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Three annotated graduate personal statements

Composite samples written by GradeDraft for gradedraft.com/admission/graduate-school-personal-statement/. No line belongs to a real applicant. Each margin note explains one decision the paragraph makes.

Sample 1: career changer, computer science master's

I taught high school geometry for six years before I rewrote our department's grade-tracking spreadsheet as a small Python program, because the commercial gradebook crashed twice a week on decades-old lab machines. That program still runs in three classrooms — why I am applying to a master's in computer science, not a doctorate in education.

Note 1: A concrete, dated artifact still in use replaces a general "discovering a passion for coding" claim.

I do not have an undergraduate CS degree, and I say so directly: my transcript shows a math major with a statistics minor. Since the spreadsheet, I completed two data-structures courses, built a scheduling tool a second school now uses, and finished a backend-development bootcamp.

Note 2: A career changer should name the credential gap directly, not let a reader find it first.

I want to study human-computer interaction — why software fails non-expert users under time pressure — because I watched forty students a day fail at grading software from interface design that assumed fluency nobody in that room had.

Note 3: The research interest grows from the applicant's own work history, which makes a career-change narrative credible.

A master's gives me the formal grounding — algorithms, systems design, a research apprenticeship — self-teaching cannot. I intend to return to educational technology, this time building the tools instead of working around their failures.

Note 4: The closing names a specific destination instead of leaving "what comes next" open.

Sample 2: humanities PhD, comparative literature

My grandmother told the same three stories about leaving Lebanon in 1975 for thirty years, and each version contradicted the last. Only in my master's program did I recognize this as the narrative revision I had been reading about in Arabic diaspora fiction — the reason my research sits at the intersection of oral testimony and the contemporary Arabic novel.

Note 1: A family anecdote can open a humanities statement if it connects to the applicant's research method within two sentences.

My thesis analyzed narrative unreliability across four novels published 1995–2015, using close reading alongside interviews with two living authors — a combination I want to extend to a dissertation-length project.

Note 2: Naming the method, not just the topic, distinguishes independent research from coursework.

I am applying to work with faculty whose published work on testimony and fiction across Arabic and French corpora overlaps my methods directly. My native Arabic and reading French let me work with sources most applicants in this subfield read only in translation.

Note 3: Language ability is a stated research asset, not a personal detail — that is what "research fit" means.

I want a dissertation treating family oral history as primary source material alongside published fiction — a combination current scholarship does not fully connect — and to teach courses built around testimony-based reading.

Note 4: The close states both a research contribution and a teaching goal, which humanities committees weigh alongside research capacity.

Sample 3: MSW, clinical social work

For three years I worked as a case aide in a county child welfare office, sitting in on home visits I was not yet licensed to conduct alone. I watched four caseworkers handle the same crisis — a parent losing housing mid-case — four different ways, and only one kept the family's other services intact. That variation is why I am applying for an MSW: I want the clinical training and license to handle it that fourth way, consistently.

Note 1: A pattern across many cases, not one dramatic case, avoids vagueness and client confidentiality problems.

My role meant sitting through licensing exams I could not yet take and reading assessments I could not yet write. I completed a 200-hour pre-MSW placement in a family reunification program, giving me direct exposure to the intake process the MSW curriculum will formalize.

Note 2: Naming exactly what the applicant could not yet do in her role makes the case stronger than "wanting to help people."

I am applying specifically for this program's concentration in child and family practice and its field placement hours in county-partnered settings — the exact population I already know.

Note 3: Naming the specific concentration, not just the degree, signals the applicant read the program handbook.

Five years from now, I want to be training new case aides in the approach that kept that family's services intact — with a license and standing to change how a unit handles a crisis.

Note 4: The closing ties back to the opening scene rather than introducing an unrelated new ambition.

What all three do in their first 60 words: each opens on one dated, specific scene and names the degree program by the end of the first paragraph. None lists every resume achievement, uses a self-description adjective, or closes with a line that could paste into a different program's application unchanged.

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