

A photograph of three young women sitting at a desk in a library, studying together. They are looking at a laptop and several open books. The woman on the left is wearing glasses and a plaid shirt. The woman in the middle is wearing a denim jacket and headphones. The woman on the right is wearing a plaid shirt and has her hands clasped. The background is filled with bookshelves.

# How to write the **statement of purpose** for grad school

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# What Is the Graduate Statement of Purpose?

The graduate **Statement of Purpose (SOP)** is required by most graduate school programs to give the admissions committee an opportunity to evaluate the candidate's maturity level, writing ability, the potential for success in the program based on preparation and education, and to provide another tool to use in the complicated process of university admissions.

SOP is your chance to tell the admissions committee about yourself in narrative form, going beyond the resume, test scores, transcripts, and letters of recommendation. The Statement of Purpose should include new and different information about you and your candidacy for grad school. It should not repeat the same material that appears in other application documents. You will have the full attention of the admissions committee for a brief time while they review your application, and the best way to take advantage of that opportunity is to write a stellar graduate Statement of Purpose that personalizes your application and makes you memorable.

## How Long Is a Good SOP?

Although colleges may have different requirements, the standard size is 1-2 pages (around 500 words). Try to use a traditional font at a readable size (12pt or 14pt) and leave reasonable margins. Remember that your writing sounds more confident when it is clear and simple. Still, it is totally fine to use discipline-specific terminology and style in your SOP. This rule works for most application documents.

# Steps to Writing the Graduate Statement of Purpose

*It's often hard to get started, so try to move step by step when writing your SOP.*

## Step 1

### **Brainstorming**

SOP is your chance to speak directly to the admissions committee, so use it wisely. You should create a unique story about your jobs, studies or volunteer experience. Try to ask yourself such key questions as “What are my expectations for this degree?” or “How will my experiences and achievements add value to the program?” You can also talk to one of our editors, whose experience is relevant to yours. They will tell you more about the application process to a particular college or university.

## Step 2

### **Writing an outline and first draft**

The outline is the starting point that will help you create the first draft of your SOP. Make sure to answer all the questions from the prompt and create a list of things that drive you. Think about the events and experiences that could demonstrate your interest in the school.

## Step 3

### **Editing and proofreading**

Before submitting your application essay, you need to make sure that all directions and requirements are followed thoroughly. Our editors can check your Statement of Purpose for grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as lengths and relevance to the program. If written well, your Statement of Purpose can leave a long-lasting impression.

# What to Cover

Cover this, not that, in your graduate school statement of purpose

Cover this:	Not that:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Your inspiration or motivation to pursue this program.</li> <li>✓ Your life experiences that will contribute to a career in this field.</li> <li>✓ Volunteer work, research or internship experience in this field.</li> <li>✓ Specific information about the professors and courses in the program you are applying to, which will enable you to pursue your future career.</li> <li>✓ Detailed information about your goals, both short-term, and long-term.</li> <li>✓ Positive details about your interest in this special program at this university.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Repetitive information from other application materials, such as your resume. New details, such as recent internship positions or honors, awards or publications can be discussed in the statement of purpose.</li> <li>✗ The information which may reflect negatively on your candidacy.</li> <li>✗ Obviously, honesty is required in an application, but it is not necessary to focus on a bad grade in a freshman year course, particularly if it already appears on your transcript and you have improved significantly since then.</li> <li>✗ Don't use vocabulary that you don't understand.</li> <li>✗ Don't fabricate facts to make yourself appear more suited for the graduate program.</li> </ul>

# Statement of Purpose Graduate School: Introductions

- The introduction is the most important part of a statement of purpose for graduate school. The function of the introduction is to capture the reader's interest, encouraging him to continue reading. If an introduction is hackneyed, boring, repetitive or poorly written, the reader will not be motivated to continue reading. Therefore, a statement of purpose graduate school should include an appealing, captivating or intriguing anecdote for the opening paragraph, in order to encourage the reader to continue.
- Introductions for statements of purpose for graduate school can be unique, compelling, or instructive in style. A humorous introduction or a very sad one may intrigue the reader's interest as well. There are as many "correct" introductions for statements of purpose for graduate school as there are applicants submitting them. The introduction works best at convincing the reader to keep reading if it is a personal story. A shared experience is an excellent way to open the statement of purpose for graduate school.
- The writer of a veterinary school personal statement may offer a story from childhood which illustrates her early love for science and animals. Or the young man from a foreign country may hope to study medicine here, in order to return home after completing medical school and residency to help his country raise their healthcare standards.
- Stories from natural disasters and subsequent relief efforts are popular themes for introductions for a graduate school statement of purpose. Serious issues, such as homelessness and environmental concerns, also provide excellent topics for introductions to a relevant statement of purpose for graduate school.
- **Start with a Bang in Your Statement of Purpose for Graduate School**  
The entire essay does not have to follow the storyline of the introduction to be effective. It is possible to establish a theme with the introduction and then weave the statement of purpose for graduate school around and through the essay's topic.

