

Writing Your Personal Statement

THINGS YOU NEED TO KEEP IN MIND:

- What they read between the lines: motivation, competence, potential as a graduate student.
- Emphasize everything from a positive perspective and write in an active, not passive voice.
- For each point you make, be sure to provide an example.
- Don't make excuses, but you can talk about mistakes you've made as learning experiences.
- If something significant happened that affected your grades you may state it, but write about it in a way that shows your perseverance.
- Make sure everything is linked with continuity and focus.

WRITING THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

PART ONE: THE INTRODUCTION

- This is where you tell them what you want to study. For example, I wish to pursue a PhD degree in materials science and engineering with an emphasis in silicon.
- Why you are applying to this specific school – indicate its strengths.

PART TWO: SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE DONE AS AN UNDERGRADUATE

- Important classes you took that stimulated your desire for graduate study, such as a specific project for a class, etc...
- Research you might have done. Indicate with whom, the title of the project, what your responsibilities were and the outcome. Write technically, professors are the people who read these statements.
- Work/internship experience, especially if you had any kind of responsibility for testing, designing, researching, etc...

PART THREE: WHAT YOU HAVE DONE WITH YOUR TIME

- If you graduated and worked for a while and are returning to graduate school, indicate what you've been doing while working: company, work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned. You can also indicate how this has prepared you for graduate study.

PART FOUR: INDICATE WHAT YOU WANT TO STUDY IN DETAIL

- Indicate your area of interest, then state questions you might have which are associated with the topic, i.e. what you might be interested in studying. You should have an area of emphasis selected before you write the statement.
- Research information about the department, the professors, and their research. Are there professors whose interest areas match yours? If so, indicate this, as it demonstrates that you have done your homework and are highly motivated.
- End your statement in a positive and confident manner with a readiness for the challenges of graduate study.

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement that accompanies your application for graduate study is very important to the admissions committee and is often a crucial factor in the decision to admit. A clear, well-focused statement reveals your potential for graduate work and may overcome average grades and test scores.

First, make sure that your objectives can be met in the intended area of study. To help determine this, carefully review information from talking to professors and reviewing materials from the prospective department. Acquaint yourself with the prospective department by scanning the website and visiting the department if possible. You should contact faculty to clarify issues and learn more about the research environment of the department. You may be applying to several institutions, but your statement should show a commitment to and a compatibility with the goals and the focus of the specific program for which you are writing the statement.

Second, be as specific as possible about the direction you wish to pursue in your area of interest and in stating your educational objectives. As you write your statement, keep this as your main focus. A naïve, non-reflective statement will not give the committee the information it needs about your ability to analyze problems and organize your thoughts on complex subjects in the major field of study. This does not mean that reviewers do not appreciate a statement that shows imagination and creativity. Demonstrating these talents can enhance your application. However, while you are writing, do not lose sight of the expression you must give to your proposed educational objectives. Don't hesitate to write many drafts. You should ask faculty members in your department to assist you as you revise your statement.

The review committee should be aware of anything extraordinary in your academic background. If your grades suffered in a particular semester because of a demanding work load or an illness, for example, an explanation should be provided. You should give the review committee a sense of your achievements within the context of your life experiences. Sharing your motivation and passion for graduate study and your perseverance in enduring past difficulties or obstacles help to provide a complete picture of you and your potential to succeed in a graduate program.

Lastly, since many schools ask you to address certain questions or ask that your statement include specific information, you must make sure you have addressed all points. When you have finished writing, proofread your statement for spelling, grammatical, and typographical errors. Mistakes of this kind can be very distracting to the content of your statement. Be sure to have others assist you in proofreading your statement in its final format. Your writing should reflect the clearest and most persuasive effort of which you are capable.