

Helpful Suggestions

Writing a Statement of Purpose

Each applicant must submit a statement of purpose. The statement of purpose is your opportunity to help reviewers better understand your academic objectives and determine if you are a good match for the field to which you are applying.

Length and Format:

The statement should be one or two pages. Include your full name and the proposed field of study at the top of each page. Please use a standard font and font size for ease of reading.

Topic:

The statement of purpose should include your reasons for undertaking graduate work and an explanation of your academic interests, including their relation to your undergraduate study and professional goals. Some fields ask that you address particular questions in your statement of purpose. Please check with your field for field requirements.

Organization:

1. A "hook" that demonstrates your passion for the field
2. Segue to your background in the field
3. Description of your academic background in the field
 - a. Specific classes you have taken, given by name
 - b. Specific professors you have had, especially if well-known in that field
4. Extracurricular activities in the field
5. Publications or other professional accomplishments in the field (perhaps conference presentations or public readings)
6. Explanations about problems in background (if needed)
7. Explanation of why you have chosen the specific grad school
 - a. Mention one or two professors and what you know of and appreciate about their work
 - b. Specific features of the grad program which attract you

General Information

Get advice from several of your professors - philosophical advice as well as specific writing advice. Proofread and copyedit; ask friends to proofread and copyedit as well. Keep working on the statement of purpose, even after you have already sent it to school(s) with earlier deadline(s).

Sections

The statement of purpose should convince the faculty on the selection committee- that you have solid achievements behind you that show promise for your success in graduate study. Think of the statement of purpose as a composition with four different parts.

Part 1: Introduce yourself, your interests and motivations

Tell them what you're interested in, and perhaps, what sparked your desire for graduate study. This should be short and to the point; don't spend a great deal of time on autobiography.

Part 2: Summarize your undergraduate and previous graduate career

1. Research you conducted. Indicate with whom, the title of the project, what your responsibilities were, and the outcome. Write technically, or in the style of your discipline. Professors are the people who read these statements.
2. Important paper or thesis project you completed, as well as anything scholarly beyond your curricular requirements.
3. Work experience, especially if you had any kind of responsibility for testing, designing, researching or interning in an area similar to what you wish to study in graduate school.

Part 3: Discuss the relevance of your recent and current activities

If you graduated and worked prior to returning to grad school, indicate what you've been doing: company or non-profit, your work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned. You can also indicate here how this helped you focus your graduate studies.

Part 4: Elaborate on your academic interests

Here you indicate what you would like to study in graduate school in enough detail to convince the faculty that you understand the scope of research in their discipline and are engaged with current research themes.

- Indicate the area of your interests. Ideally, pose a question, define a problem, or indicate a theme that you would like to address, and questions that arise from contemporary research. This should be an ample paragraph!
- Look on the web for information about departments you're interested in, including professors and their research. Are there professors whose research interests parallel yours? If so, indicate this. Check the specific program; many may require you to name a professor or professors with whom you might work.
- End your statement in a positive manner, indicating your excitement and readiness for the challenges ahead of you.

Essential Tips

1. What the admissions committee will read between the lines: self-motivation, competence, potential as a graduate student.
2. Emphasize everything from a positive perspective and write in an active, not a passive voice.
3. Demonstrate everything by example; don't say directly that you're a persistent person, show it.
4. If there is something important that happened to you that affected your grades, such as poverty, illness, or excessive work, state it. Write it affirmatively, showing your perseverance despite obstacles. You can elaborate more in your personal statement.
5. Make sure everything is linked with continuity and focus.
6. Unless the specific program says otherwise, be concise; an ideal essay should say everything it needs to with brevity. Approximately 500 to 1000 well-selected words (1-2 single space pages in 12-point font) is better than more words with less clarity and poor organization.

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