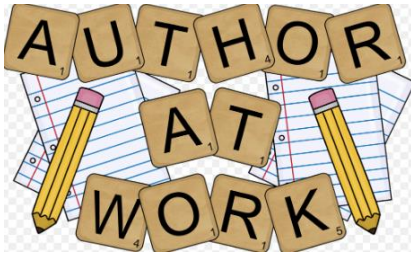


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Duello recommended outline for the grad school personal statement – Not the only way to do it, but certainly one that has worked for many students!

First paragraph - Great introduction

This is the only part of the essay that is a 'story'. It is a 'story' of how you became interested in science/research. It may be funny, sad, whatever.

Maybe you were interested from the time you were a small child. Maybe only since your Senior year in undergrad. Maybe after emigrating to the United States to expand your educational opportunities.

What you want is to talk about something in a way that makes the reader want to keep reading. Just enough to introduce the topic. (Not your entire life history.)

Most common problems:

- * Writing an abstract or summary, instead of just an introduction without a 'theme' or a conclusion.
- * Assuming this is a 'creative writing' exercise. Nada. Formal. Hard hitting. Not A 'chat'.
- Trying to sound lofty and profound, instead of writing in your normal voice.

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Second paragraph – Entrance to college and one or research experience

“I then enrolled at the University of _____ where I majored in _____ and pursued a certificate in _____. I was then **honored** to become a NIH Minority Access to Research Careers Scholar, which provided me the opportunity to conduct research with Dr. ___(first name)_____(last name)_____ at the University of _____, whose research focuses on _____.”

Example: I conducted research with Dr. Theresa Duello in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison whose work focuses on obstetrical risks associated with low birth weight infants.

Yes, this information appears elsewhere in the application, but this is ‘name dropping’ for the university and the professor.

And you are an NIH **Scholar**, not just a member. (This isn’t bragging. Just stating facts!)

The rest of the paragraph is very much like an ‘**Elevator Speech**’.

What did you **do** – The project
What did you **find** – The results
Why is/was it **important** to study this topic
What was the **benefit to you**

If you have had multiple research experiences, it is better to talk about two or three well, instead of more very superficially.

Example: “I have had the benefit of many research opportunities, only two of which I will discuss here.”

Then the admissions committee will ask you about the rest of the research experiences when you interview.

‘Talk’ about your experiences in a way that convinces the admissions committee that you have a clear, real, and deep understanding of what being a career in research actually entails. **Walk the walk. Talk the talk. ‘Sound like a scientist’**. If you do not convince them, they will be concerned that you will get to grad school, not like it, drop out, etc.

Do not try to ‘give’ the committee your conclusions and expect them to believe you. Give them information. Not your opinions. Instead you want to give enough detail to let them know what you learned in a way that demonstrates that

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you understand the hard work, commitment, and joys of a career in research.
(Also, delayed gratification. ☺)

Example: After many late nights in the lab,

Example: And then I had the 'Eureka moment . . . '

When writing about why the research it is **important**, pick the middle ground.
Not too broad or too narrow.

Example: Too broad > 'We will cure cancer.'

Example: Too narrow > 'It will tell us about the stoichiometry of this molecule'.

Instead: An understanding of the mechanism will aid in the development of cancer therapies.

Be mindful of your audience when you write about the **benefit to you**. The NIH undergraduate training programs were not created to make you 'happy' or to 'fulfill' you (though it is great that they do!)

The **benefits to you** were hopefully along the following lines:

Learn scientific method
Learn experimental design
Learn critical reading of the literature
Develop problem solving skills
Learn to communicate science.
Teamwork, teamwork, teamwork

Most common problems

- Don't use abbreviations. Spell out acronyms the first time if and only if you plan to use the abbreviation later in the essay.
Example: NIH Initiative for Maximizing Scientific Development (IMSD)
- Failing to name the professor and her/his institution. All professors have a first name and last name. When you mention it, the admissions committee may know them and their work, while no one knows who 'Dr. Smith' is.
- Giving the title of a poster, instead of telling what the project was. No experiment starts with a poster title. That is at the end. Not the beginning.
- Not stating the results. The admissions committee members are all scientists. The results are the interesting part! Do not omit them, thinking "I did research. Give me 10 points."
- Do not lecture the admissions committee or state the obvious. Do not preach.

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Not 'Science is really important'.

Third paragraph – Another paragraph about another research project (if you have one). Quality of research training is more important than quantity.

Fourth paragraph – Only include this paragraph to write about a science-related extracurricular activity, like Honors Biology. (Not about being a 'well-rounded person.)

Great concluding paragraph – **Drum roll !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**



First, tell us **why** you are applying to this program given its emphasis on/reputation in _____ and why it is a best match for you. (This is where you flatter us. We know why we are famous. Do you know?)

Example: "I am drawn to the University of Wisconsin-Madison given its groundbreaking work in stem cell research."

Great homework shortcut:

Go to any university's homepage > Search 'centers' and 'institutes'. When we create something new that is an **interdisciplinary** effort, we create a center or institute. (Not another department.) This definitely makes an institution 'unique'. Look to see if there is a 'center' or 'institute' relevant to your goals.

Then tell us whose work interests you. This is not a contract. It is not written in blood. It is demonstrating that you did your homework and know which faculty's research interests you.

Example: "I am particularly interested in the work of Dr. Jason Smith on _____, Dr. Marie Jones on _____, and Dr. Theresa Duello on _____."

You only have to give a few words in explanation to convince us you have done your homework. (Again, we know what these people study. Do you?)

Then tell us what you want to do with your PhD. Don't just say your goal is to get admitted or get through. This is naïve and short cited. Show the admissions committee you are looking beyond admission.

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Maybe what you see yourself doing 10 years after earning a PhD. It is okay to think **BIG**. If you want to head the National Institutes of Health, the Center for Disease Control, or the Smithsonian Museum, say so.

Don't stop here. **Tell us what else do you want to do.**

Start an undergrad research program?
Allow students to shadow you?
Role model for other youth to become scientists?
Communicate science to the public?

All the best,

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