Writing an Effective Personal Statement

What do you want an application committee to know about you?

Questions to get you started:
1. Why did you select your major? (Alternately, why have you changed your major? Why are you exploring?)
2. What personal/professional/academic goals are you currently trying to accomplish?
3. What makes you a great candidate? Why are you an asset?

Once you’ve settled on a program, incorporate specific details about why you selected this particular program.

Questions to get you started:
1. Was it the structure of the program? (Explain)
2. Will the credits earned on this program help you to complete a major? A minor? GE requirements?
3. For Ohio State-sponsored programs: were you drawn to a particular faculty/staff resident director? Perhaps you’ve taken a class with them? In what ways has this person really cultivated your interest in this program?
4. How will this program help you to accomplish the personal, professional or academic goals that you’ve outlined?
5. What does this program offer you that another program would not?

Next, let’s build an argument. Even applications with specific prompts can be boiled down to this basic statement: “I am a good candidate for this program/scholarship because...” Take a few minutes to develop this argument using the details from the first page you brainstormed.

Now it’s time to organize what you have. A mind map is a great tool for organization, as is an old-school outline.

Finishing touches
First read-through
• Check spelling and grammar yourself: do NOT rely on your computer to do this for you. Pay particular attention to the tricky words we talked about (to/two/too; their/there/they’re; etc.) Read your essay backwards to make sure you’ve caught everything.
• Check word/page count: have you gone over? Are you under?
  • If you are over the limit, you will need to tighten up your writing. Have you been repetitive? Have you belabored your point? Are there any irrelevant details that distract from your point?
  • If you are under the limit, you probably need to bolster your arguments. Go back and consider some of the questions above to see if you could flesh out a more complete picture of yourself and your plans.
Second read-through
• Avoid the junk food of writing: clichés
• Check the register of your writing
• Careful word choice

Third read-through
• Trusted outside reader
• Completed essays can go to the Center for the Study of Teaching and Writing’s Writing Center. They will not proofread for you, so make sure you have done this prior to taking your essay in for review.