

How to write an sop for grad school

[Education](#)



HOW TO WRITE A WINNING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR A GRADUATE SCHOOL

Compiled by Shoukat Iqbal Khattak Faculty Member Bahria

University of Management Sciences-Karachi campus E-mail: shoukat.

edu. pk Developed & Created by Anthony O. Okobi using:

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Introduction A written statement of purpose is a standard requirement for

graduate school admission. It is a tool for the faculty on graduate school

admissions committees to assess the knowledge, experience, motivation,

intellectual maturity and readiness of applicants to pursue

graduate education at their institution. The statement of purpose is a crucial

component of the graduate school admissions process. It can determine

whether an applicant is accepted or rejected, irrespective of their other

qualifications.

This document outlines the 5 stages that a graduate school applicant should

go through in order to write an impressive and successful statement of

purpose. Stage I: Do your Homework 1. Browse through the websites of the

schools/departments/programs of interest to you. Obtain brochures and

booklets and read through them carefully. Highlight the aspects of the

programs that appeal to you. 2. Read up on the research interests and

projects of the faculty in the schools/departments/programs. Read

publications from a faculty of interest. 3.

Browse through recent articles from the research field of interest and try to get a general understanding of how the field developed and what are its current problems and challenges. Stage II: Reflect and Brainstorm (on paper)

1. Reflect on your intellectual development. • What and when were the major moments in your life that have led you to your current research interest(s) and school/department/program? • What or who influenced your decision or interest (i. e. role models)? • What quality about them appealed to you? 2. Why did you choose your research topic(s)/field/school? . Why did you choose your undergraduate major? 4. What are your career goals? • Where do you see yourself in 10 years? • What do you hope to accomplish? • What drives you? What motivates you? Stage III: Outline your Statement of Purpose

1. From the results of Stage II, determine a central theme/topic that stands out or dominates your reflections and brainstorm. 2. Using bullet points and brief comments/statements, organize your reflections and brainstorm ideas that strengthen the central theme/topic of your statement of purpose. Concentrate on your life experiences and give specific examples.

• Put down only those things that excite you. • Do not make things up! 3. Your outline should cover these areas and, preferably, in this order: • What aspects of the school/department/program appeals to you? • What are your research interest(s)? • How did you become interested in your current research topic/area? • How did you prepare or are preparing to address the issues in this research area/topic (i. e. research experiences, courses, etc.)? • What are your future goals for graduate school (i. e. Ph. D.)? What are your career goals (i. e. professorship)? • What characteristics of the school/department/program can help you accomplish your goals? • What positive aspects do you bring to the school/department/program? Stage IV:

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Write Draft of Statement of Purpose 1. When writing your statement of purpose:

- Always use positive language when referring to yourself.
- Give detailed, but concise examples.
- Use transition words, sentences and paragraphs. Your statement must read smoothly.
- Skip a line after each paragraph.
- Refrain from starting neighboring paragraphs the same way.

Avoid using vocabulary that you do not know.

- Refrain from repeating yourself.
- Have strong opening and closing paragraph.
- Stay within the 2 – 3 page limit!
- Thank the admissions committee for their time at the end of your statement of purpose.

Stage V: Ask for Critique, Revise and Edit 1. When you are finished with your draft statement of purpose, read it out loud to yourself and make corrections. 2. Ask friends, colleagues and professors to read your edited draft. Taking their comments into consideration, revise and edit your draft. EXAMPLE

Courtesy of copyright © 2012 Study Mode, Inc. The following is a shortened sample SOP (with technical details removed.) Expert comments at the end of the paragraphs point out important features. After one year's work experience as a research technician at [redacted], one of the US's leading research institutes, I want to return to academic study and undertake graduate studies in Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics at the University of [redacted].

1. Stating what you are doing now and what you are applying for is a simple, direct way of starting an SOP.

After graduating with a first class degree from [redacted], University of [redacted], I felt I should gain some practical experience working in a research environment to gain first-hand knowledge of what the life of a research scientist entails. I have loved every minute of my work: especially

the opportunity to participate in cutting-edge projects and discuss ideas with senior biologists. I soon realized that, although I enjoy handling the complex equipment and processing the results, I am not going to be satisfied with carrying out routine procedures under the direction of others.

I want to be part of the team that directs the course of the project. My senior colleagues have encouraged my ambition and feel that I have the potential for graduate studies. 2. Notice how the student tries to analyze the reasons for her choices. My love of biology started in high school. We had a young and enthusiastic teacher, Mrs. [redacted], who took us on field trips and visits. She made sure we did as much practical work as was feasible, and demonstrated experiments that we hadn't the equipment or time to do ourselves. She also encouraged us to read.

I remember the impact reading Maynard Smith's *The Theory of Evolution* had on me: I wanted to be able to explain such important ideas as clearly as he did. Quite naturally my first thoughts about a future career tended towards teaching – I wanted to be another Mrs. [redacted]. 3. It is good to explain how you became interested in your subject. However, don't go too far back! Notice that a specific example helps create interest. At undergraduate level, my interests became more focused. Although physiology and ecology came easy to me, it was biochemistry and cell biology that really captured my interest.

We were fortunate to have good laboratories and excellent professors. I found that cell biology was an interdisciplinary undertaking: today you need a foundation in chemistry, physics and even IT to be at the forefront in this subject. This interdisciplinary aspect of the subject suits my abilities well. I

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have always performed well in all sciences subjects and find it challenging to apply the knowledge to practical problems. For this reason I chose to undertake a project in my final year on the behavior of protein molecules in high energy fields at [redacted].

The scientists at [redacted] were impressed with my practical skills and were happy to give me a recommendation that led to my present job. 4. Details of courses and projects help to show focus. (This student went on to describe another important college project. She also gave a full description of her current scientific work.) Many people have asked me why I did not proceed directly to graduate studies after graduating. The answer is that I wanted to make sure that I had chosen the right subject and the right place before embarking on a course of study that would involve many years of my life.

The one-year gap has also given me time to work with the local Natural History Society: we take families on Sunday trips to the nearby National Park to help create awareness about environmental issues. I have also been a member and organizer of the [redacted] Film Society: we watch and discuss films from all over the world. I am looking forward to furthering my interest in film in the [redacted] Film club, at your university, and I also hope to use my passion for teaching in the [redacted] Social Outreach program. . Explain the reasons for any unusual features of your career (taking a year out, poor performance, etc.). Include social and extracurricular activities to show balance in your life or because they are relevant to the course. In selecting the University of [redacted], I have been influenced by the way your research program addresses biological questions at the levels of molecule,

gene and cell. I am particularly looking forward to such courses as Developmental Biology and Bioinformatics.

I am also excited to interact with Professors [redacted] and [redacted] whose work is closest to what I want to pursue for the original research component of the MS degree. I have been corresponding with [redacted], a current student, from whom I have learned about the collaborative environment at [redacted] where I will interact with talented students, teachers and industry professionals. I believe that I will be able to contribute to and learn from the academically challenging environment at the University of [redacted].

6. Try to show that you are fully familiar with the course you are applying for.