**Tips on How to Write a Statement of Purpose for Graduate School**

**1.** **Follow** **Directions**Read the instructions carefully. Follow the Institution’s instructions on how they want the Statement of Purpose (SOP) to be written.

1. Word Count

2. Number of Pages

3. Format (spacing, margins, font size, etc.)

 **2. Consider Your Audience**

Remember that admissions committee will read many statements of purpose, and they can easily identify insincere and formulaic writing. So:

1. Be genuine. Be yourself.
2. Make sure your statement of purpose is complementary to whatever you submit next to it: A SOP duplicating the information which is already available on other application materials might give negative impression.
3. Show not tell: Demonstrate everything by example: instead of saying directly you are persistent, show it. Remember that the admissions committee will read your self-motivation, competence, potential as a graduate student between the lines.
4. Demonstrate your knowledge of the field: Make appropriate references to leading scholars, major writers, and current debates or concerns, employing appropriate technical terminology.

 **3. Write a strong opening**

Your SOP should help you stand out from the multitude of other applicants. An opening that successfully grabs the reader’s attention will help you to that end. Follow the link to read more about this in: How to Write a Great Statement of Purpose

 **4. Demonstrate Interest in the School**

Your SOP needs to show “Why do you want to study in this program at this school?” and “Why are you a good match for this program?”

1. Do not send exactly the same statement to every school you are applying to. Draft a general statement and modify it for each individual application.
2. Do research on each institution you are applying to. Make sure you refer to the program you are applying to and to the faculty you would like to work with.
3. Demonstrate your skills and interest specifically in that particular program.

 **6. Be Clear and Concise**

Stick to the word limit. Remember that the admissions committee will be reading many applications alongside with yours, under time constraints. They will hardly be tolerant of verbosity. If you can, for example, say the same thing in six words instead of ten, go for it. Remember that you’re writing a letter to a stranger and your main purpose is to communicate a message, efficiently and effectively. So be specific. Keep it concise.

 **5. Write a Draft**

Do not leave it to the last minute. Give yourself time to draft, revise and proofread. Once you have written your first draft, make an appointment, see a writing center tutor to get feedback on its content. To be on the safe side, you can also ask a professor from your field to read it for its content. Make the necessary changes according to the feedback and start working on your final draft. Make sure your final draft is proofread. Excessive typos and mechanical errors (spelling, punctuation) will not leave good impression.

Things to Avoid When Writing a Statement of Purpose

Errors, misspellings, poor English

Submit a handwritten essay (unless requested)

“Talk down” to your audience. Your audience does not need to have basic terminology defined for them. Be mindful that they are already experts in the program that you are applying for.

Be too personal in your essay. Do not focus on deep personal problems or excuses for past performances or experiences.

Be repetitive or too general in your statements.

Criticize other school programs

Use uncommon words that look like they came from a thesaurus.

Write an autobiography. You want to give the committee a sense of who you are but they do not want to hear about your entire life story. Be specific and mindful of your personal details.

Submit untruthful or irrelevant information in your essay.

Plagiarism. You do not want to copy and submit another student’s letter of intent.

Be overly informal.

[**Essential**](http://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/apply/statement-purpose/) **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.

[Your statement of purpose should portray you as someone who:](http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/gradapp/stmtpurpose.htm)

(1) **Passionately interested in the field**: the hook will do that

(2) **Intelligent**: Intelligence will be conveyed by the overall writing, organization, expression, etc. of your statement.

(3) **Well-prepared academically and personally**: can be demonstrated by using the lingo of the field (theory, craft, etc.), describing the specific kinds of coursework and other accomplishments you have in the field.

(4) **Able to take on the challenges of grad school**: can be shown by describing the rigor of the work you have done.

(5) **Able to have rapport with professors and fellow grad students** — in other words, collegial: "Collegiality" is not particularly important but is nevertheless a factor — if you can show yourself as a generally nice and cooperative person, that will do — just be true to your own style.

(6) **Able to finish the graduate degree in a timely fashion**: can be conveyed implicitly by your success thus far and more explicitly if you can tell some (brief) story about adverse obstacles you have overcome.

(7) **A potentially outstanding representative of that grad school in your future career**: can be implied by your being an outstanding representative of your undergraduate school — for example, don't "bad-mouth" your current college or professors.

If you are applying to ten grad schools, it's a mismanagement of time to write ten separate, tailored statements of purpose. Items 1 through 6 above can be exactly the same for all the statements. Then when you get to item 7, put in a different paragraph for each school. Remember this means the ten statements will all be as long, in terms of word count, as the shortest required length among the ten schools. If the shortest length is 300 words, probably that length will be okay for the 500-word school (in fact the admissions committee at the 500-word place may see you as savvy for not going on and on). But those 300 words will clearly not work for the 1200-word school, so you'll need to expand that one. Don't pad. Find other engaging material in your background.

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| [**Organization**](http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/gradapp/stmtpurpose.htm)**:**Here's an organization I would recommend:

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|         | [  ]  | A "hook" that demonstrates your passion for the field   |
|         | [  ]  | Segué to your background in the field   |
|         | [  ]  | Description of your academic background in the field   |

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|         |         | [  ]  | Specific classes you have taken, given by name ***Do not give a complete list of courses you have taken***  |
|         |         | [  ]  | Specific professors you have had, especially if well-known in that field   |

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|         | [  ]  | Extracurricular activities in the field   |
|         | [  ]  | Publications or other professional accomplishments in the field (perhaps conference presentations or public readings)   |
|         | [  ]  | Explanations about problems in background (if needed)   |
|         | [  ]  | Explanation of why you have chosen the specific grad school   |

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|         |         | [  ]  | Mention one or two professors in that school and what you know of and appreciate about their work   |
|         |         | [  ]  | Specific features of the grad program which attract you   |

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[**Writing the Statement of Purpose**](http://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/apply/statement-purpose/)

The statement of purpose should convince readers– 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**

a) **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.

b) **Important paper or thesis project you completed**, as well as anything scholarly beyond your curricular requirements.

c) **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.

a) 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!

b) **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.

c) End your statement in **a positive manner**, indicating your excitement and readiness for the challenges ahead of you.