

Personal Statements & Statements of Purpose

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



Often, applications will require that you submit a statement of purpose *or* a personal statement. Both documents are intended to give admissions officers an idea of who you are as a student and what you would bring to their program, with a statement of *purpose* focusing slightly more on your plans going forward and a *personal* statement focusing slightly more on personal reflection. The guidelines below offer questions and tips that can guide you in writing both types of statements.

Paragraph One: Introduction

The first paragraph of your personal statement or statement of purpose is a place to introduce who you are and why you are interested in the particular school to which you are applying. The temptation to write one single, polished personal statement and send it to multiple schools can be strong, but keep in mind that a school wants to know that you have chosen to apply to them *specifically*, not that they are just another a school on your list. When working on your introduction, think about the following questions:

- Explain the primary reason you want to study in your chosen field. Has it defined who you are as a person in some way? Was there an experience in your life that made you particularly interested in the field? Try to go beyond the obvious—for example, if you are applying to a nursing program, it can probably be assumed that you like helping people, and all of the applicants to a master’s literature program probably love books.
- Explain why you have chosen the school to which you are applying. What are the academic reasons you are applying to this specific school? Are there any professors or particular courses/tracts/certifications that fit your interests? If available, are you interested in a graduate or teaching assistantship?
- You can use this space to explain any “holes” in your resume or transcript (low scores, time away from school, etc.) as they relate to *personal* matters, if desired.

Paragraph Two: Experience

The second paragraph is where you can elaborate on the most important parts of your resume, C.V., or other academic experiences. This is where you can show admissions officers what makes you uniquely qualified for their program and how you will fit into their pre-existing academic community. When detailing your experience, think about the following questions:

- Explain your current experience in the field, beyond your degree. Have you taken any specific courses that influenced your development as a student? Have you written any research papers or conducted any practical experiments in relation to your field? Did you work closely with any faculty or staff during your research?
- Explain any current campus involvement, internships, or other experience related to your field of study. What departments and organizations did you work with? What work did you do, and how does it relate to your specific field of study?
- Explain how you plan to develop your research and involvement further. Are there long-term research projects that you want to potentially pursue? Will you continue to be involved with previous organizations at the school to which you are applying? Does any of your experience qualify you as an assistantship candidate?
- You can use this space to explain any “holes” in your resume or transcript as they relate to *academic* matters, if desired.

Paragraph Three: Conclusion

The final paragraph is where you hint at your plans for after graduation. This gives the admissions officers an idea of how dedicated you are to your field of study and what your unique goals could bring to their program. This is also a place where you can explain any *last-minute* “holes” in your resume or transcript.

- Explain why you are seeking an advanced degree in this field. Do you plan to continue on into additional programs? What are your professional aspirations? Why would an advanced degree help you reach them?