

# How To Write a Statement of Purpose

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# Agenda

What is a Statement of Purpose

Statement of Purpose vs. Personal Statement vs. Diversity Statement

Know Yourself - Know Your Audience

Outline for Statement of Purpose

FAQs


# Statement of Purpose

- Demonstrate your qualifications
- Your opportunity to stand out among your peers
- Showcase your value as a scholar/researcher/student
- Highlight your fit with program goals, faculty research focus, career tract, etc.
- Establishes your contribution to the profession




# Statement of Purpose Vs. Personal Statement Vs. Diversity Statement


## Statement of Purpose



**SHOWS YOUR KNOWLEDGE:** The main section explains what you know and who you are. Show knowledge of your field (e.g., a specific research focus) or your profession. Show how you will impact the field, or what has impacted you in the pursuit of your field.




**FOCUSES ON SPECIFIC RESEARCH or PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS WITHIN A PARTICULAR FIELD:** Detail how your academic and professional experiences have developed those research or professional interests and prepared you to pursue them at a higher academic level. Include courses, experts whose work you admire or aligns with your interests, and factors such as internship opportunities or opportunities provided by the school's location




**YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS & THE PROGRAM:** Explain how your research interests can be pursued at this particular institution in this particular program.

# Statement of Purpose Vs. Personal Statement Vs. Diversity Statement


## Personal Statement



TELLS A STORY: For personal statements, engage the reader, use a writing style that is fresh and active. Don't be afraid to use dialogue and descriptive language. Back up statements with examples and details.



HAS AN ANGLE: Even if your life has been less than dramatic, you still have a story to tell. The best approach to the “angle” is to find a THEME that can unify all your paragraphs.



PAYS SPECIAL ATTENTION TO YOUR “LEAD”: In the first paragraph, you will either grab attention or you will lose it. Use the lead to set the tone and direction for the statement. Note: the lead can, but does not have to be an attention grabbing story. The goal of the lead is for the readers to know who you are and what your goal is by the end of the first paragraph.



# Statement of Purpose Vs. Personal Statement Vs. Diversity Statement Diversity Statement

SHOWCASES YOUR KNOWLEDGE: You understand the barriers facing women, marginalized populations, students with disabilities, and other members of groups underrepresented in higher education. Bring research from non-traditional educational background or understanding of experiences of individuals from groups underrepresented in higher education

DEMONSTRATES YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS: Highlight experiences that showcase leadership, persistence, resilience, service, advocacy, etc.

DESCRIBES YOUR PLAN FOR INCREASING DIVERSITY”: Share your knowledge of the importance of diversity in academia and describe how you intend to increase diversity and access for others to education or a career field/ profession

# Applicable to All

**ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE ASKED:** Lots of schools may ask for similar information, but not all are the same. Use different statements for different schools, depending on the requirements.

**BE VERY WARY OF SOME TOPICS:** Accomplishments that happened in high school are generally irrelevant. Do not be controversial. Your content choice speaks volumes about your general judgment.

**AVOID CLICHÉS:** Statements like, “I like science” or “I want to help people,” aren’t specific enough reasons to pursue a graduate or professional degree.



# Me-Search

## Before Research

Take time to answer some basic questions before writing your essay:

◆ What do you want to study in graduate school?

◆ Why this degree? Why this particular program?

◆ What do you know about the faculty and their research? Who do you want to work with? Why?

◆ What kind of preparation do you have in this field?

◆ How is your experience related to this degree?

◆ What do you plan to do after graduation with this degree?



# Tips for Writing Your Statement of Purpose

1

Create an outline:  
Make sure there is a solid beginning, middle, and end to your statement.

2

Keep to the Word Limit –  
Be mindful of the word/page limit. Use your word limit to determine rough limits for each section.

3

Common limit is approximately 2 pages  
ProTip: Forget about the word limit on your first draft!

4

Be strategic –  
Good writers know how to write.  
Great writers know how to edit.

5

Aim for Consistency –  
Be coherent in your presentation of ideas.

# Highlight Your Value

- What makes you different?
  - Showcase what you have to offer
  - Demonstrate you are qualified
- How do your interests match the faculty?
- List the faculty by name and make the connection to your research agenda



# General Guidelines for Writing

Make your statement personal but not too personal.  
No need to divulge your full life story.

Connect the dots with your CV/resume. Discuss (not list) relevant academic, volunteer, and employment experiences.

Customize your essay to the graduate program. Be specific about why you're applying to THIS particular program.





# Understand Your Audience

- Expectations for the statement of purpose vary by field, dept and faculty reviewer
  - What can be assumed as common knowledge in your field? Terms, concepts, frameworks, etc.
- STEM or Humanities/Social Science? Academic or Professional?
- Admissions committee is comprised of faculty
- Express your interest in a particular topic/period/question
- In addition to your research area, be open to other topics
- Show a willingness to be taught and to learn from the faculty
- Demonstrate familiarity with the field
  - Methodologies (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, narrative, exploratory, empirical, primary, secondary)
  - Concepts, frameworks, theoretical lenses
  - Speak their language



# Content: Introduction

- Introduce who you are and where you are going
  - Highlight your unique qualities
- State the degree program/department and school
  - “I am applying to the Ph.D. program in Social Welfare at UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs...”
- Discuss your evolution of your research and academic interests
  - What do you intend to study and why?
  - How did you become interested in this topic/field?
  - What is the connection between your inspiration and current research?
  - Why is this program the next (and only) logical step?



# Content: Body Paragraphs

- Explain your research experience and/or relevant experience
- Describe your academic background, training, research and/or professional experience (e.g. summer research program, individual research project, internship, fieldwork, classes, lab, etc.)
- Highlight your research and academic goals
- Do you want to become a professor one day? Be sure to discuss it!
- Convey your understanding of the subject/field that you are pursuing
  - •Skills, techniques, analysis, equipment

## Example: Experience and Methodology

“I documented detailed field notes, collected and coded a variety of student work samples, and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students who participated in the State Survey of an Underrepresented Minority American Literature course.”

# Content: Current Interest and Fit

- How does your interest match the program?
- Explain why graduate school is the next logical step
- What do you plan to accomplish during/after the program?
- Why THIS particular graduate program? What attracts you to this program?
- What faculty do you want to work with? Why?
  - Discuss relevant research and publications
  - ProTip: Name at least 2 faculty

# Content: Addressing Challenges in Your Essay

- Explain anything unusual in your academic journey
- Academic blemishes, hiatus, jobs, and scholastic transfers
- One minor blemish may be forgiven
- Admissions committee looking for patterns
- Use a positive tone –ignore negatives and focus on strengths
- Use the statement of purpose to convey your initiative, work ethic and/or resilience
- What was the challenge? How did you address it?
- Some applications have a specific question/section to address this

# Content: Summary and Conclusion

- Briefly restate your main argument
- Summarize your goals and interest in the program
- Describe your career trajectory/goals for life after graduate school
  - What impact do you want to make with this degree?
- What is the implication/significance of your research?



# Final Tips

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- Give yourself enough time to write
- Avoid blanket statements
- Remember to cite your sources
- Reserve time for reviewing and editing
- Proofread proofread proofread!
- Triple-check requirements
- Page/word limit, prompt(s), sections
- Compare to other documents and application components
  - Own your accomplishments and showcase yourself!

# Thank You

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