

Graduate School – Statement

Graduate and professional schools often require some sort of written statement as a part of the application. The terminology differs, but may include "statement of purpose," "personal statement," "letter of intent," "personal narrative," etc. Some statements require rather specific information—for example, the applicant's intended area of study within a graduate field. Others suggest subjects which should be addressed specifically. Still others are quite unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of matters. Some applications call for one statement, while others require responses to a series of six or more questions, ranging from 250 to 750 words each. The importance of the statement varies from school to school and from field to field.

Determine your purpose in writing the statement

Usually the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant who should be chosen. You may wish to show that you have the ability and motivation to succeed in your field, or you may wish to show the committee that, on the basis of your experience, you are the kind of candidate who will do well in the field. Whatever its purpose, the content must be presented in a manner that will give coherence to the whole statement.

- Pay attention to the purpose throughout the statement so that extraneous material is left out.
- Pay attention to the audience (committee) throughout the statement. Remember that your audience is made up of professionals in their field, and you are not going to tell them how they should act or what they should be. You are the amateur.

Determine the content of your statement

Be sure to answer any questions fully. Analyze the questions or guidance statements for the essay completely and answer all parts. Usually graduate and professional schools are interested in the following matters, although the form of the question(s) and the responses may vary:

- **Your purpose in graduate study.** This means you must have thought this through before you try to answer the question.
- **The area of study in which you wish to specialize.** This requires that you know the field well enough to make a decision and are able to state your preferences using the language of the field.
- **Your intended future use of your graduate study.** This will include your career goals and plans for the future.
- **Your special preparation and fitness for study in the field.** This is the opportunity to join and correlate your academic background with your extracurricular experience to show how they unite to make you a special candidate.
- **Any problems or inconsistencies in your records or scores, such as a bad semester.** Be sure to explain in a positive manner and justify the explanation. Since this is a rebuttal argument, it should be followed by a positive statement of your abilities. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to provide this information outside of the personal statement.
- **Any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in the application, such as a significant (35 hour per week) workload outside of school.** This, too, should be followed with a positive statement about yourself and your future.
- **You may be asked, "Why do you wish to attend this school?"** This requires that you have done your research about the school, and know what its special appeal is to you.
- **Above all, this statement should contain information about you as a person.** They know nothing about you unless you tell them. You are the subject of the statement.

Determine your approach and style of the statement

There is no such thing as "the perfect way to write a statement." There is only the one that is best for and fitting for you.

There are some things the statement should not be:

- Avoid the "what I did with my life" approach.
- Avoid the "I've always wanted to be a " approach.
- Avoid a catalog of achievements. This is only a list of what you have done, and tells nothing about you as a person. Normally, the statement is far more than a resume.
- Avoid lecturing the reader. For example, you should not write a statement such as "Communication skills are important in this field." Any graduate admissions committee member knows that and is not trying to learn about the field from the applicant. Some statements do ask applicants about their understanding of the field.

These are some things the statement should do:

- It should be objective, yet self-revelatory. Write directly and in a straightforward manner that tells about your experience and what it means to you. Do not use "academese." This is not a research paper for a professor.
- It should form conclusions that explain the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself and your field, your future goals, and your career plans. Draw your conclusions from the evidence your life provides.
- It should be specific. Document your conclusions with specific instances, or draw your conclusions as the result of individual experience. See below a list of general words and phrases to avoid using without explanation.
- It should get to the point early on and catch the attention of the reader.
- It often should be limited in length, no more than two pages or less. In some instances it may be longer, depending on the school's instructions.

Words and phrases to avoid without explanation

significant
interesting
challenging
satisfying/satisfaction
appreciate
invaluable
exciting/excited
enjoyable/enjoy
feel good

appealing to me
appealing aspect
I like it
it's important
I can contribute
meant a lot to me
stimulating
incredible
gratifying
fascinating

meaningful
helping people
I like helping people
remarkable
rewarding
useful
valuable
helpful