Variety of wording and sentence structure is key to maintaining the reader's attention.

■ The statement of purpose for graduate school is important because it establishes the tone of the personal statement. A humorous introduction is not often seen, because many applicants probably think it is necessary to be serious. However, a very entertaining introduction can include an amusing story, and stand out because of its uniqueness. Humor should be carefully measured and handled with an eye to the final topic of the statement of purpose for graduate school. The introduction may be the most difficult paragraph to write in the statement of purpose for graduate school.



# Statement of Purpose Graduate School: Transitions

- Transitions between paragraphs are as difficult to write in a statement of purpose graduate school as in any essay. Probably the most maligned grammatical device, a transition is generally defined as a phrase or sentence that connects one subject to another in writing. Good transitions can link paragraphs in a document and transform disorganized writing into a cohesive finished product. A statement of purpose for graduate school should focus on the use of good transitions to improve the flow of ideas.
- Anyone writing a statement of purpose graduate school knows that a transition in an essay connects the ideas of one paragraph to the next one that follows. Transitions, however, often seem contrived in contemporary writing. It is a simple idea to continue one paragraph from where the previous one ended. The simplicity lies in the concept and not the execution.
- Writing transition sentences to move the reader and the topic smoothly from paragraph to paragraph in a statement of purpose for graduate school requires a plan for the statement and an organized outline. If it is extremely difficult to find a transition sentence, it may be a good idea to review whether the second paragraph should be linked to the first or whether it belongs somewhere else in the essay.



# Make your Statement of Purpose for Graduate School Smooth and Well- Written

A statement of purpose for graduate school should be a well-written document, adhering to all rules of grammar and punctuation. In addition, the statement of purpose graduate school should be professionally composed, sparkling with clarity, and passionate about the topic. Ideas should flow clearly throughout the essay, from one paragraph to the next, in logical order.



When writing transitions for an important essay, such as a statement of purpose for graduate school, the author should review the paragraph just completed and think ahead to the one about to be written, determining what the thought is that will be carried forward from one paragraph to the next. This is the link which provides the foundation for the transition between paragraphs. The purpose of transitions, then, is to lead the reader from one thought to the next, facilitating the flow of ideas. This grammatical tool enables writers to clearly and logically develop a series of ideas. This is especially important in a document such as the graduate school statement of purpose.

# Statement of Purpose Graduate School: Conclusions

- When writing your statement of purpose graduate school, you should be thinking about your conclusion while you are writing your introduction. The two most important components of any statement of purpose for graduate school are inevitably linked. The introduction should present the ideas which define the theme of the statement and which will be reiterated and summarized in the concluding paragraph.
- The conclusion of a statement of purpose graduate school can be used to remind the reader about the highlights of the essay by restating them. Bringing the purpose of the statement full circle can be very rewarding, both literally and in fact.

## Important Things to Remember about the Conclusion to a Statement of Purpose for Graduate School

- ✔ The conclusion is the last thing the reader will remember about your essay.
- ✔ The conclusion should be a summary of the highlights of your statement of purpose for graduate school.
- ✔ The conclusion should include the main points of the statement of purpose.
- ✔ The conclusion should be as well-constructed and grammatically correct as everything else in the Statement of Purpose.
- ✔ Carefully review the conclusion to be certain that it reflects the strongest points in your statement of purpose graduate school.



