

The Statement of Purpose

WRITING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The statement of purpose for graduate school applications is extremely important in the admissions process. Most applicants will have good grades and GRE scores; what will distinguish those who get accepted from those who do not will often be the quality of the written statement of purpose. Since most graduate programs are unable to interview all candidates for admission, a statement of purpose (also known as a "personal statement", "personal essay", or a "statement of intent") is utilized to assess whether a student will "fit" into that particular program. These statements are also used to assess applicants for fellowships, assistantships, and summer research programs for undergraduates. While many people find completing this statement to be a daunting task with the proper guidance and assistance, you can create a very effective statement. The following outline and suggestions should help you in structuring your statement of purpose.

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

WHO: Who will read this? Know your audience! Your statement will be read by members of an admissions committee who are typically faculty members teaching in your respective program. Write as if faculty members (as opposed to your long lost pen pal or one of your neighborhood friends) will be reading your statement

WHAT: What do you want to be when you grow up? What goals and objectives do you have within the academic field? What do you have to offer this department? What have you done to prepare for this program? What are your specific research interests?

WHEN: It is stated elsewhere in your application.

WHERE: This should be obvious.

WHY: Why this institution? Why this program? Why you?

WHOM: Among the faculty at this institution, with whom do you want to study and conduct research.

II. YOUR PREPARATION

What have you done academically to prepare for your goal (i.e. summer research, advanced coursework, independent study, others) and how have these experiences specifically helped?

What experiences have helped to foster and/or confirm your graduate school choices (i.e. pre-graduate scholarship (NSF, MII, Harcourt, ...), McNair student, campus visitation, others)? Include only those which are relevant to your academic program's goals.

What relevant expertise do you possess (lab techniques, computer skills, or foreign languages)?

III. THE STYLE

BE ORGANIZED

Be sure to answer all questions asked. Develop major ideas in an orderly fashion, using examples where needed.

BE CONCISE

Use words economically; no long sentences; keep essay to I-2 typed pages.

BE CLEAR

Don't assume that your reader understands everything - explain relevant experiences course tides and research projects where necessary, especially if these may be unclear from reading your transcripts or other documents.

BE HONEST

Don't over inflate your achievements but also don't underestimate your potential.

IV. WHAT TO AVOID

- Grammatical errors (run-ons, fragments,...)
- Personal pronouns (I, we, us,...)
- Contractions (I've, shouldn't,...)
- Trying to be overly creative or "cute" in your writing
- Merely listing activities (if you list it, tell why)
- Writing a generic statement that does not address the specifics of a program
- Highly politicized or unsubstantiated opinions
- Cliches or trite phrases ("I'm a people person")

V. CONCLUSION

Briefly sum up your goals, motivations, and strengths. Write in concrete, specific ways about YOU, not someone else's philosophy of education, etc. A minor "sales pitch" is in order. Let the admissions committee know what you have to offer and that you believe in your abilities.

PROOF YOUR WORK. You should write several drafts and have them critiqued for content and accuracy. Spend time on this statement; it is one of the more important statements you will write.

NOTE TO XAVIER STUDENTS: You should have your statement of purpose reviewed by your Faculty Liaison and by the Office of Graduate Placement.