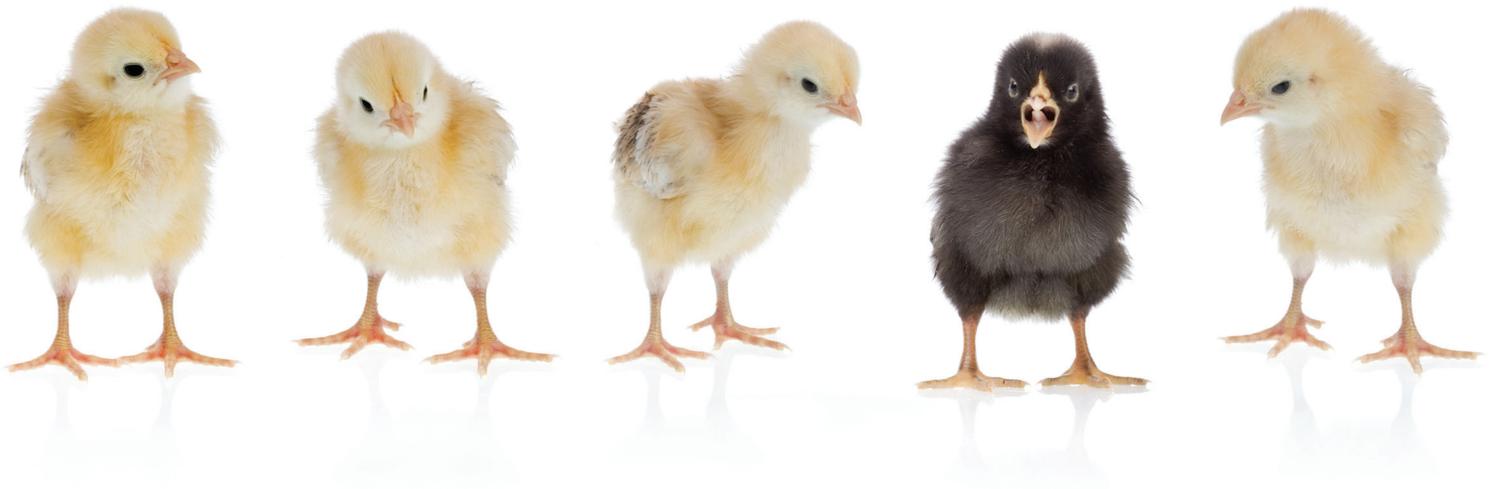


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Personal Statement Examples



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RESEARCH**

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Personal Statement Example #1

This personal statement was written by an Auburn student applying for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. Names have been removed for privacy.

Young, fragile Sweya stared with an intensity that struck my core. I held her on my lap as I taught her how to administer eye drops to protect her good eye. Her left eye was blinded by trauma that occurred before eye doctors were available at her refugee camp in Ghana. After a full examination by the Unite for Sight doctors, it was concluded that Sweya's injury was permanent. I did not want to let Sweya go. While she had accepted the conclusion, for a moment I still struggled with a feeling of anguish. Modern medicine had failed Sweya. The reality of the moment returned and I let her go. She quickly disappeared into the milieu of the camp, but she will never disappear from my memory.

Failure is no stranger to the practice of medicine. If an architect builds a bridge and that bridge collapses, it is relatively easy to determine the cause. It was designed by humans. If a patient is in poor health, however, the cause is not as easy to discern. The reason lies in Aristotle's description of the practice of medicine as a "stochastic" art. A stochastic art is compatible with failure because, unlike architecture, the part or structure in question was not built by the party charged with finding a cause or remedy. Doctors have the task of fixing things that are not of their own making and are unknown concretely. Research is the most effective tool to break these barriers; we recognize our shortcomings and in the spirit of human ingenuity, inquire into and innovate.

As a prospective physician, I propose to pursue my MSC by Research in Ophthalmology at Oxford University. I wish to attend Oxford because it presents an opportunity to participate in cutting-edge learning; arguably, it would expose me to the best collection of scholars in the world, and a student-body and cross-cultural environment unmatched by any institution.

Although I am accustomed to the excitement of competing gymnastics in front of thousands of fans, I am stoic and contemplative. My mind loves to quietly wander, study, and find solutions. I have indulged my desire to learn and question my surrounding by involvement in research. I have conducted research directed by Professor Michael Squillacote on the photochemistry of the visual system. Research in ophthalmology at Oxford will help me expand upon my knowledge of vision at the photochemical level to a more holistic view.

The diverse student body and Oxford University also provides an opportunity for cultural immersion. Last summer, I studied Spanish abroad in Spain and volunteered for the nonprofit organization Unite for Sight in Accra, Ghana. My incredible experiences traveling to these countries have taught me how to adapt quickly and have inspired me to step out into the world. Oxford presents the opportunity to be active in research and high level learning while experiencing a new culture. This opportunity is unique, much like my life as a collegiate gymnast.

