

About this sample personal statement: The following personal statement was composed by a Communication Sciences and Disorders major applying to master's programs in speech-language pathology. This is a program-specific personal statement that is nearly 1,200 words long (longer than the typical personal statement). It responded to the prompt: *Compose a brief statement giving your reasons for wishing to undertake graduate study, your future plans, or any additional information that may aid the admissions committee in evaluating your preparation and your aptitude for graduate study at Vanderbilt University.* A personal statements overview with writing strategies and other relevant resources are available at [this link](#).

Personal Statement

The writer opens her personal statement with an unusual and attention-capturing image. Through her description of holding a human brain, she demonstrates her curiosity, courage, and ability to apply her learning outside of the classroom. Some readers may be left wondering, "What does this have to do with speech-language pathology?" but the writer answers this question in the next paragraph.

Just a few months ago, I held a human brain in gloved hands for the first time and marveled at the fact that three pounds of gray and white matter, fat, and water houses 100 billion neurons, a person's lifetime of memories, their sense of self, their personality, their motor coordination, and their ability to communicate. I had never seen a brain up close other than in models and diagrams, so when my neuroanatomy professor offered us the opportunity to observe in our university's cadaver lab, I jumped at the chance.

It is only recently that my interest in the brain has been piqued. For most of my undergraduate career, I wanted to work with children. I had even narrowed my interests to children with disabilities in an early intervention setting. However, after taking courses in neuroanatomy and acquired brain injury this semester, I have become fascinated with the complexities of the brain's pathways and neural networks and awed by the multifaceted effects that an injury can cause. I was surprised to learn that aphasia has the largest negative effect on quality of life, even more so than

It's more important to demonstrate what draws you to the field/position/profession you plan to enter than to explain why you didn't choose another path. If this writer needed to shorten her personal statement, she could have cut this underlined material.

Readers of personal statements often want to know how and why the applicant became interested in the field or profession. In this paragraph, the writer offers important background about her vocational journey—in particular, why she wants to work with adults with brain injuries.

Personal statements typically do not include thesis statements. However, this writer effectively uses a thesis to provide a unifying claim about her qualifications and to signal what will come next. If necessary, though, this could be cut.

This sentence answers the essential questions “What did you learn?” and “How will you apply your learning in your profession?” about the experiences described in this paragraph.

cancer or degenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s, because it affects a patient’s ability to communicate and therefore interact with the world around them in a meaningful way. This stark realization has changed the path of my future career. I am pursuing my master’s degree in Speech-Language Pathology because I want to be a clinician who helps adults with brain injuries regain their quality of life, reconnect with the world, and most importantly, express themselves effectively. During my time at James Madison University, I have taken on many different roles—honors student, tour guide, advocate, volunteer and more—but my most important role has been that of an active learner.

Since my sophomore year, I have gained invaluable research experience from working in labs, collaborating with faculty mentors, and developing and executing my own senior honors thesis. For the last year, I have worked with a faculty member and a team of five other graduate and undergraduate students in the Social Communication Lab at JMU. One of our ongoing projects has been to create and validate a rating checklist that can reliably characterize pragmatic deficits in children and adolescents. In the early stages of the project, we listened to language samples and identified and characterized common pragmatic behaviors such as topic maintenance and responding to questions. We are now working to establish interrater reliability by scoring language samples independently using the checklist we created. This process has taught me to think clinically and make informed diagnoses while also identifying goals for

A common move toward the end of the introduction is to acknowledge the purpose of the personal statement by referencing the specific degree program the applicant is seeking admission to.

This portion of the paragraph answers the essential question “What did you do?” regarding the topic of the paragraph.

Moreover, the writer demonstrates expertise and audience awareness by using the terminology of her discipline (e.g., “pragmatic deficits” and “interrater reliability”).

treatment. In my own honors project, I am working to critically compare two naturalistic protocols, the Yale *in vivo* Pragmatic Protocol and the CELF-5 Pragmatic Activities Checklist, to determine which provides the most clinically relevant information about an adolescent with disordered pragmatics. Administering these protocols to participants has been one of my favorite experiences. Because we are focusing on naturalistic observation, the interaction is only structured, not scripted. It is up to me to facilitate a natural and flowing conversation and to engage the participant in my activities. Though being a researcher is not one of my long term professional goals, the knowledge I have acquired from working with participants, collaborating with other researchers, and reading current scientific literature will inform and guide my clinical practices, allowing me to provide distinctive and personalized care.

Notice how the writer explicitly connects her experiences to her future profession. Even though she doesn't plan to become a researcher, she shows how her research experience has cultivated knowledge, skills, and abilities that she will apply as a speech-language pathologist.

This writer missed an opportunity to signal a change in topic by beginning a new paragraph. Paragraph breaks and transitional phrases can help your readers navigate shifts in topic. Paragraphs that take up a page (or more) may visually overwhelm readers and make it difficult to locate important information.

