

# Personal Statements and Your CV

(This document is for information purposes only.)

## Personal Statement

Most graduate program applications require a personal statement, and it is a good idea to have one ready to send a prospective advisor and the writers of your letter of recommendation.

1. This statement is your opportunity to speak directly to the admissions committee and/or potential advisor. Use your statement to show who you are, what you have done, and what you want to do. This is similar to a cover letter for a job.
2. There are many ways of writing a personal statement and there is not a correct or wrong way to approach this personal essay.
3. Make sure you check to see if the program has specific requirements for the style, content, and length of your statement.
4. Suggested structure and content (remember, this is just a suggestion. These are potential questions that you could answer. You can answer one, some, all, or none of them.)
  - a. Part 1: **Who you are (personally)?**
    - i. What brought you to anthropology?
    - ii. What brought you to forensic anthropology?
    - iii. What extracurricular activities did you do in undergrad that you participated in?
    - iv. Have you had to overcome any personal struggles that you want to address? (Certainly not required and needs to be handled sensitively if you do)
    - v. Why do you want to go to graduate school?
  - b. Part 2: **What you have done (academically)?**
    - i. What courses did you take that will prepare you for graduate school?
    - ii. What was your undergraduate research about and who did you work with?
    - iii. Did you go to a field school? If so, write about it.
    - iv. Did you volunteer? If so, write about it.
    - v. Have you had to overcome any academic struggles that you want to address (e.g., low GPA, low GRE, etc.)? (Certainly not required and needs to be handled sensitively if you do)
  - c. Part 3: **What you want to do (in graduate school and beyond)?**
    - i. Why do you want to go to graduate school (if you did not address it in part 1)?
    - ii. What topic(s) in forensic anthropology interest you and why?
    - iii. What research do you want to do for your master's thesis? (see FAQ)
    - iv. Who do you want to be your advisor and why? (see 5.c. below)
5. Your personal statement should be either in a cover letter or essay format.
  - a. Cover letter format: Put it on a letterhead and address it to the admissions committee for the program you are applying to. Single-spaced with regular margins. Sign (digitally or handwritten) at the end.
  - b. Essay format: Include your name and what it is in the header (example: *Name – Personal Statement*) and number the pages. Single-spaced with regular margins.
6. Good practices for developing your statement:
  - a. Take this statement seriously. Let your personality show in your statement but **maintain a professional tone**. This is a professional document. Any personal stories should be relevant to your journey to graduate school and appropriate for an academic setting.
  - b. **Keep the topics and language respectful**. Do not include any statements or topics that disparage the living or dead. (see FAQ)

- c. **Tailor each of your statements for each school you apply to.** Make sure you include information (i.e., potential advisor and thesis topic) that is specific to the program you are applying to.
- d. **Avoid overly complicated language or jargon.** It feels out of place in a personal statement. You are a student and you do not need to prove that you know everything. You would not be applying to graduate school if you have nothing left to learn.
- e. **Read your statement out loud.** Does it sound awkward or rambling? Edit your statement to be succinct and to the point. You do not want the admissions committee or your future advisor to be bogged down by a lengthy and wordy personal statement.
- f. **Edit, edit, edit.** Make sure your personal statement is free of any grammatical errors, it has proper punctuation, and is structured appropriately. You only have one opportunity to make an impression. Make it a good impression.

## Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Most graduate program applications require a CV. This document is similar to a resume but focuses on your academic achievements. It is a good idea to have one ready to send a prospective advisor and the writers of your letter of recommendation.

1. There is no accepted or universal format for a CV; however, there are common themes that you will find in most academic CVs.
2. A CV is different than a resume. **CVs are designed to include ALL academic work and can fill more than one page.** A resume is a summary of only the relevant information that can fit on a page.
3. Finding examples:
  - a. Use a search engine to see examples of CVs.
  - b. The LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology has CVs of each faculty member on their faculty pages (<https://www.lsu.edu/ga/people/faculty/index.php>).
4. Choose a format that you prefer. Remember, there is no standard format for a CV.
5. Suggested subheadings/content sections:
  - a. Personal Information: Name, address, email, etc.
  - b. Education: Degrees awarded and/or to be awarded (expected graduation dates), Major, Minor, GPA, Honors(?), etc.
  - c. Courses: List courses that you took that are relevant
  - d. Research Experience: Undergraduate research (topic/title, skills learned, role in the research, etc.), skills learned (in the classroom or in the laboratory)
  - e. Professional Organization: Membership in AAFS, AABA, SAA... are common in forensic anthropology.
  - f. Awards, Scholarships, Funding: All academic awards or honors.
  - g. Professional Presentations: If you presented your undergraduate research at a conference or symposium, list them as a citation (bibliography style).
  - h. Jobs or Positions: Any job or position you held (like a student worker) that is relevant.
  - i. Volunteer/Internship: Any volunteer or internship opportunities
6. The suggested subheadings above do not need to be in a particular order. Do not include a subheading if you do not have anything to put in that section. Include any sections not listed that you feel are important.
7. Your CV is designed to be catalogue of your academic accomplishments. It will grow as you move forward in your career, so do not feel discouraged if you do not have many things to place in your CV yet.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Choosing Personal Statements and CVs

### 1. How long should a personal statement be?

- Look for specific requirements for each application. If there are none, a general rule is to keep the statement at one or two pages.

### 2. Should I share a personal story in my personal statement?

- Only if you want to and feel it would provide useful information to the admissions committee or your future advisor.
- You want to make sure you maintain a professional tone. The admissions committee wants to know why you are perfect for their department. Narratives about your dog Mitsy or your love for the TV show Bones are not a good use of the space you have available.

### 3. Should I talk about my love of skulls/skeletons/bones/bodies/crime scenes?

- There are many things that can bring you to forensic anthropology, but you should have a good idea of why you want to go to school to be a forensic anthropologist. Forensic anthropologists assist agencies (law enforcement, coroners, medical examiners, etc.) in identification and trauma analysis efforts. If your only connection to the field is a love of the macabre aspects of the work, forensic anthropology may not be the right path for you.
- Every skull/skeleton/bone/body/crime scene represents a person. Refrain from talking about people as objects or props. Every professional forensic anthropologist understands the gravity of the work we do and how important it is to remain respectful of the deceased.

### 4. Do I need to change my personal statement for every program I apply for?

- Yes. A generic statement will be interpreted as generic. You need to show the program why you are perfect for their program. Personalizing your statement shows that you know what they do and how your interests will fit with their resources and research.

### 5. What if I don't know what I want to research for my thesis?

- That is okay. Think about what aspects of forensic anthropology interest you most (examples: biological profile, trauma analysis, pathology, human identification, social/ethical issues, etc.). You can be strategically vague about your interests. You do not need a perfectly planned out thesis project.
- It is also okay to change your mind later. Interests often change as we learn new ideas and concepts.

### 6. How long is a CV?

- It should be as long as it needs to be. It will grow as you grow as an academic. One or two pages is average for an undergraduate student applying to a master's program.

### 7. Can I submit a resume instead of a CV with my application?

- Not really. You should construct a proper academic CV. It will be useful to add to as you move through your career.