At a very young age, I fell in love with flipping and decided I wanted to be a great gymnast. At age 12, I trained 32 hours per week. At 14, I was partially home-schooled and I qualified Elite—the highest level of gymnastics. Soon thereafter, I smashed my face into the vaulting apparatus, broke my nose, and required 14 stitches to close the gash on my forehead. I developed fears and struggled to regain the passion I had as a youth. I fell and failed repeatedly, but I did not give up. I recovered my passion and qualified for the Junior Olympic National Team. I then accepted a full-athletic scholarship to Auburn University. At Auburn, my dedication to athletics strengthened my commitment to

academics and all aspects of my life. My freshman year, I crashed twice on the balance beam in front of 10,000 fans at the University of Georgia, a team Auburn had never beaten. As it turned out, I had mononucleosis and strep throat. This disappointment and failure was one of the most defining times of my life. I realized that when I face adversity, I am strengthened, empowered, and revealed in my struggle.

Everyone hits highs and lows, but not everyone gets up quickly: some not at all. I do not consider myself a quitter. During my senior year, my team performed the unexpected: for the first time, we defeated the famed University of Georgia Gymnastics Team, the five-time reigning National Champions. Athletics have rewarded me with an understanding of hard work and taught me that almost anything can be accomplished when I commit wholeheartedly.

In Ghana, I helped provide eye care to some of the world's poorest people. I witnessed the impact and felt the frustrations of blindness. These men, women and children were the most genuine, sincere, and persevering individuals I have met. I am inspired by them and uplifted by their inner strength. I am committing my life to the practice of medicine for people in dark moments like these. I especially wish to pursue ophthalmology because I have seen the expression of individuals with restored vision--the flicker of the eye and smile. Restored vision is a miracle born of research.

Sweya is still in Ghana, blind in one eye. I think of her often. We are not the architects of Sweya's eye, but perhaps someday research will provide a remedy for the injury suffered by Sweya. One defining, core characteristic of researchers is that they never stop trying. I have, and have consistently, committed myself to that ideal. If awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, I would use the education and experience that I gained during my study to directly impact the lives of others, like Sweya positively. The opportunity for me to pursue a MSc by Research in Ophthalmology would be an immeasurable blessing and gift from Cecil Rhodes and The Rhodes Trust, I would only hope to repay this debt through my own service to those less fortunate.

Personal Statement Example #2

This personal statement was written by an Auburn student applying for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. Names have been removed for privacy.

When I was in the sixth grade I aspired to marry rich and live off the earnings of my substantially older husband. I wanted life on a silver platter; a beach house in Malibu, a penthouse in New York, butlers that opened my doors and maids that fluffed my pillows. I wanted to be able to travel the world, to Milan, to Tokyo, to Dubai, all at the drop of a dime. I wanted to take all and give nothing.

Looking back on it now I do not know where this marvelous idea came from, and I also don't know where to it disappeared. Oddly, I can only hypothesize that my childhood aspiration of luxury started to fade when I began to throw myself into the process of what was real to me at the time—my sport, swimming. Swimming provided me the venue in which I was first able to establish substantive goals and learn how to achieve them. Even though my swimming career has brought countless gold medals, it is not my victories that I cherish most after fourteen years in the sport; it is the growth that each and every one of the five thousand one hundred ten days in the water has afforded me.

Much of my personal growth came in my junior year of high school. Having moved at an accelerated rate through the ranks of swimming since age eight, I never truly encountered failure in my pursuit of winning. It was in the fall of that year that my trend of progress ceased; I simply was not moving forward in the direction of my goals. I watched while my ends slipped away into a distant fog as younger and faster girls swam past me. I hit a wall and the only thing I could think to do was to claw desperately at the vestiges of my former self—the part of myself defined by swimming and winning. I worked harder and got worse. I was failing. As I fought without any success to regain my footing in the identity that was quickly crumbling beneath me, I came to the harsh realization that it was time to let that swimmer, whom I had clung to so dearly, fall away.

It took nearly two years to redefine my sense of self. Though I have never truly gotten back on the track of progress that I rode prior to my junior year, I can say that I value incredibly the experience of failure I experienced at such a young age. In that failure I learned that my worth lies beyond my ability to swim fast. Besides being a swimmer I am a daughter and a sister, I am a friend and a teammate, and I am student. And not only am I these other things, but I am good at being these things. Learning that my identity is broader than the width of the pool has allowed me to pursue swimming with greater passion now than ever before. Seeing more value in the means than in the ends, I have been able to enjoy and learn from each day and every challenge. Three years ago, I recommitted myself, my true self, to swimming and have since proudly represented Auburn University in the pool.

