

WRITING THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Before you begin writing, read the essay question(s) carefully (if provided) to find out what the university expects you to cover in your personal statement or statement of purpose (SoP). While you don't have to stick only to the questions asked, you must be sure to answer them all in your SoP. Refer to your notes from the background research and write about two handwritten pages in response to the essay question. Go through them the next day.

Remember that your essay has the following objectives:

Show your interest in the subject. Rather than saying that you find electronics interesting, it is more convincing to demonstrate your interest and your level of competency by talking about any projects you may have completed involving electronics. Be sure to include what you have learned from these experiences. If you have taken the initiative to do things on your own, now is the time to talk about them.

Show that you have thought carefully about further studies, know what you are getting into, and have the confidence to complete the objective. Avoid sounding opinionated, conceited, pedantic or patronizing. Your SoP should show that you have researched the school and program and ensure that your reasoning for choosing that school is individualized and based on fit, not solely the school or program's reputation.

Keep the essay focused; each sentence you use should strengthen the admissions committee's resolve to admit you. So while you may have done several interesting things in life, avoid falling into the trap of mentioning each of them. Your resume is where you can list achievements. Try to focus on experiences that relate to your given field, why you chose this specific school and/or program, or experiences that give an idea of who you are and where you want to go. Remember that you have very little space to convey who you are, so make every sentence count.

Pitfalls your essay must avoid:

- It is a repetition of the resume or other information available from the application form
- It could have been written by just about anybody
- Your individuality does not come through
- It is not an honest account in response to the essay question
- It has embarrassing, highly personal and emotional content that should be avoided unless it makes a unique, creative point

An account of how you overcame difficult family circumstances, illness, or a handicap, would be a valid point to include in your essay. However, avoid emotional language.

EDITING AND REWRITING

Once you have written your essay, take another 7-8 days to improve and polish your statement. Read your essay carefully, and enlist the help of others to proofread. It may also be helpful to put your essay away for a couple of days and then read it as if you are an admissions representative for the school you are applying and have already read hundreds of essays. Consider your content and whether your statement would stand out as unique and interesting.

Flow

While each paragraph should make a complete statement on its own, the essay should logically progress from paragraph to paragraph. Avoid making an abrupt shift between ideas in two consecutive paragraphs.

Structure

Structure follows naturally from flow. Do all the paragraphs mesh together to form a complete essay? Does the essay, through a logical progression of ideas, demonstrate your interest, enthusiasm, and fit in the department you have applied to? Does your essay have an interesting beginning that hooks the reader and makes them want to read more? Does your essay leave the reader feeling satisfied, while avoiding cliché statements?

Language

Avoid slang, abbreviations, and contractions. For acronyms, use the full form the first time and show the acronym in parentheses. Use grammatically correct English and ALWAYS read your essay carefully for spelling mistakes before you send it off. Your computer's spell check may not flush out all the errors. Try to make sure your essay is free of unnecessary adverbs, articles, and pronouns (for instance, a careful reading may yield several "the's" that are superfluous).

Tone

Use a consistent tone throughout the essay – not doing so will only confuse the admissions counselors reading your statement. Your SoP should be professional, yet informal as if you are engaging in a discussion with a Principle or Head of Department. While you should avoid flowery language and clichés, there is no harm in looking for the most apt phrase or sentence. Be careful while using humor and preferably avoid it - it can misfire and harm your chances.

Layout

Be sure that your essay is in a legible font that is between sizes 10-12pt. and avoid printing on any special stationery or letterhead. It is important to ensure that the school name and the program that you are applying for are written and spelled correctly and mentioned in your essay. Include a header in the top right-hand corner with your name and the name of the program you are applying to. Your header should be in a smaller font than the rest of your essay.

POLISHING - THE 'IN THEIR SHOES' CHECK

Put your essay away for a day or two. When you take it out, lay it face down for two minutes while you put yourself in the admissions committee's place. Imagine yourself to be a professor or graduate student who is going through a few hundred applications and classifying them into 'yes', 'maybe' and 'no' piles. Think of how you would look at SoPs and try to read yours through a stranger's eyes. What do you see?