- “How should I conclude my statement of purpose?” is a question asked frequently by candidates writing a statement of purpose for graduate school. This question cannot be asked in isolation. The conclusion is developed out of the text of the graduate school statement of purpose. The conclusion restates the most important points of the essay, summarizing and reviewing them, for the reader.
- The purpose of a strong conclusion, also, is to use the details and information included in the statement to confirm the progression of the theme from introduction through the body of the essay to the conclusion. The details in the body of the essay should support the conclusion. The conclusion of the statement of purpose for graduate school can be restated in an informative way, to vary the ideas presented in the introduction.
- The conclusion of the statement of purpose graduate school is as important as the introduction to the statement. The conclusion is the last impression the admissions committee will have of your statement and of you. A solid conclusion to the ideas developed within the statement of purpose for graduate school could leave a lasting positive impression on the reader.

## Things to Avoid in Your Grad School Statement of Purpose

- You are about to start writing your grad school statement of purpose for your grad school application. You find yourself worrying not about what you will write, but what you should avoid. You do not want to say the wrong thing to the admissions committee.
  - Concern over creating this very important component of your application may cause you to delay writing your graduate school statement of purpose. Don't let it! A list of things to avoid follows. Relax and focus on the positive aspects of your application.
- ✓ Check and double-check your grammar and punctuation. Make sure your words are spelled correctly and that there are no typos.
  - ✗ Do not use colloquial expressions, such as contemporary words which are not in common usage in formal writing.
  - ✓ Avoid contractions (don't, can't, isn't) in a formal graduate statement of purpose. This statement should illustrate your best writing skills.
  - ✓ Be professional in your writing. Use proper language and complete sentences.
  - ✗ Avoid controversial subjects and strong opinions in a graduate school statement of purpose, unless they are directly related to your specific field of study.
  - ✗ Do not write something that you would not say to a person in a face-to-face interview.
  - ✗ Do not be disorganized in your presentation of ideas in the graduate statement of purpose.
  - ✗ Do not forget to proofread your statement after you have finished writing it.
  - ✗ Avoid "stretching the truth" in discussions of your responsibilities in an internship experience or in the workplace.
  - ✓ Do not exceed the word limit indicated for the graduate school statement of purpose.
  - ✓ Be candid and self-confident, rather than negative about yourself.

A young man with dark hair and glasses is sitting on the floor in a library, leaning against a bookshelf. He is wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt and dark jeans. He is holding a black folder or book and looking down at it. The background is filled with bookshelves filled with books, creating a warm and studious atmosphere.

**“Focus on the positive aspects of your preparation for this degree program**

- Avoid leaving out details of your desire to pursue the program of interest. Do not assume the committee will know why you want to pursue a graduate degree in Spanish, for example. Let them know you want to work with underserved communities in South America and need to become fluent in Spanish in order to accomplish this.
- Most important of all, focus on the positive aspects of your preparation for this degree program. Your graduate statement of purpose should let the admissions committee know why you want to earn this graduate degree and what you plan to do with it in the future.
- Do not worry about writing the “wrong” thing. Instead, write from your heart and the committee will recognize this.

# The role of the Graduate Statement of Purpose

- What is the role of a graduate statement of purpose? In the application process, this is one of the most important essays you will write. The graduate statement of purpose defines your motivation and career goals. It tells the admissions committee what your plans are, what you hope to accomplish by earning this degree, and what your long term goals include.
- A graduate school statement of purpose is intended to differentiate you from the other candidates. You have the opportunity to define your long term plans and how earning the graduate degree will impact your life. There are several important components of the graduate school statement of purpose.



- The introduction to your graduate statement of purpose. This could be a compelling story about an experience related to your field of study. The story should show the admissions committee how you handled yourself in a challenging situation or it could be an anecdote about your decision to pursue a particular graduate academic course.
- The body of the graduate statement of purpose will contain information about you and your experiences (volunteer, work, personal) that set you apart from the other candidates. Generally, a brief academic or professional background will lead the paragraphs in the body, then move to a description of what you hope to study and why. Remember not to duplicate material which is included in your application packet. If you have additional or new information to add to the application packet, it should be included here. Details of recent honors or awards or publications accepted or internships and promotions recently earned could be mentioned in the graduate statement of purpose.
- The next paragraph might include information about your desired course of study and what you plan to do with the degree when it is awarded. Relevant details of your professional or academic experience could be added here. Specific details of courses you hope to take and professors with whom you hope to study are also great inclusions in this paragraph.
- A concluding paragraph will offer your goals, both short term and long term. The impact of your graduate degree on your career could also be highlighted here. Describe the ways in which the graduate degree will advance your future plans and what this will mean to you personally.

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