



Personal Statement Kit

A Roadmap to Draft 1 of Your Statement

Introduction

There is no use beating around the bush: drafting your personal statement is one of the most challenging components of the college application. Even the most confident writers struggle to distill their identity within the bounds of a word count. The personal statement requires serious introspection about your life and long term goals, and thus can be extremely hard to write.

The key to writing a good personal statement is to structure your brainstorming time. Cambridge Coaching has designed this personal statement kit as a way for you to reflect, brainstorm, and finally write on the experiences that shape you as a person and an applicant.

The only materials you need (outside of this guide) are a pencil, paper, a quiet and comfortable space to write, and an open mind.

What's Inside: Instructions and Worksheets

- **Brainstorming**
- **Brainstorming Worksheets**
- **Outlining**
- **Outlining Worksheets**
- **Transitioning from your Outline to Writing**



Brainstorming

Before you can develop an application that highlights your strengths, you need to see yourself ***as a candidate***. We have included a list of questions that will help you draw out your personality, academic strengths and weaknesses, extracurricular experiences, and community involvement - the seeds for the personal statement.

Instructions

Complete each question in an unstructured way. ***Everything counts as fair brainstorming material: single words, images, graphs, etc.***

By the end of this exercise, you should have some essay ***possibilities***. It's not necessary to finalize every detail, but it is crucial to have your kernel ideas. We want to help you clear away the clutter and begin writing from a broad and well-conceived foundation.

Each worksheet should take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Complete the following worksheets

- ___ Personal Brainstorming
- ___ Academic Brainstorming
- ___ Extracurricular Brainstorming
- ___ Community Brainstorming
- ___ College Brainstorming



Personal Brainstorming Worksheet

- 1. Who is your role model, and why?**

- 2. What do you like to do in your spare time?**

- 3. If you had to describe yourself with adjectives, what words would you use? (Make a list.)**

- 4. Is there anything crucial that this list of adjectives does not capture about you?**

- 5. Describe a time when you overcame a challenge...**



Academic Brainstorming Worksheet

1. What courses are you studying this year/semester?
2. Do you have any favorites? Why?
3. Which courses are your least favorite? Why?
4. Have you thought about what potential majors and minor in college? What about these subjects attracts you?
5. Do you like writing?



Extracurricular Brainstorming Worksheet

- 1. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities? Which ones and why?**

- 2. How did you become involved in these activities?**

- 3. Would you like to continue these activities in college?**

- 4. Are there activities that you hope to pursue in college that you haven't pursued in high school? Which ones and why?**

- 5. In general, would you say you enjoy your extracurricular or academics more?**



Community Brainstorming Worksheet

- 1. How are you involved in your community?**

- 2. Have you done any formal community service?**

- 3. What inspires you?**

- 4. What issue do you care most about and why?**

- 5. Do you plan to participate in community service projects in college?**



Outlining

Phew! You made it through the beginning of The Personal Statement Kit. Take a 10-minute break to stretch your muscles and relax. If you feel like you need more distance, take 24 hours. Now that you've brainstormed five aspects of your personal history, you will now consider these wedges of your identity and how they will inform your transition into college.

Instructions:

- 1. Set yourself up and get comfy.** Be generous – give yourself lots of space and use the writing tool that feels most comfortable to you (pen, pencil, or computer). You should turn off your cell phone and disconnect your wifi.
- 2. Get started by highlighting the most important sentences** of your responses. The responses you select don't have to be the most capacious; they could be the most incisive, precise, and expressive.
- 3. Use the highlighted bits to begin an outline.** Draft your outline by completing the following:
 - a.** Group any highlighted sections that go together.
 - b.** Summarize the key themes that have emerged, and articulate them in full sentences.
 - c.** Once you have 3-4 sentences summarizing your argument, try and come up with a thesis – one sentence that will summarize the entire essay.
 - d.** Once you have a thesis and 3-4 topic sentences, work to fill in the details and prose of each section. This way, you'll start your draft without even realizing it.
- 4. Now you can start drafting.** Put your outline to work and develop your topic sentences



Outlining: Worksheet 1

Instructions: You can use this worksheet to begin grouping the highlighted portions of your brainstorm.