- Remember that for graduate school, your essay needs to display great writing. What the school is looking for is a competently written statement of goals and interests that demonstrates how you think. They expect to see the following in an essay –
 - What areas are you interested in and why?
 - How well defined your interests are
 - Are these interests based on experience (academic or on the job) that the school may find useful?
 - Where do you see these interests taking you?
 - How do you think graduate school will help you?
 - What experience have you had that will help?

Does your essay cover these points? Does it do so in an honest and interesting manner? Many of the students applying will have backgrounds similar to yours, so avoid clichéd ideas.

- Are you repeating information that is available from the resume? Do so sparingly, and only if you are making a point about your learnings or achievements during that experience. Eliminate information that sounds like repetition or does not actively contribute towards making a point in your essay.
- Does your essay have an interesting beginning? This need not be witty, but should persuade the reader to stay with your essay.
- Have you talked about specific incidents that illustrate your interest or familiarity with the subject? These incidents might include, for example:
 - A college or work project that was instrumental in confirming your interest in the field (be sure to include a recommendation from your guide!),
 - Extra-curricular activities that brought out useful aspects in you (leadership skills or team activities are particularly helpful for business school applications!),
 - A book or person who had a strong influence on you
- Does the essay bring out your personality? Or could it have been written by just about anybody?
- Have you mentioned why you are applying to that particular school? Does this section of the essay demonstrate that you have researched the school and the program? DO NOT stop at the standard formula phrase, 'I am applying to XYZ because of its great reputation in _____.'
- Does your essay flow smoothly? If it is choppy and abruptly jumps from paragraph to paragraph, your readers will have a tough time reading your essay. Make it easy on them – smooth your transitions between paragraphs.
- Is the tone too formal or not formal enough? Be professional yet informal – the tone you would take with your Principal or Head of Department.
- Does the essay end well? Does it leave the reader with a sense of completion? Avoid usage of cliches like, 'I hope the admissions committee finds my application up to their expectations.'

This self-check will yield a few ideas for improvement. Use it at least 3-4 times during this last stage of polishing up your SoP.

POLISHING - SHOWING YOUR STUFF AROUND

It is essential to show your SoP to a few people whose opinion you respect – an English teacher from school, a professor, an older friend, a parent, or a relative. Include among these, 2-3 people who know you well. Ask your readers to pay particular attention to the following points:

- The beginning and the end – do they hold interest?
- The smooth flow of ideas – does each paragraph smoothly give way to the next?
- The structure – does each paragraph bring home a central idea and contribute to the overall objective of the essay?
- The style and language – are they appropriate and consistent? Does the essay have too many cliches? Does it repeat particular words or phrases too often? Does it have too many superlatives?
- The tone – is it unnecessarily boastful or overly modest?

- The quality of the essay – is it boring? Does it bring out the writer's personality? Does it include superfluous information? Or conversely, are there incidents or aspects the essay should mention?

Ask your readers to write their comments on the essay and spend some time discussing possible improvements. Listen to their suggestions carefully but remember that this is your essay. You do not have to implement every suggestion, only those that make sense to you.

POLISHING - THE FINAL PRINTOUT

Once you have the final draft ready, do the following before you print/submit it:

- Run a spelling and grammar check
- Read the essay carefully two to three times for spelling and/or grammar errors the program did not detect
- Look for and correct any anomalies found throughout the essay
- Choose a readable font and size, nothing fancy. Avoid special effects like underlining, boldface and italics (except in the title, if you have one). Use only black ink, font size 10 to 12. Do not use special stationery or your letterhead
- Make sure that the school and program mentioned in the essay are correct. **THIS IS IMPORTANT**
- Include a header in the top right-hand corner with your name and the name of the program you are applying to. Use a smaller font size for this.
- Make sure that the printer cartridge is good enough to print clear, crisp copies. Put in a good-quality sheet of white paper. Keep the printed copy carefully in a folder until you are ready to transfer it to the application envelope.