However, now, as I approach the end of my swimming career, I stand at a crossroads where I must decide what cause to commit myself to next. Having pledged myself to a relatively selfish act for so long, I am at last ready to devote myself to a greater good—to maximize the capabilities of my growth obtained through swimming, think beyond just helping myself, and tap into the potential of the other layers of my identity.

It has been only just recently that I happened upon a new passion worthy enough of my future commitment. This passion seized my interest last spring when I was taking a course in political ecology—an elective in my major of anthropology. The course opened my eyes to the tenuous

relationship that we humans have with the single entity that supports our existence—the environment—and made me better understand the profound importance of the growing movement towards sustainability. Still maintaining my interest in anthropology and believing in its significance as a subject, I hope in my coming honors thesis, and later in my graduate studies, to meld my new interest in sustainability with my background in anthropology.

I believe anthropology to be central to the study of sustainability; it is human action that has exploited our environment and it is human action that will allow us to restore harmony with it. If given the opportunity to study at Oxford, I intend to pursue two separate masters degrees over the course of two years: one in Social Anthropology and one in Environmental Change and Management. Though Oxford does not offer graduate study specific to sustainability, I believe that these two programs taken separately would combine to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the subject that has consumed my interest. I hope that in completing my studies at Oxford I would have the necessary knowledge and skills to pursue the question of how we as humans can begin to embed the paradigm of sustainability into our world's remarkable cultures while also preserving their integrity.

Swimming taught me the importance of the process. As I direct my focus to new goals, I wish to apply this lesson and place myself in the best learning environment. I firmly believe that Oxford will provide a social and educational atmosphere that will foster the growth of my young ambitions and will, with every class and encounter, encourage their achievement. No longer do I wish to take from others, take from the Earth, and live for myself as I did as a sixth grader; I want to capitalize on all that I have to offer. An Oxford education can help me realize my new dreams.

Personal Statement Example #3

This personal statement was written by an Auburn student applying for the prestigious Mitchell Scholarship. Names have been removed for privacy.

I was raised in Roanoke, a small town in the southeast piedmont of Alabama. Several generations of my family have called the east Alabama and west Georgia region home, first in the bondage of slavery and now as proud and active members of the community. Singing “Old Negro Spirituals” in the family church every Sunday gave me an appreciation for the tenacity of the human spirit, while interacting with members of the community at civic events and Friday night football games taught me the importance of human connection. Growing up in such a close-knit community, I developed a strong sense of place. Yet, despite my love for my hometown, I knew I would have to leave because there were no opportunities for me in a town struggling to redefine itself in a post-industrial economy.

Roanoke, like so many towns in rural America, is facing economic hardship. Businesses have been forced to close their doors and countless textile jobs have been eliminated and relocated overseas. Social ills like teenage pregnancy, drug use, and adult illiteracy are endemic. Rural America is facing challenges like never before. Unlike in the past when farm and mill jobs would return after economic slowdown, the present day rural economy, attendant with mechanized and industrial food production and outsourcing of low skill jobs, is not likely to rebound. This, in turn, leads to a rural brain drain and loss of human capital leaving the poorest and most vulnerable behind.

Entering college, I knew I wanted to prepare myself to influence positively the lives of others living in rural towns like Roanoke, so I decided on a career in public interest law, majoring in History and minoring in both Political Science and Community and Civic Engagement. In retrospect, I realize that I neither fully understood the magnitude of the rural crisis nor believed that there was a way I could personally work towards fixing the problem. Quite frankly, I did not know my college experiences had the capability to help me find the link between my past and future while still allowing me the opportunity to impact the world in a meaningful way.

Through my involvement with the College of Liberal Arts’ Community and Civic Engagement Initiative, I started working in the black belt town of Notasulga, Alabama. The beautiful, lush landscape of the town stands in stark contrast to the dire social and economic conditions its citizens face. In Notasulga, I was able to connect my experiences in the classroom with the experiences I was having beyond the campus gates. I became involved with a program called the Macon County Youth Initiative and have worked to assist teenagers in developing college readiness and general life skills.

The schools in Macon County, where Notasulga is located, do not adequately prepare students to compete with their peers across the state, and the students are well aware of these deficiencies. They feel forgotten, and truthfully, they are. Through the program, we enable the students to seek success in their lives while connecting them to resources that can help them achieve their dreams. One of my students, Alexis, expressed interest in a career in journalism, but with no school newspaper or journalism class, she had no way of exploring the possibility. Fortunately, one of my professors coordinates a high school journalism workshop every summer, and I was able to get Alexis enrolled with a scholarship. Now, as a senior, she is more excited than ever to be a journalist. It is not the fact that I used my resources to help her that meant the most to Alexis; instead, it was the fact that I invested in her future. Empowering others to believe that change is possible, I learned, is a huge part of creating that change, first on the personal level and then on the community level.

