

Personal Statements, Part 1: Brainstorming Ideas

SUBMITTED BY: Kathryn McGinn

SUBJECT(S): Career Development

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

This is the first lesson in a series about writing personal statements. During this lesson, students will think about their plans for the future and begin crafting personal statements that outline their goals and qualifications. They will read and discuss articles that offer career-planning advice, and work with peers to begin thinking about their future plans.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Career Development, IV. Career Strategy

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Would You Bypass College for Real-world Learning?”](#)
- [“Student Essay: The Power of Stories to Inspire Strong Leaders”](#)
- [“Providing Guidance to Others Could Boost Your Own Success”](#)
- [“One House, Three Seniors and Lots of College Essays”](#)
- [“How to Reflect on What Matters to You as You Begin the College Search”](#)
- [“Career Insight: CFO Lloyd Howell Jr. on Being Prepared for Anything”](#)
- [“Career Insight: Adam Grant on What It Takes to Be Original and Get Your Ideas Heard”](#)
- [“Apple Peach Greenleaf Smoothies Can Help You Unlock Your True Potential”](#)

Common Core Standard(s):

- ELA CCR Writing 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- ELA CCR Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- ELA CCR Reading 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or compare the approaches authors take.
- ELA CCR Reading 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
- ELA CCR Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Objectives/Purposes:

- Students will read/analyze the articles to obtain relevant information about job seeking.
- Students will discuss their future goals and how they plan to achieve them.

Other Resources/Materials:

- Article graphic organizer ([Handout A](#))
- Peer Interview questions ([Handout B](#))
- Newsprint/markers

Activities:

1. Have students count off by threes. Each number reads a different article:

Group 1: "The Employment Reality"

Group 2: "Family Influence"

Group 3: "From Business Clubs and Lab Research to Choir and Africa"

Have students work in their groups to take notes in the relevant sections of the graphic organizer (Handout A). (5 mins)

2. Have each group share their findings. Then ask the students what challenges or advice stand out? Why?

Be sure to address the following key points:

Article	Challenges of Job Seeking	Advice for Job Seekers
“The Employment Reality”	High unemployment rate. One out of four teens cannot find jobs.	Think practically; study subjects that will help you get a job. Realize you can make a difference in whatever career you choose.
“Family Influence”	Pressure to succeed.	Follow your passion; don’t choose a career just because it is what your parents do. Develop your own sense of independence.
“From Business Clubs”	Learning different business norms and cultural norms. People may criticize your ideas/chosen path.	Expose yourself to as many different environments and experiences as possible (to see what you like). Be open to many possibilities.

(10 mins)

3. Ask students why it might be important to set goals and have a plan for the future. Explain that this unit will help them to discuss and write about their goals and plans. Have students break into pairs, and give each pair an interview guide. Each person will interview his/her partner about his/her career goals. If a student doesn’t have a definite goal in mind, he/she should think about one possibility. Tell students it is okay if they don’t know all the answers to the questions. (10 mins)

4. When the students have finished, ask what they thought about the questions. Were they able to answer most of them? Were some questions harder than others? Explain that these are all important questions to think about when considering a career. Ask one or

two students (depending on time) to talk about the profession in which they are interested. Visit the website <http://www.wetfeet.com> and look at the professions presented there. Are the students surprised by the information they find? Why/why not? Encourage students to explore this website on their own. (10 mins)

5. Give students the remainder of class time to create a “roadmap” of their plans and goals. Explain that this is a brainstorming activity, and encourage students to think broadly about their future. Using newsprint and markers, each student should create a “roadmap” that includes:

1. Major landmarks (goals) that they want to reach.
2. The path(s) they will take to get there.
3. Any obstacles they anticipate along the way.

Emphasize that this is simply a first step towards getting their ideas down on paper. Students should feel free to add questions or leave blank spaces if they are not sure what to expect. They should talk to people in their fields or look online (after class) to address any gaps in their plans. (10 mins)

Tying It All Together:

When students finish their roadmaps, post them around the room. Give students time to walk around the room and look at their peers’ plans. Come back together as a class and discuss what stood out about the maps. Were there a lot of similarities? What significant differences did people notice? Was there anything that was really surprising? (5 mins)

Practice Outside of the Classroom:

- Ask the adults in your life if they had a career plan and if they followed it. Talk to them about how their plans have changed, what obstacles they have encountered, and how they have overcome them.
- Continue thinking about your future goals and what you will do to achieve them.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:

This lesson ran a bit long, as reading the three articles and reporting on it took more than the allotted 15 minutes. If you are worried about time, have students focus on the advice to job seekers and just share that information with their peers.

Students enjoyed exploring wetfeet.com. If you have access to a computer lab or space with multiple computers, it would be great to allow students to explore this site on their own. While students knew a fair amount about their chosen careers, some students were surprised by things like the qualifications needed and the salary range.

Lastly, it is important to emphasize that the roadmap is not meant to be a final career plan; rather, it is a brainstorming activity designed to help students to *start* thinking about their futures. Drawing roadmaps gives students the opportunity to express their ideas visually in a lesson that is otherwise writing-intensive.

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