

## **30 Personal Statement Tips from Columbia University**

(with some additions by Mr. Chiang, don't worry, he's not giving grammar advice)

- 1) Answer the questions that are asked. Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications.
- 2) Tell a Story. Show or demonstrate your points using concrete examples from your experience.
- 3) The essay should come from your heart and brain.
- 4) Give yourself some distance. During revision process put your writing away for a day or two and then come back to look at it with fresh eyes.
- 5) Don't be afraid to delete. It's okay to let it go. Sometimes you will need to delete words, sentences or entire paragraphs as your writing and ideas evolve. Get rid of that which no longer fits.
- 6) Be specific. Broad sweeping statements will not make you stand out as an individual. Illustrate your points with personal examples or experiences.
- 7) Find an angle. An angle helps you to focus and make your statement interesting.
- 8) Have a strong opening paragraph. Your first paragraph should state your thesis and grab the reader's attention. Examples include a remarkable or life-changing experience, an anecdote, or a question that will be answered by your personal statement.
- 9) Show continuity. Conclude your personal statement by referring back to the introductory paragraph and restate your main thesis in a slightly different way.
- 10) Avoid cliches and quotes. This statement is about you and should not borrow from other's words.
- 11) Write well. Be meticulous about your writing style. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Don't rely on spellchecker.
- 12) Don't write a descriptive resume. This is a common mistake. Don't restate your extracurriculars in prose. This can be found in other parts of the application.
- 13) Have an adult comment on your essay, but not re-write your essay.

- 14) Caution writing about experiences before high school. Colleges will expect that you have had significant experiences while in high school.
- 15) Don't focus too much on another person, even if they have been influential in your life.
- 16) Do not solely discuss why you want X career/major. Instead, again, try to discuss what experiences led to your choice and what unique attributes you will bring to that field.
- 17) Be positive. Don't badmouth anything.
- 18) Avoid controversial issues. The person(s) reading your statement may feel offended or awkward.
- 19) Be honest.
- 20) Everyone Fails. Writing about a failure can demonstrate that you have been able to learn and grow from your mistakes.
- 21) Find a balance between creative and cautious. This can be tricky. There is a fine line between creative and interesting and odd and gimmicky. Don't write your personal statement as a poem unless asked.
- 22) Be concise. This is greatly appreciated by those who are reading thousands of applications.
- 23) It's hard to be a stand-up comedian. Humor is difficult and can be misinterpreted. It's best to avoid it.
- 24) Read the statement aloud.
- 25) Keep it a reasonable length. If the length is prescribed, keep it within that length, otherwise a good rule is to keep it to two pages.
- 26) Double space and make the margins at least an inch.
- 27) Put your name on each page.
- 28) A title is not necessary.
- 29) Do not write like a thesaurus. Avoid words you don't understand.
- 30) Use an "active" voice.