

Letter/Statement of Intent

What is it?

- Intellectual autobiography that conveys the continuum of experiences and events in your academic life which have led you to desire an academic graduate education
- What you did academically, why and with whom
- What you want to do academically, where, why, and with whom

Before you write, DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

- Get the school's catalog
- Confirm that the degree program offered matches your career goals
- Review the courses offered by the school that pertain to your goals
- Get the names of specific faculty members with whom you want to study
- Ask your current teachers if they know any of the faculty members in the proposed graduate program

How is it organized?

Opening Paragraph

State the program to which you are making application, whether you are seeking a master's or doctorate, and in a general sense, why you are applying to the program. Begin in a direct manner. Avoid talking about personal, extracurricular or family background.

Subsequent Paragraphs

Your Qualifications and Background

Describe experiences that have served as a foundation for your future graduate work, how your interest in the field developed, and how you planned academically for your goal.

Discuss undergraduate studies, in general, and your major and any specialization within the major, in specific terms.

Weave into the letter any academic achievements or accomplishments, specific learning experiences that demonstrate your motivation and inspiration for continued study and/or research. Examples include: independent study courses or research with professors, teaching assistantships, undergraduate research conference presentations, published work, laboratory experiences, research internships, seminar courses, honors thesis, relevant education abroad, independent writing, academic honors and/or very closely related work experience.

Discuss in detail qualifications that relate to your academic goal, as well as special academic and research experiences.

Explain special projects or research. This indicates ability to explore or master certain skills or particular knowledge about your academic field, and illustrates to the committee that you have the initiative and ability to develop ideas, the capacity to work through problems independently, and the determination to achieve your goals.

Mention special skills (laboratory techniques, computer skills, foreign language proficiency, advanced quantitative and statistical expertise).

Closing Paragraph: Planned Academic Future

Explain specifically why you wish to attend their particular program, and specifically how the department's graduate curriculum matches your short and long term academic and career goals. Show evidence of your investigation of their program, its faculty and their research, and their departmental resources and facilities. Indicate how your academic and intellectual interests form a match with the research interests of one or more faculty in the program or department.

Concluding Statement

Tell the Graduate Committee that you are qualified and motivated, and you will be successful in graduate study and research.

Summarize briefly why you believe you possess the experience and skills to be admitted to their program.

Style of Letter

- direct and straightforward manner
- no contrivances or gimmicks
- place central points early
- use active, not passive voice
- do not use words such as rather, quite, somewhat, fairly, pretty much
- be positive
- emphasize strengths
- explain anomalies
- be accurate and precise
- edit ruthlessly
- CUT OUT redundancy
- be organized, orderly, specific and concise
- use examples where needed
- keep the statement to one or two typed pages
- use transitions that tie each paragraph to the next
- do not assume that the committee will understand everything (explain course titles and research projects where necessary)

Many thanks to Professor Lynn Beene from the UNM English Department for allowing us to use these guidelines!