

Statement of Purpose and Personal Statement Guide | Purpose and Example Outline

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In general, your **Statement of Purpose** should be future-focused (describe the *purpose* of applying to graduate school), but should also provide details about past experiences that have prepared you for that future. If your program asks for a **Personal Statement** (instead of a Statement of Purpose), you can be more past-focused and give more details about your personal history, unique challenges, and growth. However, you also need a little future-focus in a Personal Statement to show how your past has led to your educational, career, and personal goals. As such, the guidelines and outline example in this document pertain to both Statements of Purpose (just be more future- and academic-focused) and Personal Statements (be more past- and personal-focused).

Start writing your statement well before any deadlines. A convincing Statement of Purpose or Personal Statement requires you to do thorough research about the programs you are applying to and the faculty advisors you could potentially work with. Hopefully, you already did this work when deciding where to apply, but it still takes time. It also takes many revisions to craft a well-written statement that makes you sound amazing, while also appearing humble and eager to learn. Get lots of feedback!

General Guidelines

- Carefully describe who you are as a scholar based on **relevant** academic, research, work, service, and personal experience.
- Provide concrete examples of times you demonstrated knowledge, skills, abilities, or other characteristics that will make you a successful graduate student, Research Assistant, and/or Teaching Assistant in their program – beyond good grades.
- Make sure to demonstrate that you are (and have been) serious about pursuing graduate school and are dedicated enough to persist through the challenges involved.
- Discuss your research interests and how they align with what faculty teaching in the graduate program are currently studying.
- Give clear and specific statements about future career goals and how the program (and faculty) will help you meet them.

See the example outline on the next page.

Example Outline

This is an example and can be adapted to meet your needs. Focus on any program-specific guidelines. Remember a Statement of Purpose should be more future-focused, and a Personal Statement should be more past-focused.

- Introduction
 - Name the program you are applying for and a brief statement about why (save more for the end).
 - Name-drop if there is a specific faculty member you want to work with.
 - Introduce what will be included in the letter (e.g., “This letter highlights my personal, academic, and research experiences that make me an excellent fit for your program”).
- Brief but personal background information (or story) that helps the reader understand who you are (a little) and why you are interested in your chosen field of study or future career
 - Feel free to discuss personal challenges you have overcome (and how you overcame them).
 - Avoid sharing information about personal “drama” unless it is extremely relevant to your research interests, field of study, or career goals.
 - Do not have a tone that may seem intended to make the reader feel sorry for you.
- Relevant academic and/or research experiences that steered you toward an interest in the field of study
 - If you have a great deal of relevant research experience, you may want to summarize it before providing specific details (e.g., “I have conducted independent research with X professors, presented research at X conferences, have X manuscripts in review, etc.”). Also provide an overall summary of what you gained from the experience (e.g., ...”extensive preparation to independently perform literature reviews, develop theoretically interesting and testable hypotheses, perform statistical analyses, interpret results, and present findings to any audience”).
 - Describe any major group projects or independent research projects you have worked on (especially those relevant to the program and field of study). Briefly describe the purpose of the project(s), your role in the project(s), and the outcome(s).
 - After discussing your experience, focus on how that particular experience guided your career/research interests or demonstrated skills that will help you excel in graduate school (i.e., competence, reliability, grit, conscientiousness, and/or ability to work well with others on complex projects).
- Describe relevant work/internship experience or service experience (e.g., clubs/organizations or volunteer work)
 - Again: provide concrete past examples of experiences that highlight your competence, reliability, grit, conscientiousness, and ability to work well with others on complex projects.
 - Focus on how your work and service experience has prepared you for the demands of graduate school and how it informed your research interests, graduate program selection, and career goals.
- Provide a detailed explanation of why that specific program (do your homework) is a great fit for you. Think about:
 - educational goals (how the program will help you meet them)
 - research goals (faculty you are excited to work with and why)

- career goals (why you are eager to continue your education and how you think the program will get you there)
- Thank them for their time and consideration, and reiterate your sincere interest in speaking with them further about your potential future in their program.
 - Maybe include a 1-2 sentence summary/recap of why you will be successful there (based on the letter).

Final Considerations

Your statement may be the only writing sample the graduate school admissions committee has from you, so make sure it is well written (organized, logical flow, perfect grammar, concise, clear, and convincing). Start with an outline based on what the school asks you to include in your statement.

- ✓ Use clean and easy to read formatting.
- ✓ Be clear and concise, yet specific and detailed enough to be convincing.
- ✓ Be ORGANIZED with a logical flow of ideas that tells a story about your progression as a scholar and human, and convinces them that you are a worthy investment.
- ✓ CAREFULLY make sure each statement of purpose adheres to all requirements listed in the application to that specific graduate program.

😊 This is one of the most important and challenging documents you will ever write, but it is also a cathartic and rewarding experience. Hang in there and revise, revise, get feedback (from good writers and people who know you and your field of study), and repeat. You Got This! 😊