**10 Commandments for Writing Personal Statements**

1. *Thou shalt have no false goals before thee*. Applicants who set hubristic goals such as curing cancer or winning a Pulitzer Prize only sound naive, and selection committees grow weary of such lofty claims. Articulate and set realistic, reachable goals.
2. *Thou shalt not make graven images of thy school, thy program, or thyself*. Some students praise their schools or themselves out of proportion to reality. Create context as needed, but never idolize inappropriately.
3. *Thou shalt not take the advice of others in vain*. Any advice about your personal statement that is offered by a recommender, a mentor, a scholarships director, a parent, a Writing Center tutor, or a peer should be considered carefully and respectfully.
4. *Remember thy deadlines, and meet them verily*. When you stretch deadlines, you don’t just inconvenience yourself, but everyone involved in the selection process. You also risk being passed by no matter what you deliver if it’s late.
5. *Honor thy reader with thy true self*. If you are not genuine in your tone, examples, and motivations, your readers will question your ethos. Write about the best in you, but not about the person you only *wish* to be. Embrace the most basic advice about personal statements: *Be yourself.*
6. *Thou shalt not kill the chances of others in the face of thy own uncertainty*. Those who attend graduate school, in particular when they accept a scholarship or fellowship, are literally taking away someone else’s seat. In deciding on a graduate program and writing your personal statement, reflect carefully on the decision and your own readiness. Someone else deserving is waiting right beside you.
7. *Thou shalt not adulterate thy personal statement*. You dilute the power of your personal statement by including extraneous, improper, or inferior ingredients. Attend to the question prompt and word count carefully, answering completely with relevant detail.
8. *Thou shalt not steal the words of others*. Especially with ready models available in handbooks and online, it can be tempting to plagiarize something you like from someone else’s personal essay. This is both dishonest and highly risky, and it undermines the value you should place on your own words, your own voice, and your own personal story.
9. *Thou shalt not bear false witness about thy deeds*. Do not lie or exaggerate on your personal statement, especially about your own accomplishments. Affirm what is true.
10. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s scholarship*. Keeping in mind that nearly half of all enrolled graduate students do not finish their degree, carefully re-read Commandments I-IX.

Written by Joe Schall, past Giles Writer-in-Residence for the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences at Penn State.

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