

How to Write a Great Statement of Purpose



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Statement of Purpose vs. Personal Statement vs. Diversity Statement

(Generally speaking)

- Statement of Purpose: highlights why you are applying to graduate school with specific focus on your academic and professional goals
- Personal Statement: highlights your personal background (not *necessarily* academic and professional)
- Diversity Statement: highlights the broader impact you and/or your research might have for underserved/diverse communities

What are the formal *requirements*?

- Some applications call for one statement, while others require two or more different statements. Word limits can vary wildly. Always **read the instructions** carefully! When in doubt, call the department or program for clarification.
- In general, a statement of purpose is about 1-2 single-spaced pages (standard font, 12pt, 1" margins).
- Include your **NAME** and contact information on the first page.

What is *essential*?

- A discussion of your preparation and background
- A statement of your area of interest
- A statement regarding your research ambitions
- Your reasons for wanting to undertake graduate study
- Your reasons for selecting this particular institution
- A brief discussion of your future career goals

What makes it *great*?

- Concise
- Well-written (and carefully proofread!)
- Organized
- Relevant (to the discipline, program, course of study)
- Sets you apart from other applicants (without gimmicks)
- Speaks to your audience (the admissions committee)
- Establishes your voice

What should it *do*?

- Articulate a clear, realistic research purpose.
- Set you apart from other applicants.
- Demonstrate evidence of relevant experience and preparation.
- Convince committee of your fit and suitability to the specific program to which you are applying.
- Convey your collegiality.

What are the *component parts*?

- Introduction
- Research Experience/ Relevant Experience
- Current Interests and Aspirations
- Career Goals
- Statement About Your “Fit” With the Program
- Summary and/or Conclusion

1. Introduction

- A statement of who you are and where you are going.
 - This is where you should foreground qualities that make you stand out from other applicants such as unusual experiences, member of an underrepresented population, first generation to attend college, etc.)
- Name the degree program, department, and school to which you are applying.
 - “I want to enter the Ph.D. Program in Chemical Engineering at UC Irvine....”
- Discuss the genesis and evolution of your research (scholarly) interests:
 - What do you intend to study in graduate school and why?
 - How did you become interested in your field?
 - What is the tie-in between your inspiration and your current research interest?
 - What is it about your field of study that motivates you to pursue a graduate degree?
 - Why is the Ph.D. your next (and only) logical step?

2. Research Experience and/or Relevant Experience

- The lengthiest portion of your statement.
- Showcases your research or other relevant experiences.
- Illuminates your research/academic goals.
- Demonstrates your fluency with the discourse of the discipline.

Tips for Writing the Research/ Relevant Experience Section

- Discuss influences or inspirations in your development as a researcher (scholar).
- Was there a turning point or “ah-ha” moment when you realized you wanted to pursue this path?
- Do you have a summer research experience or other relevant experience? Be sure to discuss it!
- Is there a particular researcher or professor who inspired you to become a scholar?
- Explain how all of these research/relevant experiences are related to your current interests.
- Convey your understanding of the subject matter that you are pursuing for graduate studies.

Organizing the Research/ Relevant Experience Section

- This can be discussed chronologically or categorically:
 - Classroom
 - Laboratory
 - Internship
 - Fieldwork
- What skills have you acquired?
 - Operation of equipment (Not a list)
 - Techniques
 - Analysis/Critical Thinking
 - Developing a Research Plan
- Statement of the relation of your experience and skills to your current research and scholarly objectives

3. Current Interests

- Why is graduate school the next logical step for you?
- What do you plan to accomplish while in graduate school?

4. Statement About Your “Fit” With the Program

- What attracts you to the **program**?
- What **particular professors** from that program would be appropriate for you to work with? Why?
- Name at least 2 faculty.
 - Include a sentence or two about their research, including mention of relevant articles/books.
 - NOTE: Do not apply to a program if you have not bothered to read the published work of the faculty you name.

5. Summary/Conclusion

- Don't just regurgitate earlier sections.
- Use what has already been stated to finalize the theme.
- Keep the tone upbeat and positive, about yourself and the program.

Challenges you've faced: whether, how, and where to include them

- **What** was the challenge?
- **How** did you get over it?
 - What did you learn from it that will help you in graduate school?
- **Where to include this information?**
 - Introduction—or in a paragraph just after.
 - Summary/concluding paragraph

Addressing Inconsistencies or Challenges

There are three schools of thought about how to deal with academic blemishes or uneven preparation:

1. Address inconsistencies head-on in your statement of purpose and show how you resolved the problem (i.e., by taking the class over or reorganizing your priorities).
 - Having one minor blemish may be forgiven, but a low grade point average will be cause for concern.
 - Some applications have a specific section/question that asks you to address this.
2. Ignore negatives and focus on your strengths.
3. Ask one of your recommenders to address the issue in her or his letter.

Review

- **In *general* the SOP should be ~2 pages** and should tell the reader these things:
 - Why graduate school?
 - What are your ultimate professional goals?
 - Why this school? (What's the connection?)
 - Why you? (Why you above other candidates?)
 - What makes you different/special/interesting?
 - What makes you a good FIT for this *particular* program?

Final Steps

REVISE:

- Revise, revise, revise. Tighten, polish, add, subtract. Be willing to make changes!

PROOFREAD:

- Double check spelling and grammar. Polish prose.
- Watch word count; do not exceed.
- Ask colleagues to read it and to help you check for readability and catch typos, etc.
- Get feedback as possible from academic mentors, colleagues, TA' s, etc.
- Ask faculty mentors to read it and to advise you on any details that may be discipline-specific.

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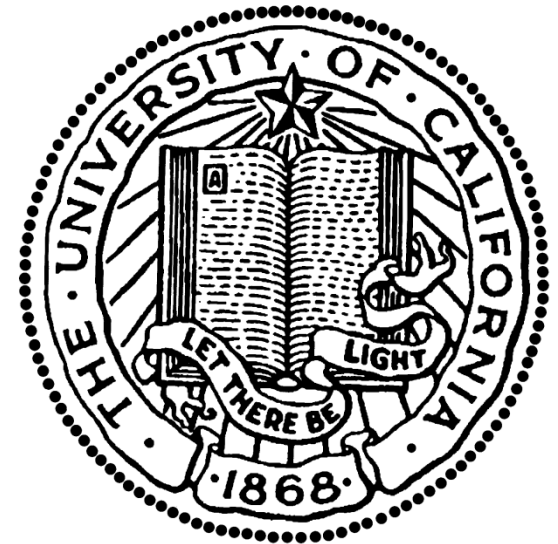
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Questions?

You can find this presentation at:
www.mcnair.ucsb.edu/resources