The Personal Statement-Things to Consider

I. Personal Assessment (ask yourself the following ten questions and answer them thoroughly in writing)
   A. Your chosen field of study
      1. What was the moment when you first knew the field you have chosen is what you wanted to do with the rest of your life?
      2. What successes (scholarships, honors, awards, publications, poster sessions) have you had in the field since you chose it?
      3. What activities or events have deepened your interest in the field (books, lectures, meetings with top people in the field)?
      4. Are there any problems in your academic record that you need to explain?
   B. You as a person
      1. What is unusual about you as compared with your peers?
      2. What parts of your history would make your story stand out from all the others submitted for graduate school or nationally competed scholarships?
      3. What might make you a stronger contender in your field (both in graduate school and in your career) than others?
   C. Your future career
      1. What are your career goals?
      2. If you have considerable work experience, what are the skills and understandings you have acquired because of it?
      3. What personal characteristics (persistence, compassion, for instance) do you have that would help make you particularly successful in your career? Do you have anecdotes to demonstrate them?

II. Writing the Statement
   A. The First Paragraph
      1. Choose the angle you are going to use to tell your story. The assessment should be a good guide to what is unusual and meaningful about you. Start with that. Ask friends for input.
      2. Begin the personal statement with an anecdote that illustrates your angle. It should not be long, but there should be an element of excitement, humor, or drama to it.
   B. Information to include in the rest of the statement
      1. Any research or work you have done in your field
      2. Special talents (artistic, musical, athletic)
      3. Interesting hobbies
      4. Hardships you have had to overcome to get where you are

III. Polishing
   A. Read and reread your personal statement with a very critical eye
   B. Show it to two to three people who know you well (in professional contexts) to get their input