



Tips for Writing your Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose

This handout presents key tips for writing a successful Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose, which are considered the most important elements of your Graduate/Professional School application. Despite having similar names and overlap in content, Personal Statements and Statements of Purpose are distinct narrative forms that require different strategies.

While there are key differences between the two types of writing, Personal Statements and Statements of Purpose do share some things in common. Namely, you must remember that **all applicants are equally worthy**. For your application to stand out, you must write a statement that stands out from the others.

Personal Statement	Statement of Purpose
Storytelling of experiences related to who you are & how they shaped your interest in the field.	Focuses on your reasons for applying; include professional & intellectual & research interests and the expertise you have gained.
Tell 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.	Show That You Know Something: 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.
Have 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.	Focus on Your 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.
Pay 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.	Your Research Interests & the Program: Explain how your research interests can be pursued at this particular institution in this particular program.
A Bit Informal: A personal statement focuses on your qualities as a person. It explains why you are the right candidate for a program. It focuses more on your motivation for applying.	More Formal: Highlights your academic or professional background. It explains why you want to study a given subject topic, and is more focused on your area of interest.

For Personal Statements –

1. Create an outline before you start writing the personal statement. Write down your thoughts in an organized manner and ensure that your essay is coherent and flows smoothly.
2. You need to find personal reasons that motivate you to apply for the particular program. Spend some time to check what motivated you and apply for the course specifically.
3. Talk to your friends and family members to find out about your unique qualities. You could also ask for an honest opinion from your siblings, they will be a better judge of your qualities.
4. Start with an interesting introduction to capture the admission officer's attention. Starting with an incident or a real-life experience would be the best way to write an introduction for your statement of purpose.
5. Readers of personal statements are used to openings that tell stories or borrow quotations, essays that discuss relevant current events, and even daring writers who risk a bit of well-conceived humor or surprise.
6. Discuss your weaknesses or challenges that you overcame in recent years. Also, mention your struggles during school or college. In the end, conclude on a positive note, this will tell the admission committee that you can tackle any challenges and succeed in any field.
7. And go easy with the thesaurus and Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*!

For Statements of Purpose –

A Statement of Purpose is typically one of the requirements for graduate school admission. It should reveal your experience, motivation, maturity and readiness to pursue graduate education and should be tailored to each department to which you will submit an application. It is very important to spend the necessary time to make it a compelling document.

Steps to Creating a Strong Statement of Purpose:

1. Research the programs
 - Make a spreadsheet containing the departments and programs of interest. Read about them online and request more information from them. Enter relevant info into your spreadsheet (e.g. location, areas of research, financial support, faculty of interest, etc.).
 - For areas of research interest, read scientific reviews to get an understanding of the field and its current challenges. Refine your areas of interest based on what you have learned.
 - Consider where each field might lead you. Is it cutting edge, or an area that has waning interest?
2. Reflect on your experiences and why you are applying
 - What were the major moments in your life that led to your current research interest(s) and to these departments or programs?
 - What or who influenced your decision or interest (e.g. role models)?
 - Why did you choose your undergraduate major?
 - Why did you choose your undergraduate research topic(s), field, and/or department?
 - What are your career goals? What do you hope to accomplish? What drives you? What motivates you?
3. Make an outline
 - Based on your reflections above, define a central theme for the body of the statement
 - Organize the outline into sections

- Your outline should cover these areas with specific examples where possible:
 - What aspects of the school/department/program appeals to you?
 - What are your research interest(s) and how did you become interested in them?
 - What are your experiences that relate to this area (e.g. research experiences, courses, etc.)?
 - What are your career goals (e.g. professorship)?
 - What characteristics of the department or program can help you accomplish your goals?
 - What positive aspects do you bring to the department or program?
4. Write a draft of Statement of Purpose
- Always use positive language when referring to yourself.
 - Don't apologize if your research experiences are not all related. Exploration is expected at the undergraduate level and helps you learn what you want to pursue.
 - Write in a confident, but not arrogant manner.
 - Give detailed examples, but make every word count (be concise).
 - Use transition words, sentences and paragraphs. Your statement must read smoothly.
 - Refrain from starting neighboring paragraphs the same way.
 - Have strong opening and closing paragraphs.
 - Thank the admissions committee for their time at the end of your Statement of Purpose.
5. Revise and edit
- When you are finished with your draft, read it out loud to yourself and make corrections.
 - Ask friends, colleagues and professors to read your edited draft. Take their comments into consideration, revise and edit your draft.

Adapted from Notre Dame Career Center

ADDITIONAL NOTES / TIPS:

- Help the admission committee to analyze your aptitude and motive for taking admission to their university. Thus, write what the admission committee wants to know.
- Admission officers read hundreds of SOPs in each academic session. They can find flaws quite efficiently. However, a genuine statement of purpose that talks about realistic achievements and thoughts of the future will intrigue their interest.
- Introduce your career goals. Be specific about how the program will help you attain your career objective. Mention your objectives related to the program you are applying to.
- Don't be boastful but mention your academic and professional achievements. Try to be precise about the achievements and your decision in choosing the program.
- **NOTE:** People who have had experiences very early in life that set them on the path toward law should focus instead on something of more recent vintage. Don't tell me about how you got an idea as a child about wanting to be a lawyer— it is better to know why, now that you're an adult, your application is in front of the reviewers.