

# WRITING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



## ***What is a statement of purpose?***

The Statement of Purpose (often called “letter of intent” or “application essay” by various educational institutions) is one of the most important components of your application process. This document provides the admissions committee with information that allows them to become more acquainted with who you are; what you want to study at graduate school and why; experiences you have in the field; and what you plan on doing with the degree once you have mastered it. A statement of Purpose also serves as a writing sample and interview.

## ***Tips on Writing a Statement of Purpose***

1. Be Yourself. Be mindful that you are seeking a program that is a good match for you. Do not disguise who you are or second-guess what the committee is looking for.
2. Write a Strong Opening. You want to stand out from the multitude of other applicants. Write an opening that grabs the reader’s attention. Please visit this site for assistance on writing a strong opening statement.  
<http://www.ceu.hu/admissions/statement-tips>
3. Frame the points you wish to make in a positive light. You do not want to reveal weaknesses in your personality.
4. Describe an important experience that is relevant to the program of interest. It is usually good to place this portion of the essay towards the opening. This experience may have contributed to the person that you are today. Make a point to note that in your writing.
5. Be Specific, Concise, Honest and Unique.
6. Describe why you are a good match for their program. Tell the committee about your skills and interest in that particular program. Be specific and thoughtful.
7. Talk about your goals. Explain how a graduate degree will help you accomplish those goals.
8. Explain any shortcomings in your background. (i.e. You had a poor GPA during your freshman year in college. Put a positive spin on this explanation

and illuminate how your GPA has improved as you matured.)



When writing a Statement of Purpose, your thoughts and ideas can become quite overwhelming as you struggle to create an effective essay that captures who you are and why you are applying. The following advice is another friendly measure in helping you write that winning essay:

- Follow the Institution's instructions on how they want the Statement of Purpose to be written.
  1. Word Count
  2. Number of Pages
  3. Format (spacing, margins, font size, etc.)
- Examine samples written by other students who have submitted successful letters of intent. This will help you get a better understanding of the format. Of course, please do not copy their work. Write your own letter of intent. See samples at <http://www.essayedge.com/promo/samplework>
- Write a first draft. Read the questions again. Make sure that you have effectively answered the questions provided by the institution.
- Ask a professor, counselor or someone that you trust to read your first draft and provide any feedback on its content.
- Once you have received adequate feedback, make the necessary changes to your essay and prepare your final draft. The final draft should contain strong sentence variety and be free of spelling and grammatical errors. Please visit this link for assistance on writing your final draft. <http://www.essayedge.com/graduate/essayadvice/course/>
- Make sure that you have established your voice in your final draft. Your tone in the essay should reflect what is special, diverse, unique, or impressive about you.
- Save! Save! Save! Be sure to keep a backup file of your document. A portion of this essay may be useful for writing another letter of intent to another college or university. You definitely do not want to submit the same essay when applying to multiple schools.



If you find that you are still having difficulties completing your Statement of Purpose, do not stress. Take a few days and put this task aside. You will find that other activities will jog your mind and creativity, providing you with ideas and content to incorporate into your paper. A Statement of Purpose requires time and thoughtfulness. You want to sell yourself to the committee and in order to do that you need to put your best foot forward. Be honest. Most importantly, be yourself.

## Things to Avoid When Writing a Statement of Purpose

- ✓ Errors, misspellings, poor English
- ✓ Submit a handwritten essay (unless requested)
- ✓ "Talk down" to your audience. Your audience does not need to have basic terminology defined for them. Be mindful that they are already experts in the program that you are applying for.
- ✓ Be too personal in your essay. Do not focus on deep personal problems or excuses for past performances or experiences.
- ✓ Be repetitive or too general in your statements.
- ✓ Criticize other school programs
- ✓ Use uncommon words that look like they came from a thesaurus.
- ✓ Write an autobiography. You want to give the committee a sense of who you are but they do not want to hear about your entire life story. Be specific and mindful of your personal details.
- ✓ Submit untruthful or irrelevant information in your essay.
- ✓ Plagiarism. You do not want to copy and submit another student's letter of intent.
- ✓ Be overly informal.

## General Formatting for a Statement of Purpose

We encourage the following:

- ◆ Maximum Page Length: 2 (do not exceed the limit)
- ◆ Double-spaced
- ◆ 1-inch Margins
- ◆ Times New Roman 12 pt. Font (preferred)

Check with the department you are applying to for specific guidelines.

## Additional Online Resources

- ◆ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- ◆ <http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx>
- ◆ <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/gcallaghan/graduate/winningstatement.htm>
- ◆ <http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm>
- ◆ <http://www.infozee.com/application-issues/essays-sop.htm>
- ◆ <http://www.english.ucsb.edu/node/1743>
- ◆ <http://www.butler.edu/pre-graduate-advising/personalstatement/>
- ◆ <http://cai.ucdavis.edu/sop/sopindex.html>



Please do not hesitate to contact the College of Charleston Career Center for counseling or advice on creating your Statement of Purpose.

*Please visit our website:*

<http://careercenter.cofc.edu/>

We also have a wide variety of reading material that would be of great assistance to you. So please feel free to stop in to browse our library of resources.

**Location:** Lightsey Center, Room 216, 160 Calhoun St., Charleston, SC

**Phone:** (843) 953-5692    **Fax:** (843) 953-6341    **Email:** CareerCenter@cofc.edu

**Office Hours:** 8:30 – 5:00 pm, Monday – Friday, Call for an appointment.

**Drop In Hours:** 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Monday – Friday, (for quick questions only, approximately 15 minutes or less)



You may also visit the Writing Lab at the Center for Student Learning located inside the Addlestone Library (1<sup>st</sup> floor). The lab consultants provide one-to-one assistance on writing a letter of intent. [Walk-in and appointment times available—please call for special requests].

*Visit their website for more details:*

<http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab/index.php>

**Location:** Addelstone Library, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Room 107, 205 Calhoun St., Charleston, SC

**Office Hours:** [*fall and spring semesters*] 8:30 – 5:00 pm, Monday – Friday  
[*summer hours vary*]

**Phone:** (843) 953-5635    **Fax:** (843) 953-5798