Group 1

-
-
-

Group 2

-
-
-

Group 3

-
-
-



Outlining: Worksheet 2

Instructions: Use the section below to summarize the key theme or themes that you see emerging. Sometimes, you'll find that each group you've highlighted will suggest a theme, but other times, it's just the opposite: you'll see a theme across one or more groups. Keep an open mind. The idea is to say something truthful about yourself; don't let the highlighting, grouping, and organizing stand in the way of a flash of inspiration.



Transitioning from your Outline to Writing: Thesis and Topic Sentences

So you've reflected on the most formative experiences of your life, and now have them down on paper – that's no small feat! Congratulate yourself for getting this far. Now, it's time to take some of the themes you've identified in your responses, and structure your statement with a thesis and topic sentences.

Your thesis and topic sentences are tools – think of them as signposts for your reader to follow the map of your argument. Without clear, well-marked signs, the reader will be lost.

A thesis statement is the main point you're trying to communicate. That's it. However, there are many features of a good thesis statement that you should consider when drafting your own:

- **A good thesis statement is arguable.** This means that you're making a claim that others may dispute. Without this feature of a thesis statement, the paper will lack tension. Oftentimes a main point that isn't arguable is boring, and/or stating the obvious.
- **A good thesis statement anticipates what's to come.** This is essential – think of the thesis statement as establishing rules for the game of the paper. You want to be sure that what follows the thesis statement is aligned with the theme and the evidence that you're using in the body of your paper.
- **A good thesis statement is clear and specific.** Though you probably have many examples and themes that you want to include in your personal statement, it is important to stick to one central argument. A good thesis sentence will hold you

accountable to this – if you find yourself bleeding into two or three sentences, it is probably an indication that you’re trying to fit too much.

How to create a thesis

Now that we’ve defined a thesis, you’re curious how to create one of your own, aren’t you? Before you develop a thesis, you need to look at the evidence you’ve gathered to see if it falls in line with a clear point or idea. You’ve already done the work of grouping your evidence into buckets of theme, so now your job is to write down a “working thesis” – a point that serves as a starting place for your argument, but may change over time as you continue to tease out your evidence.

Write your “working thesis” here:

See, that wasn’t so painful, was it? Now that you have a working thesis (huzzah!) you can begin thinking about the topic sentences.

If the thesis is the focus of the statement in its entirety, the topic sentences are the focus of the body paragraphs. Topic sentences are the most important sentence of the paragraph, and oftentimes extend or embellish the thesis by introducing the evidence of the paragraph.

Some things to keep in mind when writing your topic sentences:

- A good topic sentence always supports the thesis of your paper. The topic sentences should be a litmus for staying on track with your argument. They should certainly extend, complicate, and develop your argument, but they should always support it as well.

- A good topic sentence should introduce the evidence that supports your claim. If you think about your paper as a court case, think about your topic sentences as a lawyer's address to the jury. A topic sentence should always introduce the evidence that you are using to persuade a group of people – a jury of your peers.

Now that we've discussed the definitions of our topic sentences, you can revisit your working thesis. Keeping in mind the evidence that you'd like to use in each paragraph to support your working thesis, go ahead and write the topic sentence above the correlating piece of evidence on the following page.

Topic sentence

Evidence

Topic sentence

Evidence

Topic sentence

Evidence



Ready to Write

Congratulations! You're ready to write draft #1 of your personal statement!

Let's review what you've accomplished in this kit:

1. You've brainstormed some of the most impactful and meaningful experiences of your life using the brainstorming tools.
2. You've grouped your evidence into themes using the outlining tools.
3. Finally, you revisited the definition of a thesis and topic sentence, and used the evidence you generated to come up with statements of your own.

Now that you have a basic outline for your statement, you're ready to begin writing! Though some of you may be able to take it from here, remember that if you need a guide, mentor, editor, and second reader to keep you on track, you should contact Cambridge Coaching. We've been working with prospective college students for over a decade, and have been helping writers like you come up with compelling personal statements that help you stand out as an applicant.

Interested in learning more? Shoot us a note at info@cambridgecoaching.com. Attach your draft to the email, or scan in your completed personal statement kit. Our well-seasoned team will match you to the best available college coach, who will help you work on your statement at any phase of completion.