

How to Write an Excellent Personal Statement in 14 Days

Day 0	Sleep in; enjoy friends and family; take deep breaths
Day 1	Explore the scholarship foundation's website, focusing on pages for applicants such as the mission, application timeline, application components, selection criteria, and FAQ.
Day 2	Write down everything you do. It may help to think of your daily, weekly, monthly tasks and obligations. Include personal activities as well as those that don't have a name/ title. Write for 30 minutes in the morning, then keep your list handy all day. You'll think of more. Don't edit. 30 minutes in the morning, 30 minutes later.
Day 3	Reflection: What project are you most proud of in your life? Why that project? How did you grow while you worked on it? Write out your reflection, but don't edit.
Day 4	Complete the Values Activity (attached below).
Day 5	Reflection: You are the type of person who solves problems with a positive attitude. What's the problem you want to solve during your life? Why? How are you preparing yourself? Write out your reflection, but don't edit.
Day 6	Write down your plans for your future: How are you preparing to solve the problem you noted on Day 5? Be as specific as you can. Write as if you're telling someone who's never met you what you want to do in the next months, years, decades. Once you've written everything, take out jargon and acronyms.
Day 7	Look at your list of all the activities you do from Day 2 and the project you identified from Day 3. Think about what common thread ties together these activities? Think about how these activities demonstrate your leadership, service, and skillset. Think about what qualities and experiences the scholarship foundation is looking for. Think about which activities match well and which activities you want to discuss in your personal statement. Write down your reflections.
Day 8	Look at the core values that you identified from the Values Activity on Day 4. Think about which of these values are relevant to the scholarship. Think about which of your activities demonstrate these values. Write down your reflections.
Day 9	Look at the problem that you identified for Day 5. Think about how your activities prepare you to tackle this problem. Think about how this problem is connected to the career goals you identified in Day 6. Write down your reflections.
Day 10	Take a look at all of the notes you've taken so far. Identify 2-3 themes that you see repeatedly coming up. These themes should show up in your values, activities and experiences, career goals, and the problem that you want to solve.

Day 11	Write a first draft of your personal statement, arranging it around the themes that you identified and using your previous experiences and activities to provide “evidence.” Incorporate short anecdotes to “show, not tell.” If relevant, include a statement about your career goals.
Day 12	Ask someone who doesn’t know your work to read your personal statement. Try to ask someone who doesn’t know about your projects, plans, and accomplishments. Remember the readers won’t know you personally and you won’t be in the room to explain your work. Therefore, you must answer all the readers’ questions with your essays. “How?” and “Why?” are the most common questions readers might have.
Day 13	Read your entire application with a critical eye. Do your themes come through coherently? Will the reader get a good sense of your core values and beliefs? Did you incorporate suggestions from yesterday’s reader? Think about the words you use when you speak passionately about your work. Use those words in your essays. Readers want to meet the authentic YOU!
Day 14	Make final edits and ensure that you’re happy with your statement. Take a deep breath and appreciate yourself and the deep reflection that you just engaged with!

Adapted from the Udall Foundation’s “Suggested Timeline”

Values Activity Worksheet (for use on Day 4)

Step 1: Identify all the values that may be important to you. Take 5 minutes to do this.

Use the list below to identify **all the values you feel are important to you in your life**. When selecting the values that are important to you, remember the definition of values: “standards or principles which guide our actions, beliefs, and decisions.” You can **highlight** or **bold** the words.

List of Values

Accountability	Equality	Joy	Security
Achievement	Ethics	Justice	Self-discipline
Adaptability	Excellence	Kindness	Self-expression
Adventure	Fairness	Knowledge	Self-respect
Altruism	Faith	Leadership	Serenity
Ambition	Family	Learning	Service
Authenticity	Financial stability	Legacy	Simplicity
Balance	Forgiveness	Leisure	Spirituality
Beauty	Freedom	Love	Sportsmanship
Being the best	Friendship	Loyalty	Stewardship
Belonging	Fun	Making a difference	Success
Career	Future generations	Nature	Teamwork
Caring	Generosity	Openness	Thrift
Collaboration	Giving back	Optimism	Time
Commitment	Grace	Order	Tradition
Community	Gratitude	Parenting	Travel
Compassion	Growth	Patience	Trust
Competence	Harmony	Patriotism	Truth
Confidence	Health	Peace	Understanding
Connection	Home	Perseverance	Uniqueness
Contentment	Honesty	Personal fulfillment	Usefulness
Contribution	Hope	Power	Vision
Cooperation	Humility	Pride	Vulnerability
Courage	Humor	Recognition	Wealth
Creativity	Inclusion	Reliability	Well-being
Curiosity	Independence	Resourcefulness	Wholeheartedness
Dignity	Initiative	Respect	Write your own:
Diversity	Integrity	Responsibility	Write your own:
Environment	Intuition	Risk-taking	
Efficiency	Job security	Safety	

Step 2: Identify 10 values above that feel most central to your life and your aspirations. Take 5 minutes to do this. You can highlight them in a new color or change the font.

Now we are going to narrow down that list to your top ten values. Using the values you initially highlighted or bolded, select the top ten most important values. These values should represent the core beliefs which most motivate your actions and attitudes.

If you are having trouble narrowing down to the top ten, consider the following question, what is the one rule, principle, or philosophy that you believe is important to live your life by? What values from your list are reflected in this rule?

Additional questions to help you decide:

- What do you feel really passionate about?
- What would you choose to do if you have unlimited resources?
- Who are the people or characters from history you most admire, and why?
- What character traits do you want to develop?
- What do you want to give back to the world?

Step 3: Narrow your list of 10 down to 3 core values, then list them below. Take 3 minutes to select your top three values. Again, you can highlight them in a new color or change the font.

We would like for you to note which values of those ten are the three most important values to you at this point in your life. If you are feeling challenged to pick the top three, consider a recent time when you were at your best.

- What makes you at your best? What were you doing?
- What values are represented in that recent moment?
- Or you could take a minute to envision yourself at the end of your life. What are the three most important lessons you have learned and why are they so critical? What values are reflected in these lessons?

Also, it may be helpful to think about if some values in your top ten may be “supporting” values. Meaning if you have highlighted values of trustworthiness, responsibility, and loyalty you might recognize that trustworthiness is a core belief and are supported by your values of responsibility and loyalty. In this case “trustworthiness” might end up being one of your top values.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 4: Share your values. (Can be done in small groups or all together if group is small)

- What was this process like for you? What are your reactions and how did it feel?
- Why did you select those?
- How did your value emerge in your life? What's a story connected to your value?
- How do you (or how do you want to) put these values into action?
 - (ex. How do you see these values showing up in your academic path, work and life?)
- What do you want others to know about your values?

- What do you think these values say about how you approach leadership, civic engagement, and community change