I carried those ideals with me as a Living Democracy Fellow in Hobson City, Alabama (Alabama's first incorporated all-Black town) while working on issues of community needs and historic preservation. Living and working there, I experienced the difficulties related to enacting real, lasting change in a downtrodden community. Walking door to door in the hot Alabama sun conducting needs assessments gave me the opportunity to get to know the citizens better, and I was able to understand the attitude of hopelessness that permeated the town. The town has been in a state of economic decline since the 1980s, and a large amount of the population lives in poverty. The citizens of the town do not understand why conditions cannot improve. Just like the students in Macon County, the people of Hobson City are left behind.

From working in Macon County and Hobson City, I feel a connection to the figures I have studied in my Civil Rights Movement class. Instead of working at a freedom school, educating community members about citizenship, I teach college and life skills to teenagers. Rather than travelling the dusty roads of the Mississippi Delta in search of individuals willing to register to vote, I walked the streets of Hobson City interviewing citizens about their community. Instead of the 1960s, it is 2012, but like those organizers of another era, I too am fighting to give a marginalized group the right to better social and economic opportunities.

My experiences in Roanoke, Notasulga, and Hobson City have convinced me that there is much work to be done in rural America. The one sixth of American citizens who live there have been forgotten and left to fend for themselves. Most rural policy is still tied to agriculture and ignores other pressing issues. I believe that rural America deserves better, and I plan to use my graduate and legal education to advocate for and develop better rural policies.

Personal Statement Example #4

This personal statement was written by an Auburn student applying for the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship. Names have been removed for privacy.

When I was nine years old, my family took a trip to Yellowstone National Park. As we entered Yellowstone, we glimpsed a Bald Eagle on its morning hunt and a young Black Bear drinking in a small creek. When we got to the geyser basins, I was awed by what I saw. The different colors of the paint pots and springs baffled me. I wanted to know why they looked that way, how they produced brilliant colors of copper reds, brunt oranges, emerald greens, and deep blues. I devoured every book on Yellowstone's thermal features in every gift shop we stopped at. I even convinced my parents to ask permission to use a sample of a hot spring for my 5th grade science project. Although I never ended up using that sample from Yellowstone, I kept it as a reminder of the trip where my love for science and the unknown began to blossom. I began to pursue opportunities that connected me to science throughout middle and high school and, eventually, at a university.

I entered Auburn as a microbiology major, but was not sure what path I wanted to take. I accepted an invitation to join the lab of Dr. Mark Liles as a freshman. Dr. Liles works on discovering novel, natural antibiotics from soil bacteria. I joined the lab not only to study antibiotics and their mechanisms, but also to learn more about microbiology and to apply the knowledge I gained in class to the laboratory. I discovered a love of seeing the experiment to the end and discovering that the data helps to confirm, or even contradict, a hypothesis. Sometimes, it is the experiments that reach an unexpected conclusion that help us out the most, and I have certainly found this to be true in my research. I always end up with additional questions which drive me to continue the pursuit of the final answer. This experience has strengthened my determination to continue research, specifically to conduct medical research.

I have always driven myself to aid people. I have been involved as a leader and member in various organizations throughout my life. I have used my research and leadership opportunities to prepare me for a career in medicine as a physician-scientist, a career in which I can solve problems and help people. A career including medical research would enable me to study infectious diseases and their mechanisms of infection to better help patients. Medicine needs to constantly keep up-to-date with cutting edge biological research, so we can remain ahead of new diseases. As a physician-scientist, I would be in a unique position to bring medicine from a laboratory bench to the patient's bedside.

My Oma, German for Grandma, lived with us during my childhood. As a female student in post-World War II Germany, she only received an eighth grade education. She made it her goal to get her GED in America. She always emphasized the need for a quality education to better yourself and the world around you. I took her lessons to heart. I will also complete a German degree during my time at Auburn as a testament to my family's heritage and my love of the German language and culture. As a Fulbright student, I will be in a unique position to combine microbiology and German. I will be able to improve my German and take part in advanced research in microbiology. As part of my course work, I studied in Vienna for five weeks during the summer of 2010. I lived with a host family for those five weeks and really tried to immerse myself in Austrian culture. This experience not only greatly improved my German language skills but also gave me the confidence to use German and study internationally.

I look forward to serving as a bridge between America and Germany, between our cultures. When I return from Germany, I plan on enrolling in an MD/PhD program to continue towards my goal of becoming a physician-scientist.

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