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Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls

Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Rules

1. Strive for depth rather than breadth. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences
2. Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say
3. Provide the reader with insight into what drives you
4. Be yourself, not the 'ideal' applicant
5. Get creative and imaginative in the opening remarks, but make sure it's something that no one else could write
6. Address the school's unique features that interest you
7. Focus on the affirmative in the personal statement; consider an addendum to explain deficiencies or blemishes
8. Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them
9. Proofread carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style
10. Use readable fonts, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins

Writing the Personal Statement: Top 10 Pitfalls

1. Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application
2. Do not use the same personal statement for each application. Generic statements are often obvious
3. Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme
4. Do not talk about money as a motivator
5. Do not discuss systemic and social injustices simply as complaints, but as a relevant source of motivation for your overall goals and intended studies
6. Do not remind the school of its rankings or tell them how good they are
7. Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions
 - o "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is..."
 - o "This question asks me to discuss..."
 - o "I would like to thank the admissions committee for considering my application."
 - o "It is my sincere hope that you will grant me the opportunity to attend your fine school."
 - o "In sum, there are three reasons why you should admit me..."
8. Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages
9. Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
10. Do not get the name of the school wrong
11. Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words