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# How to write the **statement of purpose** for college

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# What Is the Graduate Statement of Purpose?

A statement of purpose (SOP) is an essay that's one of the most important aspects of your application because it tells the admission committee who you are, why you're applying, why you're a good candidate, and what you want to do in the future.

The statement of purpose reflects not only who you are as a candidate, but your writing abilities as well. In college and graduate school, you're going to be doing a ton of writing. Seriously a ton. It was not unusual for me to write papers 10-20 pages or longer. With that in mind, it is really important to show that you are a truly competent writer. Some quick tips are:

Your statement of purpose shouldn't have any spelling or grammatical errors

- Use strong, clear, and concise writing;
- Avoid cliches and repetitive language;
- Stay away from overly informal language;
- Keep a positive and confident tone.

## What is the general format?

The general format is similar to any other piece of academic writing.

You should use:

- 12 point Times New Roman font
- 1-inch margins on all sides
- 1.5 line spacing

This format will make your writing easier to read. It is also the expected format. Sadly, you probably won't get bonus points for standing out with your general visual formatting. It is going to benefit you much more to focus on wowing your reader with your actual content.

## **Do I need to put my name on my statement of purpose?**

In general, no you don't need to put your name on your SOP. The reason is that your statement is apart of your larger application which already has your name throughout it. However, it is important to look at the specific requirements for the program you're applying to. If the requirements for your program say that you should include your name, then you should follow those directions.

## **How long is a statement of purpose supposed to be?**

A statement of purpose should really be one-page and only one-page. You could write up to one and half pages if needed, but nothing longer than this. The reason is that you need to be economical with your writing. Admissions officers read dozens of applications a day so you are going to need to be able to concisely and clearly state what you want to say. Writing longer than 1 – 1.5 pages will make you seem like you lack focus and clarity in your purpose for school.



# Statement of Purpose Format – What do I write?

*It can be hard to know what to include in each section of your writing. The following statement of purpose format is a simple five paragraph essay that will help you address all the points admissions officers expect you to cover.*

## 1st paragraph

### Who are you and what do you want to do?

In the first paragraph, you should introduce yourself by briefly giving your background and stating your current career goal or objective. Your introduction should be relevant to the specific program you're applying to. Talking about your love of cooking when you're applying to medical school won't really help you by itself. Any information you include in your introduction needs to be relatable back to specific aspects of the program.

For example, consider this statement from the description of the Harvard-MIT Health Sciences and Technology (HST) program, "HST students learn to carry their engineering and scientific expertise from the laboratory bench to the patient's bedside and to bring clinical insights from the bedside to the bench." If you were applying to this program, you'd probably want to include some background you have with scientific research or bedside interactions with patients. Your career goal or objective should also clearly show that this is the kind of work you want to do.

Research the program you are applying to thoroughly and make sure that what you write about directly relates to the specific details included in the program description.

## 2nd paragraph

### Why do you want to do it?

The second paragraph, should explain how you came to be interested in your specific area of study. Now that you've made it clear that you have a background and goal related to the program, explain your interest in it. Your statement of purpose tells admissions officers why you're applying, and fast!

Don't give really general reasons like, "I like helping people." General reasons don't help admissions officers understand you as an individual. This is because so many people give these reasons. You probably do like helping people and that's great, now look deeper. Why do you like helping people? How do did you come to like helping people? Why do you want to learn in this specific program to help people? The more completely you understand your reasons, the better you'll be able to convince admissions officers you're the right choice.

## 3rd and 4th paragraphs

### Why are you the right candidate for the program?

After this, in the third paragraph, briefly describe any experience you may already have in your area of study. Think of any jobs, internships, projects and so on that you have done. It can be difficult for some people to think of any applicable experience they may have. If this is you, try talking to some friends or family that know you well. They may be able to help you think of some relevant experience.

Look back to the background and career goal from the first paragraph. This should be your point of reference when talking about your experience. Using the school's program description as a guide, talk about any related experience you have. The more direct the experience the better. If you don't have direct experience, choose the most closely related experience as possible. Be sure to reference how your experience relates to the program. This will show that you have a clear understanding of what the program is and how you fit into it.

Next up is the fourth paragraph where you can describe any other experiences you've had that helped you decide on your specific area of study or has helped you prepare for graduate studies in general. Do this briefly though. Your statement of purpose is not the place to give long narratives.

If there is any other information you really think the admissions officer should know about you, include it here. It is important to emphasize that the admissions officer really should know this information. Ask yourself if you can clearly articulate the specific value these experiences add to your story. This is another chance to stand out and be unique, but it still needs to be tightly focused on explaining why you are the best person for the program.

