

# Write a Statement of Purpose

Your grades and test scores will determine whether or not you will be considered for admittance to graduate school. Your personal statement can help determine if you are unique enough from the other qualified applicants to actually be admitted.

## Before writing....

### Read the question!

A fantastic essay that does not answer the question the admissions committee asks will get you nowhere. Read the question, re-read the question, and then write your personal statement with the question constantly in mind.

### Develop a theme

Graduate school personal statements need a thesis, organization, cohesiveness, and direction. The essay question is usually structured to give leeway to be creative, so take advantage of the writing freedom. Develop a creative theme that answers the essay question and gets across your message. Remember, the admissions committee reads hundreds of essays. Make sure you write one that stands out!

### Read example admissions essays

Read a few essays and find out what you like and dislike about each!

### Remember..

Make yourself stand out!

Showcase what makes you unique

Get feedback

For assistance with your writing needs, make an appointment with a Writing Specialist or a Peer Tutor through the UCI Center for Excellence in Writing and Communication:  
[www.writingcenter.uci.edu](http://www.writingcenter.uci.edu)

## Need help getting started? Think about these questions...

- ✓ What is special, distinctive, unique, or impressive about you or your life story?
- ✓ How did you learn about this field?
- ✓ What characteristics and skills do you possess that enhance your prospects for success?
- ✓ Have you overcome any unusual obstacles?
- ✓ Are there any gaps in your academic record that you want to explain? (You may want to explain this in an addendum vs. SOP.)
- ✓ What are the most compelling reasons for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
- ✓ What career (related to your graduate program) are you interested in pursuing?

## When writing....

### Be positive

You've graduated from UCI, you have career goals, and over the past four years you have accomplished a lot. Be proud and positive and try to avoid the negative. If it sounds like you do not have confidence in your own accomplishments, the admissions committee will not have confidence in you.

### Give details

Anyone can claim to be assertive, intelligent, creative, ambitious, and analytical. You need to prove that you have the skills and characteristics you possess. If you claim you can research well, explain why and give examples. If you cannot backup your talents, then they are not worth mentioning. Explain your feelings but avoid words like *meaningful*, *invaluable*, and *rewarding*. This is a "personal" statement. Explain events in detail because they reveal who you are. It is better to have a few great points and stories than a lot of un-descriptive generalities.

### Seek help

The personal statement should never be completed alone. Have friends, family, and advisors give constructive comments and criticism.

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## Do

- ✓ Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis
- ✓ **Before you begin writing, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it**
- ✓ Use concrete examples from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants
- ✓ **Write about what interests and excites you - that's what the admissions staff wants to read**
- ✓ Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead - be careful with using an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene
- ✓ **End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis**
- ✓ Revise your essay at least three times
- ✓ **In addition to your editing, ask someone else to critique your statement for you**
- ✓ Proofread your statement by reading it out loud or into a tape recorder and playing it back
- ✓ **Write clearly and succinctly**

## Don't

- ✗ Include information that does not support your thesis
- ✗ **Start your essay with "I was born in..." or "My parents are from..."**
- ✗ Write an autobiography, itinerary, or resume in prose
- ✗ **Endeavor to be a clown, although gentle humor is okay**
- ✗ Be afraid to start over if the essay just isn't working or fails to answer the essay question
- ✗ **Try to impress your reader with confusing vocabulary**
- ✗ Rely exclusively on your computer to check your spelling
- ✗ **Provide a collection of generic statements**
- ✗ Give weak excuses for your GPA or test scores
- ✗ **Lie or exaggerate**

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## Sample Outline

### Opening Paragraph

State your general reasons for pursuing graduate study and introduce yourself to the selection committee in a compelling manner. Make it interesting; the committee members will read many applications so be sure yours gives them a sense of your particular talents and individuality.

### Background

Describe your community and family background and tell how your interest in and your knowledge of your chosen field developed. Describe any personal attributes and qualities that would help you complete graduate study successfully, such as determination in achieving your goals, initiative and ability in developing ideas, and capacity for working through problems independently.

### Qualifications

Explain those experiences that will serve as a foundation for your forthcoming graduate work.

*Discuss:*

1. Your expertise and accomplishments in your field
2. How your undergraduate studies relate to what you intend to do in graduate school
3. Specific learning experiences that demonstrate your motivation and inspiration for continued study
4. Other relevant experiences such as jobs or community activities, including names of organizations and concrete detail

### Specific Goals

Express the specific training and background that you would like to acquire while in your graduate program. Your specific goals should be consistent with the goals and training objectives of the department to which you are seeking admission.

### Closing Paragraph

Leave the reader with a strong sense that you are qualified and will be successful in graduate or professional school. Here, as throughout your statement of purpose, try to be as brief but as informative as possible.