

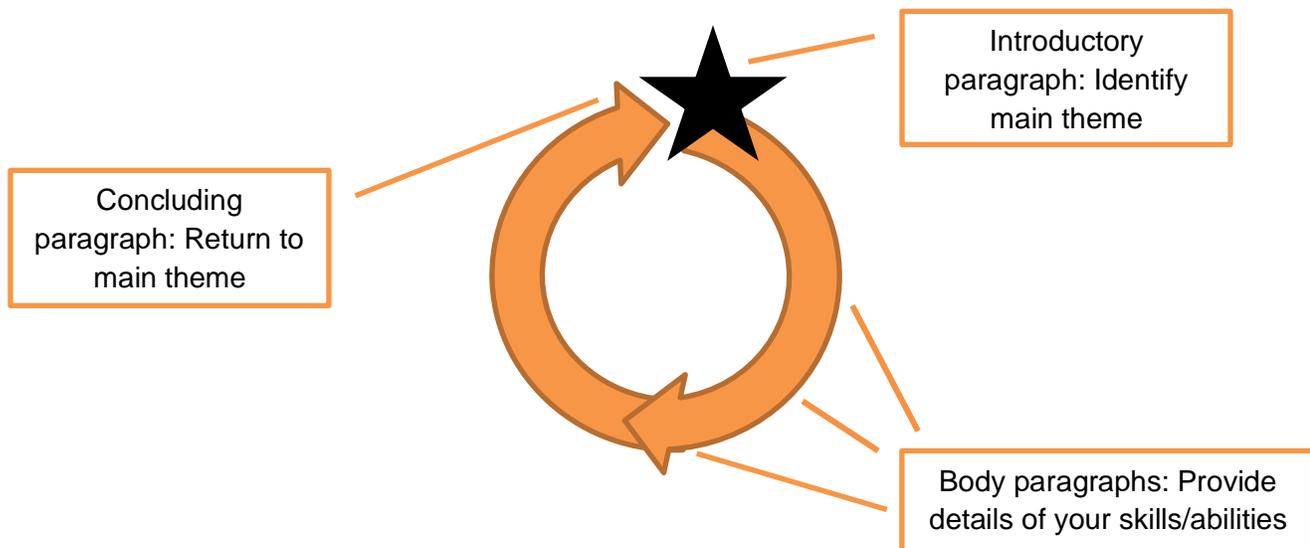
Personal Statements

Many graduate and professional school programs require that applicants submit personal statements as a component of their application packages. The primary purpose of these statements is to convey information about the applicant's **personality, motivations** and **goals** or **ambitions**, while a secondary purpose is to highlight **skills** the applicant has developed throughout their working and scholastic career.

Narrative Structure

The most impactful way to describe your reasons for pursuing a particular program or career path is to tell a story with you as the main character. This method allows you to **provide details about your experiences and training** while **capturing your readers' interest** and compelling them to not only **engage with the writing**, but more importantly to **remember your application** later when deciding which applicants to accept into the program. **Note:** Engage your readers' interest, but maintain a **formal tone**. Stories do not need to be expressed in a poetic style heavy in description.

Always begin your story by introducing the main character, YOU, and the main theme. The theme is the **central, unifying idea of the statement**, and it should relate to **your motivation** for pursuing a career in the particular field relevant to the program to which you are applying. This theme could be an epiphanous moment when your future profession became suddenly clear in your mind. It could be a person you helped or who gave you advice, or it could be a problem you solved or an interest you have pursued throughout your life. Whatever the theme, be sure to return to it explicitly in your concluding paragraph:



For example, your decision to pursue a career in law can be traced back to a conversation you had with your grandmother, who was a lawyer, about the “justice” of a particular decision. In your first paragraph, devote **at least one or two sentences** to describing this conversation. What did your

grandmother have to say about justice? And how does this advice motivate your interest in a law career? If you have answered the second question, you can transition into the first body paragraph.

Skills and Abilities

Having established the rationale behind your decision to apply to a particular program, your next task is to demonstrate that you have the **necessary qualities** to succeed in that program. In many cases, application questions will ask candidates to refer to specific skills, but if the questions are open-ended, take some time to **consider the skill sets that would be required in a particular program**. For instance, students applying to law school may want to emphasize leadership and communication skills, while those interested in careers in medicine may be more inclined to focus on research and problem-solving skills. In your own statement, you will want to provide details on at least a few of the skills shown in the table below:

Interaction-based	Individual-based	Administration-based
Teamwork skills	Time management skills	Leadership skills
Communication skills	Reliability	Decision-making skills
Problem-solving skills	Responsibility	Management skills
Customer service skills	Creativity	Strategic thinking skills
Negotiating skills	Adaptability	Organizational skills
Ethics	Analytical skills	Teaching skills

When you describe your skills, **do not simply list** a few for each job or experience you have had and expect your readers to make connections between the jobs and the skills they imparted. Always explain how you developed the skills based on **specific tasks** you completed.



Conclusions

After writing **two or three body paragraphs** that highlight your skills, you can now transition into your conclusion by explaining to your reader that the experience you have accumulated and the skills you have developed were all a part of your **broader plan** to prepare yourself for the demands of your chosen profession.

At this stage, you will also want to return to the **main theme** of your statement by making the case that your **further training** in this discipline, within the program to which you are applying, is necessary if you are to fulfill the ambition you stated in your introductory paragraph.

Ex. “I am confident that, with the kind of instruction I receive at Osgoode Hall Law School, I can embark on a legal career that will epitomize my grandmother’s vision of justice.”