

# How to Write a Great Statement of Purpose



# 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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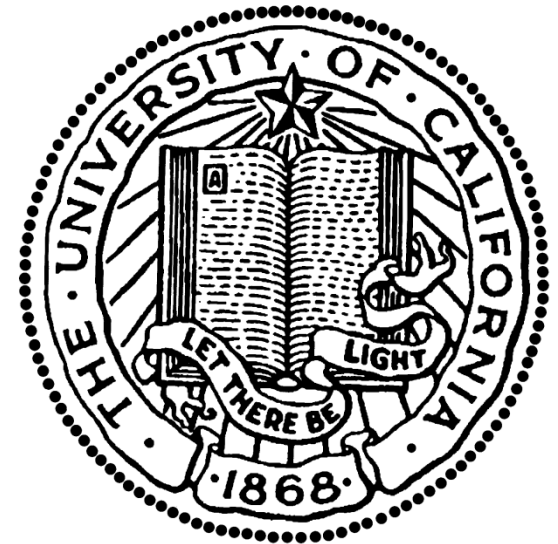
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# Questions?

You can find this presentation at:

[www.mcnair.ucsb.edu/resources.html](http://www.mcnair.ucsb.edu/resources.html)