

## Guidance for Writing a Personal Statement

A personal statement can be a way for test takers with disabilities to express in their own words the limitations they experience and how those limitations impact their test-taking performance. This information can serve as an important supplement to the documentation submitted by the evaluator. A detailed personal statement may fill in any gaps in a test taker's documentation and/or application and offer some excellent insight into the current need for accommodations. We acknowledge that expressing how the disability impacts you may be challenging; however, it can frequently be a compelling piece of evidence. To provide more direction for submitting personal statements, below are some tips for composing supporting personal statements that may add further weight to your request for accommodations:

- It is important that the personal statement be written by you, as the test taker. Statements from parents, advocates, teachers, etc. can be helpful in other ways; however, a personal statement is unique as it is your platform for expressing in your own words what your limitations are and why you believe accommodations are needed for test-taking. Furthermore, unlike disability services staff at high schools or college campuses, ETS staff cannot meet with test takers in person, so a personal statement is a means for you to participate in an interactive process.
- The personal statement should address the limitations that result from the disability and how they affect you in your daily life, specifically within academic and test-taking settings. It is helpful to include a summary of background information (i.e. discuss the onset of the disability; how it affected you in school early on, if applicable; your use of coping strategies; and the accommodations that you have used previously in school and/or work).
- If accommodations have been used on another high-stakes test (e.g. ACT, SAT, LSAT, GMAT, MCAT), please describe how they helped “level the playing field.” Verification of the approved accommodations should be submitted as well (e.g., a copy of an accommodations approval letter from the testing agency). If accommodations have never been used previously, please include in the personal statement an explanation of why accommodations are *now* needed.
- Using an unfamiliar accommodation on a high-stakes test can be challenging, so a request for a previously-unused accommodation may require in-depth explanation. For example, if someone is requesting a scribe but has never used one before, a detailed rationale would be helpful. In the example of the scribe request, it may be beneficial for ETS to know that the test taker understands the purpose of the accommodation and how it works (e.g. the scribe is another person in the room with the test taker, which may be unsettling for a test taker who is not used to that situation).
- If you have used practice tests, it may be helpful to describe how you felt your disability impacted you during the practice test and how the requested accommodations would ensure equal access.
- Of course, any other additional information in support of the requested accommodations is welcomed.

It is also important for test takers to be aware of some topics that may not be quite as helpful to include:

- There's no need to restate in detail what your evaluator wrote in the documentation, though referring to some of the information in the documentation and expanding on it in your own words may be helpful.
- It is not helpful to use the personal statement as a way to express your position on issues other than how your disability affects you and impacts your academic and test-taking performance. The personal statement is your way of voicing your current need for the requested accommodations, so make sure every word counts!
- As a reminder, personal statements do not replace documentation. Instead, personal statements supply additional information that may further support the current need for the requested accommodations.