Personal Statement Tips, Guidelines, and Things to Avoid

1. Proofread! Then proofread it a few more times and then get someone else to proof it.

2. Write clearly and concisely. There is no need to impress people with your command of the English language; overly flowery or dramatic language is not only unnecessary, it is annoying. Remember this is a scientific discipline, and scientific writing is not creative writing or poetry. Say what you need to say in a concise statement and move on. You should not use a thesaurus to write this statement.

3. Avoid broad statements that don't provide any useful information. In psychology, we commonly see students write things like "I want to go to graduate school in psychology because I want to help people." This in and of itself is not a good reason for me to admit you into a graduate program. Think of something else.

4. Always phrase things in the positive. Avoid saying things like "I don't like" or "I don't have research experience." Always focus on what you do want to do, or have done. Even if you had a research (or other) experience that you did not particularly like, think about what you learned from that experience and frame your writing around this.

5. Keep it to 1 ½ - 2 pages max. The selection committee is probably going to have to read 40 or more of these things. They'll appreciate that you can write concisely. Plus, anything over this you are probably providing unnecessary information that could do more harm than good.

6. Although this is called a "personal statement", don't get too personal. Over-sharing can get you into trouble. Some examples may be to say "I really want to come to UNCC because I love BBQ and I hear Charlotte has some of the best", or "when I wake up in the morning my breath smells really bad". Think of this more as a "professional" statement.

7. Don't list the wrong school or wrong faculty members. You will likely apply to several graduate programs. Be sure that you send the right version of your statement to the right program. This is an easy way to move from the, we may want this person to this person in not very conscientious, so let's move on list.

8. Don't lie. Don't talk about experiences you do not have or skills that you do not possess. Stick with what you know. Do not try to BS something that you don't know much about. If you say things that aren't really correct, it can come off very badly.

9. If you list faculty whom you want to work with in the program, don't list all the faculty members at the program. Pick one (or two at the most) who seem to be most interesting to you. Also, don't lie (see point 6). That is, if you really don't have any interest in Dr. X's research, don't claim that you do. Occasionally programs will admit students to work with specific faculty; you don't want to get stuck in an area that you don't like.

10. Tailor your statement to the program in which you are applying. Although you will have a general statement, you may need to move things around based on what the specific program is looking for in applicants. For example, you may generally put your research experiences before work experiences when applying to ph.d. programs; however, if you are applying to a program that focuses on producing practitioners, you may want to switch the order of this information or pare down the research information and build up the work experience.

Guide to a strong personal statement
Writing Session Template

I. **INTRODUCTION**
   (Include who you are, name of the program to which you are applying, and degree you're seeking)

II. **EXPERIENCE**
   (Include your research experience; related work experience; show understanding of the discipline)

III. **CURRENT INTERESTS**
   (Why graduate school now? What are your goals?)

IV. **"FIT" WITH THE PROGRAM**
   (Why this school? With which faculty would you want to work?)

V. **SUMMARY**

   (Reiterate interest in program; this may be part of paragraph IV)