



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAMS
Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program
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www.aap.umd.edu/mcnairprogram.html

Suggested Structure for Writing Personal Statement

Why [University X] Appeals to Me (about 2 solid paragraphs)

Attending University of X appeals to me for several reasons. First..., Second..., Third..., Finally... As you craft this section, reflect and discuss at least the following:

- Strength of programs
- Faculty reputation and research
- Diversity of faculty, students
- Overall reputation of institution
- Location strengths
- Research facilities
- Other??

Summary of Undergraduate Academic, Leadership, and Service Experiences (about 1 solid page)

In this section, you want to address at least the following:

- Courses: best, worst, lessons learned, impact of professors, how prepared you for graduate study
- Leadership experiences
- Community service experiences
- Unique life experiences? Difficulties? Challenges? How survived? Lessons learned?
- Explanations for unacceptable grades in classes

Summary of Research and McNair Program Experiences (about 1 solid paragraph)

In this section, explain in compelling terms your McNair experiences by focusing on at least the following:

- Why did you apply to the program, what did you do, lessons learned, what were your research topics, you published in journal, your relationship with your mentor
- How were you prepared for graduate school and research
- Conference presentations
- Other research anywhere else because of your McNair relationships

Summary of Research Interests and Goals (about 1 solid paragraph)

- What are you interested in researching? Why? How did you formulate these interests?
- What questions are you interested in answering? What are the potential implications once you get the answers?
- How will University X program facilitate your research interests/help you achieve research agenda?

Summary of Professional Interests and Goals (about 1 solid paragraph)

- What's next after grad school?
- Doctorate?
- Faculty member? What type of institution?
- Teacher? What type of environment?
- Researcher? For whom?
- Peace Corps? Service Corps?
- Not for profit work
- Government (e.g., NASA, USDA, Homeland Security, CDC, NIH)

Closing (about 2-3 sentences underneath the last paragraph)

Say something like: "Given my research experiences, graduate school preparation, and lessons learned from participation in the McNair Scholars Program and given the mentoring I received from Dr. XXX, I believe I am qualified and prepared to pursue graduate level work at any institution. Thank you for considering my application, and I hope to be joining you in the fall semester."

General Writing Tips

Because you will likely use the same template for each school, you need to really make sure you are sending the proper statement for the correct school. A mistake could cost you acceptance.

Include your name and contact information at the top of the document

Follow the instructions for personal statement completely or use the model above if a model is not provided

Write in crisp, clear, compelling language -- use the writing tips on the McNair web page under "Forms and Documents" (www.aap.umd.edu/mcnairprogram)

Double space your statement unless stated otherwise in the instructions

Use headings based on the instructions to organize your thoughts and focus the reader

Get faculty mentor to read and "bless" the final product

Think like a faculty member – what would you want to see in a statement?

Indent paragraphs – do not "justify" the text, meaning that the right margins are all blocked straight down. Use "align text left" setting

Avoid unnecessary words

Diversify your vocabulary and do not overuse words such as "I," "as well as," "there are," etc.

Do not overemphasize weakness. If you must explain shortcomings, do so briefly, offer a rationale, and discuss how you corrected and learned from the problems.

Use your own words; do misuse or overuse other people's words—e.g., quotes

Use grammar check and spell check but do not rely on this to catch all errors – some will be missed

Use writing center multiple times

Avoid lengthy personal stories which may be interpreted as not have a strong statement

Do not use long paragraphs

Do not use one-sentence paragraphs

Remember, you are not the only talented student applying, so think about how can you leverage your experiences, skills, and relationships to increase chances of getting in

Ask for help – but give people enough time to help you (at least three weeks)