Statements of purpose may ask applicants to focus only on related academic, research, and professional experiences; however, many personal statement prompts are more open ended. Talking about experiences outside of the field or discipline, as the writer does in this paragraph, may help set you apart. That said, it's important to explain how the experience has prepared you to succeed in the program or in the profession.

As a member of JMU's student tour guide organization, Student Ambassadors, I am in the unique position of interacting with hundreds of guests to the university each semester. During tours, I do my best to answer every question asked with confidence and professionalism, but once in a while there is a guest with a curveball question. I was once asked on a tour how many liters of water our campus lake held, to which I laughed and replied, "Well if I had to guess: more than a puddle, less than the ocean." While that question was quite ridiculous, I have to be prepared to think on my feet and navigate tougher and more serious topics such as campus safety, diversity of thought, and tragic events. In those situations, I

Selection committees aren't merely looking for qualified applicants; they're also looking for personality traits that will help applicants be good students, classmates, and colleagues. This memorable anecdote showcases the writer's sense of humor and people skills.

The writer's work as a Student Ambassador also appears on her résumé, but here, she provides more depth and detail, allowing readers to see her in action.

must be honest and straightforward, focusing on the positive without undermining the reality of the situation. I think that skill will serve me well in a clinical setting, where it is important to utilize effective and honest communication when talking to clients about treatment goals and outcomes.

Student Ambassadors has also taught me that I have a voice with the power to implement change. Through my lens as an Ambassador, I noticed that our Office of Admissions was not as accommodating as it could be for guests. Collaborating with another Ambassador, I worked this past semester to facilitate a partnership between the Office of Admissions and the Office of Disability Services and implement the seven principles of Universal Design in our daily tour activities. After many meetings, much research, and even a little pushback, the Office of Admissions now uses 100% captioned videos in information sessions, offers a “no-stairs” tour for guests with strollers and wheelchairs, and better advertises accommodations offered to guests on its visitation website. Though there is always more to be done, I am proud to have advocated for these steps toward a more inclusive campus. This experience has empowered me to advocate for the needs of my future patients with confidence and ensure they are receiving the highest quality of care.

One aspect of Vanderbilt’s MS-SLP program that excites me most is the commitment to experiential learning, evidenced by the wealth of diverse clinical education placements. I am especially interested to see

In a shorter personal statement, the writer would not have had space to dedicate two paragraphs to her Student Ambassador experience. If necessary, she could have cut one of these paragraphs or combined and condensed them.

Notice how the writer describes in specific detail the outcomes of her advocacy efforts. Those particulars support her claim that she has effectively advocated for more inclusive campus tours. Moreover, such precise examples are more likely to stick with a reader than vague generalizations.

This could be said of any program the writer is applying to. In program-specific paragraphs, it is best to focus on unique aspects of a program that align with your interests or will draw upon your qualifications.

Here, the writer describes a specific aspect of the program that aligns with her goals and interests. This demonstrates that she has researched the program and that she's a good match for it.

multiple opportunities for experience working with older adults.

Unsurprisingly, I am most drawn to the placement in the Pi Beta Phi Rehabilitation Institute for adults with brain injury and neurologic disorders. While I am eager to learn more about the complex field of brain injury and post-injury rehabilitation, I am also dedicated to being a well-rounded clinician. I look forward to gaining new perspectives and insights from a diverse, clinically experienced faculty and building on the knowledge I have obtained during my undergraduate studies. Speaking to a current first-year student in the program also revealed to me the strong sense of community that is present among the students and professors in this program. Though I am a highly self-motivated student, I thrive in an environment where I feel connected to others and supported in my learning endeavors, and I feel I have much to contribute to this kind of learning community as well.

Because this paragraph talks about a specific program, it would not appear in a common application. Moreover, if it were part of a statement of purpose, it would likely emphasize the writer's research agenda and the faculty member(s) she hopes to work with.

The concluding paragraph is a good place to turn an eye toward the future and share long-term goals, if you haven't already. This writer's vision for the future includes a specific population (older adults) dealing with specific conditions (brain injuries). If you are less certain of your plans, you might explain how you think the program will help you solidify your interests or select a specialization.

I want to attend this institution because it is evident that we share a commitment to growth, discovery, and change making. I am pursuing my master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology because I am passionate about making change in the lives of adults with brain injury. Attending Vanderbilt would afford me the opportunity to gain specialized experience with older adults, learn from renowned faculty, and be one step closer to my goal of helping adults with brain injuries and neurogenic communication disorders reconnect with the world around them.

This is a nice touch. The writer describes not only what she will gain from the program but also what she hopes to contribute to it.

NOTE: Many personal statements may be submitted as a single-spaced document. Review instructions or reach out to an admissions contact to find out formatting requirements for your personal statement. Then make good use of whatever space is available to you.