## Closing paragraph

### What do you want to do in the future?

In the final closing paragraph you should very briefly describe your long-term career goals. Be very clear and specific when you write this. Also, notice how this is a bit different than the current goal from the first paragraph. In the first paragraph you talk about what you want to do right now, in other words the next goal you want to achieve. The closing paragraph discusses where you want to be years from now. For example, your next step may be to become a manager in your field, but your long-term goal may be to be a director or CEO or whatever the applicable title for your field is.

Up until this point, you've talked about the past and present. These are important for showing how you fit the program right now. From the admissions perspective, they want to select students that have a long-term vision related to the program. The reason is that it shows you clearly see yourself as using what you'll learn to truly grow and contribute to your field of study. Why would an admissions officer want to admit a student that doesn't have a clear vision of how they want to grow their field? It doesn't make sense for them to choose a student that does not have a clear long-term goal over a student that does.

## How to use this format effectively

- Now that you have a basic idea of the statement of purpose format, the next thing to do is to get started. If you're ready, you can get started writing immediately. If you're not quite sure what this format looks like in action, you should read some sample essays.
- While you read the sample essays, try to notice how the writer either followed or diverged from the above format. Evaluate whether or not you think the writer was clear in their statement of purpose and what you might do differently when you write your own. Make sure to take notes while you read and use them as a reference.
- Remember, you want to be able to show admissions officers that you are clearly focused on your purpose for going to graduate school. This process will help you truly take control over how you convey yourself in your writing.



**In the final closing paragraph you should very briefly describe your long-term career goals.**





# What to do when you're done

**1** Writing and editing is complicated. Really complicated in fact. This statement of purpose format is meant to give you a great head-start on writing, but there is a lot more than just the format. There is a fine art to selecting the right verb for a sentence. You also need to cut through the clutter and deliver your message with just the right blend of punchiness and evocativeness. Good writing is clear thinking made visible. When you have 1-page to convince a stranger that your future should be what you think it should be; you'll want some really good writing.

**2** When you're writing something as important as a statement of purpose, having your essay well-edited can make the difference between a letter of acceptance and a letter of rejection. You also don't get to reapply right away. If you get rejected from the school you want, you may have to wait months or even up to a year before you can reapply. If you'd like to be more confident that your statement of purpose has the best chance of getting you an acceptance letter, consider hiring a professional editor. In the scheme of how much school costs, a professional editor is pretty inexpensive. Most textbooks you'll buy are more expensive.

# Make Your Statement of Purpose as Strong as it can Be

The statement of purpose has never been more important if you're applying to any type of educational program. With standardized test scores on the rise, high GPAs common, and many applicants boasting impressive resumes, applicant pools are full of great candidates. This makes it hard for admissions committees to decide who to accept and who to reject. It's much more than just picking the individuals with the highest numerical qualifications.

This is important to understand because as an applicant, you must now focus on differentiating yourself from other applicants rather than just showing your accomplishments. It's not enough to be highly qualified; instead, you also need to be a unique applicant who brings something to the table that other, similarly qualified applicants do not. When they review your statement of purpose admission committees want to learn why you're a better candidate than the hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of others who are also competing for a spot.



# Statement of Purpose Admission Decisions

*So how does the statement of purpose work when it comes to reviewing applications?*

*At many schools, particularly those that are highly competitive, the process works like this:*

- ✓ The admissions committee uses things like GPA and test scores to separate applicants into larger general groups: those who are qualified for admission and those who are not.
- ✓ If you're firmly at the far end of either group, you have a good chance of either being accepted or rejected. However, this is not guaranteed. Applicants who are more in the middle of the pack or who boast numerical qualifications similar to many other applicants must be sorted somehow. That's where the statement of purpose comes in.
- ✓ Admissions officers read your statement of purpose admission essay. If it makes you seem like a unique, qualified applicant that would fit well in that program, your application gets a substantial boost. If it is poorly written, cliched, or otherwise unremarkable, you are likely to fade into the crowd.
- ✓ While a great essay or statement can't guarantee admission by itself, it can have an enormous impact on your chances, especially if you're a borderline applicant in any way.

Understanding this, it's in your best interest as an applicant to make your statement of purpose as strong as it can be. If you neglect this vital component of your application, it could have a significant negative impact on your chance of admission. However, you always have an opportunity to ask our statement of purpose editing service to help you with your application!

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