the summer before my sophomore year when my doubts and hesitations around biology were plaguing me and when biomechanics was brought to my attention. I was volunteering at the Saint Paul Health Center in Denver, Colorado, assisting patients with long-term rehabilitation care. Many individuals had prosthetic implants, and as I listened to their stories about their newly restricted lifestyles, I grew frustrated as to why the surrounding muscles and bones couldn't compensate for the addition of the prosthetic. Or why engineers couldn't develop a better orthopedic implant, one that was stronger and could handle high-impact exercise. I learned first-hand from these patients how society does not adequately accommodate those who endure physical limitations, and I emerged from this experience with a new passion for improving skeletal health through both engineering and technical abilities and by incorporating the voices of those affected by these mechanical skeletal alterations.

6

That fall I changed my major to mechanical engineering, and I have since dived into a wide variety of experiences to increase my abilities in research, manufacturing, and testing. On campus, I joined the Smart Materials and Biomechanics (SMAB) Lab as an independent study where I have assisted in measuring the effects of impact exercise and non-impact exercise on bone density and strength. Using medical imaging, including CT and MRI, and computational modeling, I have increased my knowledge of the skeletal structure and how to better predict and identify fractures.

4

Includes academic or extracurricular distinctions that help them stand out from other candidates.

5

Identifies one of their strengths.

6

Provides one of many examples that illustrate their experience and knowledge in the field of interest.





7 Addresses concepts around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

8 This paragraph demonstrates the applicant has researched the program in advance and highlights why this program, specifically, is a good fit for them.

9 Articulates what they can contribute to the program.

10 Identifies their future goals.

! It is important not to exceed the length requirement. Because no length was given for this prompt, the applicant kept their statement around an average length (two pages single-spaced or three pages double-spaced).

7 To exercise my learnings outside of the campus lab, I completed an internship at Merlin Medical in Littleton, Colorado. This product development company generates medical device technologies to deliver safer and more efficient spine surgeries. As a biomedical designer, I learned how to process medical images and use them to create CAD models while increasing my knowledge of human anatomy. I also frequently communicated and collaborated with clients regarding their work orders, which taught me the importance of tailoring engineering-specific language to the individual so that anyone can feel knowledgeable about the product used for their operation. The concept of surgery is not unique to a population or demographic, and I believe inclusive communication skills are vital to success in biomechanics.

8 The professors at the University of Colorado Denver's M.S. in Mechanical Engineering - Biomechanics track are conducting ground-breaking research that I am eager to be a part of. Under the instruction of Dr. Camila Ramirez, I am excited to explore how finite element analysis can be utilized to measure the stresses experienced at the bone-implant interface, particularly for spinal fusion devices. In collaboration with Dr. Dan Yung, I desire to learn more about the role of materials in biomedical devices and how novel smart polymers are currently being utilized in mimicking tissue and injury prevention. Lastly, I look forward to continuing my work in the SMAB Lab assessing the impact of exercise on bone strength and density. In my internship at Merlin Medical, I was enraptured with the mechanical accuracy of Beadle technology for screw placement, and I intend on contributing my knowledge of this technology to the ongoing exploration at CU Denver of medical innovations that experimentally test biomedical device performance.

9 As a future Biomedical Engineer, I desire to create and promote medical innovations that will improve patient quality of life for all individuals. I am eager to dive into discussions around how to increase equity within biomechanics and simultaneously develop my knowledge and expertise of smart materials and design modeling techniques, specifically in the area of the spine and treating degenerative disc disease. My goal is to continuously work toward unrestricting previously restricted patient lifestyles, so that individuals such as my grandmother, even when battling osteoporosis, can return to a fulfilling life where the camera catches her not slumped in chair, but still smiling the same smile from 1954 as she rides beyond the Kentucky hills.

