

Personal Statement Example

Throughout my time in high school, I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. When I graduated, I earned the Gold Medal for the graduate who best combines academic achievement with overall contribution to school life. I twice represented my class on student council, co-edited my high school newspaper, peer tutored, and played on numerous sports teams. I continue many of these activities today. However, my favorite extra-curricular activity was always debating.

My school was lucky enough to have a teacher who cared deeply about debating. Her name was Linda Martin, and she had a profound impact on my life. I still remember the first time I debated in front of her. It was in the 5th grade, and she had come to our classroom to introduce us to debating. She asked for eight volunteers to take part in a debate. The topic: This House Prefers Baths to Showers. I was on team bath and, as a shy student, I remember being incredibly nervous as we huddled in the hallway and brainstormed reasons why baths are better than showers. The actual speaking part is a bit of a blur in my memory. I was probably in front of the class for less than 30 seconds, but in my mind, it was much longer and quite painful. I didn't debate again until I was in high school, when I was reunited with Mrs. Martin in an elective debating class. The topic was about funding our local zoo, and this time I was given several weeks to prepare my arguments, something I much preferred. Instead of being nervous, I was excited to show off my skills in front of my classmates.

As my high school years went on, I continued to debate. I went from being shy and nervous in front of an audience, to confidently delivering arguments on a wide variety of topics. In addition to learning how to talk, I learned how to listen. I keenly followed the arguments of my opponents, searching for flawed logic or questionable assumptions. And these skills paid off. In the ninth grade I started winning various Manitoba debating tournaments at the Junior level. I went to Toronto twice, placing third in the Hart House North American Debating Championships, and first in the Canadian Junior National Debate Championships.

Through grades 10, 11, and 12, I continued to improve and gain confidence. All three years I qualified for, and ranked highly in, the Canwest National Speaking Tournament. In 11th grade I represented Canada at the World Individuals Public Speaking Championship in Backnang and Winnenden, Germany. There I made the finals in three out of the four events and placed thirteenth overall. In 12th grade I placed 10th overall at the International Independent Schools Public Speaking competition, and again represented Canada at the World Individuals, this time in Reading, England.

On a personal level, these competitions helped me make friends all over the world, improved my confidence, and instilled in me a love of international travel. On an intellectual level, they exposed me to a wide variety of topics I would otherwise have never considered. I learned to think critically and examine an issue from multiple perspectives. I loved working past the rhetoric in my opponent's speeches and pointing out flaws in their arguments. Sometimes I was given many months to prepare a topic, and sometimes I was only given two minutes. Whichever the case, I always had to be creative in developing and articulating my arguments.

Since high school, I have focused on other pursuits. However, I still volunteer regularly as a debate coach or judge. This year I am assisting several first-year university students in reviving my university's competitive debating society. I owe a tremendous amount to Linda Martin for making my debating experiences possible.

The lessons I learned from her will stay with me forever. When I reflect on myself as a nervous and confused fifth-grader, I am amazed at how much debating has changed me. I know that there is much more to being a lawyer than just arguing, but I believe that many of the skills I attained through debating will contribute to my success in law school and a legal career.