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.

**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**

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
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
Selection committees aren’t merely looking for qualified applicants; they’re also looking for personality traits that will help your readers navigate shifts in topic. Paragraph breaks and transitional phrases can help your readers manage these shifts and make it easier to locate important information. 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
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
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.

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.