# GENERAL FORMATTING GUIDELINES

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*Note: If your program provides formatting guidelines, follow those requirements.*

## VISUAL STYLE

- Use the same font throughout the whole document
- Set margins to 1”
- Use black text only
- Use a simple font such as Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman, or Cambria
- Use 11-12 point font size
- Single-spaced or double-spaced is acceptable

## WRITING STYLE

- Utilize a captivating phrase, story, or ‘hook’ in your opening paragraph
- Use variety in sentence structure – don’t begin every sentence with ‘I’ or ‘My’

## HEADER

- If there are no guidelines provided, include:
  - The title of the document (ex. “Personal Statement”)
  - The school and department you are applying to
  - Your name
- Alignment should be left-justified

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Be personable and honest - this is a chance to express what can’t be covered on a resume, such as your passion and feelings
- Give yourself lots of time to revise and revise again
- Have at least a second pair of eyes on your statement before submitting



# LETTER OF INTENT SAMPLE

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This is an example letter of intent to showcase the difference between letter format (letter of intent) and essay format (personal statement, statement of intent, etc.).

This letter of intent came with a prompt: *Write a letter of intent that provides an overview of your background, goals, academic and professional aspirations, and a commitment to public service. Explain why you are seeking a Master of Public Administration (MPA) at the University of Colorado Denver and how you hope to use your degree for the public good.*

- 1 Provides a brief overview of their background.
- 2 Clearly identifies their goals and aspirations.
- 3 Describes their background in more depth and their commitment to public service throughout this paragraph.
- 4 Clearly identifies their goals and aspirations a second time.
- 5 Spends the remainder of the paragraph explaining why they are seeking an MPA at CU Denver and how the degree can be used for the public good.

Kadeem Belvins  
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(555) 605-2244

January 15th, 20XX

Dear Dr. Geraldine McCormick and fellow members of the admissions committee,

1 I am honored and eager to be submitting my letter of intent for the Master's in Public Administration program at the University of Colorado Denver. My interest in public service lies in those spaces of collision between public policy, the nonprofit sector, and a population desperate for innovation: unhoused individuals. The past three years I have served in a variety of nonprofit organizations including Volunteers of America and the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless where I witnessed the gaps in our societal support of the houseless population, specifically during reintegration into the workforce. I aim to develop innovative, inclusive, and integrative programming throughout Denver nonprofits to serve our unhoused constituents more equitably and effectively.

2  
3 My commitment to design more responsive transitional procedures originated over five years ago when I volunteered at the Food Bank of the Rockies. In this role I grew to appreciate the lived human experiences of those in need by listening to their stories. I sympathized with a woman who faced eviction because she was never taught how to complete electronic forms, and I consoled a man who had received a job offer but couldn't get paid because he didn't have a bank account. My desire to highlight these voices rarely expressed at the political table motivated me to seek more advanced opportunities, including my current position as a Case Manager at the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. These momentary and modest interactions have been, and will be, my most valuable lessons in public service.

4  
5 As a future Program Director, I seek to design new systems that support unhoused individuals into and throughout the realm of professional preparation, vocational development, and community reintegration. This goal requires increased knowledge of the interconnections between nonprofit, public, and for-profit sectors, and is one of the many reasons I am drawn to the MPA program at CU Denver with a concentration in Nonprofit Management. I am eager to return to the speculative environment at CU Denver while the world is yearning for re-imagined equitable programs. Working alongside Dr. Robin Miller, I desire to learn how evidence-based decision making and research methods can be utilized to successfully implement policies, projects, and programs. In addition, earning the Certified Nonprofit Professional credential will assist me in becoming a more prepared, informed, and effective leader within the nonprofit community.

To contribute my three years of experience working in Denver nonprofits to your graduate program, along with my passion for working toward alternative solutions for a nation-wide crisis, would be a privilege and an honor.

Sincerely,  
Justin Thompson



# congrats!

YOU LEARNED HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT

At LynxConnect, we're here to support you throughout the process!

Schedule an appointment in [Handshake](#) to talk with a professional about your statement.

*Already met with a Career Counselor and want a second set of eyes on your personal statement?*

## Contact the Writing Center:

[writing.center@ucdenver.edu](mailto:writing.center@ucdenver.edu)

**CU Denver Writing Center**  
Learning Commons, First Floor  
(303) 315-7355

**CU Anschutz Writing Center**  
Health Sciences Library, Room 1204  
(303) 724-4143