



Statement of Purpose

A-State Writing Center

What is a Statement of Purpose?

A Statement of Purpose (SOP) is a persuasive essay outlining your accomplishments and qualifications as a graduate program applicant. SOPs display why you are qualified for the program you are applying for and how you stand out among other applicants. Generally, graduate programs receive countless applications, so you need to ensure your essay provides a clear picture of how you will fit into that specific graduate program.

How Does it Differ from a Personal Statement?

While many graduate programs use these terms interchangeably or overlap, there is a difference between personal statements and statements of purpose. However, make sure that you understand the type of questions you need to answer within your essay and/or follow programs' directions.

SOP

Generally, a statement of purpose is more formal and focuses on academic and professional experiences to exhibit how a candidate will thrive during and beyond a graduate program. This requires more research regarding the program and less about your personality, triumphs, and obstacles.

PS

[Personal statements](#) are typically less formal and delve into your personal motivations more so than SOPs. Frame your experiences and interests within a story rather than declarative statements. You will connect with readers on a deeper level and stand out as an individual applicant with your own obstacles and triumphs. With that being said, you still need to ensure you don't get lost within the creative details and keep to your main points.

Brainstorming

When crafting your essay, we suggest asking yourself these personal questions:

- 1) Why are you applying to this specific school's graduate program?
- 2) Which aspects of the program stand out to you?
 - Are you interested in the program's latest research and/or publications?
 - Are you interested in taking certain courses offered?
 - How does the school rank in your area of study?
 - Do you want to work with certain faculty members?
 - Does this program provide excellent opportunities and connections?
- 3) How do your academic, and professional experiences prepare you for this program?
- 4) How does this degree prepare you for your career interests?

Tips for Writing Statements of Purpose

- 1) Make sure you abide by the word/character limit as well as formatting specifications to meet essay requirements. You don't want the admissions committee to dismiss you for simple errors.
- 2) Use active over passive voice.
- 3) Show rather than tell. Don't say "I am detail-oriented"; show how you have used that skill.
- 4) Be professional but approachable. Do not use incendiary, inappropriate language or write as if you are speaking to friends. However, you do want to get your personality across in a positive manner.
- 5) Write positive statements that do not denigrate your past experiences and show your optimism for future pursuits.
- 6) Avoid vague, grand statements like "I want to give back to local communities after I graduate." But what does that look like? Be as specific as possible to show that you have done your research. Learn as much as you can about the program you are applying for, and detail distinct aspects about the program you are passionate about and connect to based on your experiences. In other words, show how you will give back and how this program will take you there.
- 7) Quantify your experiences to show you garner results. Rather than explaining, for example, that you lead a team, explain how many people you led, for which team, and what that team accomplished.
- 8) Although you may be writing multiple essays for various schools' graduate programs (and you should), remember to customize your essay to fit that specific school's mission and culture.
- 9) Use a trusted source to proofread your essay before you submit.

General Outline

Part I

State your academic and career interests and briefly describe how you became interested in this area of study.

Part II

Condense your academic and professional experiences to show how prepared you are to enter this program and contribute as a scholar.

Part III

Discuss your current academic, professional, and relevant personal pursuits that align with your interest in this program.

Part IV

Provide more details on your academic and career interests and/or pursuits. What specifically do you want to study and accomplish? How will this program help you accomplish your goals?

Sources & More Resources:

- <https://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/apply/statement-purpose/>
- <https://www.essayedge.com/blog/statement-of-purpose-vs-personal-statement/>
- <https://www.prepscholar.com/gre/blog/statement-of-purpose-vs-personal-statement/>
- <https://crunchprep.com/gre/powerful-statement-of-purpose>
- <https://gradschool.cornell.edu/diversity-inclusion/recruitment-2/prospective-students/writing-your-statement-of-purpose/>
- <https://www.essayedge.com/blog/statement-of-purpose-format/>