What are they?

- Accompany applications to graduate school and professional schools
- Answer questions posed by the school in the application
  - Questions can be specific or vague
  - Responses vary in length, 1-3 pages usually

The Audience

- Important to keep in mind who will be reading the essay
  - Typically read by admissions committee serving particular department
    - Most likely composed of professors in the field
  - Writing the PS offers the opportunity to show these individuals you belong in their program

Steps

- **Reflect on your personal qualities and goals**
  - Focus on your intention
  - Think about what makes you unique and different from other applications
    - Why did you choose this field
    - What do you hope to accomplish through the program
    - Has anyone influenced you to go into this career – professors, writers, family, personal experience

- **Research the department to which you are applying**
  - Find out about the department you are applying to
  - Research the professors in the program and find out their research interests
    - What are their dissertation topics
    - What private research have they published
    - What are their general interests
  - Admissions committee will be looking for someone whose interests coincide with those involved in the program

- **Analyze the question**
  - Be certain you know what is being asked by the program
  - Is it ESSENTIAL to answer all questions asked on the application

- **Write the statement**
  - Provides an opportunity to show competence and personality to the admissions committee
  - Chance to demonstrate your writing skills
Try to avoid sounding too personal or too informal – jokes, gimmicks, and rhetorical questions are not appropriate

Story style is the new “trend”
  - Begin your PS with a short story (1 paragraph max) of how/when you realized what you want to be

Steps:
  - Write a powerful, captivating introduction
  - Give concrete examples (e.g. a specific situation that you used a skill)
  - Write strong, concise conclusion – this is just as important as the introduction

- Revise, edit, edit, edit!
  - Make sure you have
    - Answered the question(s)
    - Adhered to the word-length requirements
    - Expanded upon any generalizations, giving examples where appropriate
    - Eliminated any grammar and spelling errors
    - Made an appointment with Career Services for editing assistance

Other resources:
- OWL Online Writing Lab:
  - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/
- Berkeley Writing Center
  - http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/
- Essay Edge Writing Resources
  - http://www.essayedge.com/

The Do's
1. Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate.
2. Before you begin writing, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it.
3. Use concrete examples from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants.
4. Write about what interests you, excites you. That's what the admissions staff wants to read.
5. Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead -- an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.
6. End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.
7. Revise your essay at least three times.
8. In addition to your editing, ask someone else to critique your statement of purpose for you.
9. Proofread your personal statement by reading it out loud or reading it into a tape recorder and playing back the tape.
10. Write clearly, succinctly.

The Don'ts
1. Don't include information that doesn't support your thesis.
2. Don't start your essay with "I was born in....," or "My parents came from..."
3. Don't write an autobiography, itinerary, or résumé in prose.
4. Don't try to be a clown (but gentle humor is OK).
5. Don't be afraid to start over if the essay just isn't working or doesn't answer the essay question.
6. Don't try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
7. Don't rely exclusively on your computer to check your spelling.
8. Don't provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes.
9. Don't give mealy-mouthed, weak excuses for your GPA or test scores.
10. Don't make things up.