Advice on What to Put into a Personal Statement for Graduate School

Information given to an ACE Scholar in the Class of 2016, from a graduate program she applied to

1.      First, list 2-3 qualities unique to your program of interest. Identify interdisciplinary opportunities and areas of specialization. What are the available academic, research and training facilities that will assist you in pursuing your degree?

2.      Next, name the faculty that interest you and briefly identify their research projects.

3.      Then, in 3-4 sentences, describe your research interests. Follow this by explaining how your professional goals can be achieved by pursuing your research interests in your program of choice.

**Mention the unique qualities and faculty members you identified in steps 1 and 2; show how they coincide with your interests.**

Enhance your statement by considering the following:

* **Have you had experience outside the classroom?** If so, describe it in detail. Be sure to mention how it will help you in graduate school.
* Do you have any challenges that you would like to explain to the Admissions Committee (e.g., poor grades in a given semester, a low standardized test score, etc.)? **Don't dwell on anything negative, but sum up the situation in a sentence or two and explain what you learned from it**. Show how you have since improved or realized success.
* **Showcase your abilities**. As a graduate student, what will you be able to contribute to your graduate program? Give evidence of your strong work ethic, mention jobs held or organizations supported while earning a high GPA. Give concrete examples. Be illustrative.
* If providing a résumé or curriculum vitae (CV), don't hesitate to reference it, but do not restate all of its contents in your statement of purpose. For example you could say, As you'll note in my enclosed CV, I have received several academic honors, which include the Young Investigator award at Institution X. Receiving this award was a shining moment for me as it served as recognition for long nights in the lab researching tomato viral stains. After this sentence you should describe your research. **Remember that you're telling a story**, not simply listing a multitude of facts.