



Personal Statement vs. Statement of Intent

The objective of a personal statement or statement of interest is to provide the admissions committee with a sense of who you are and your motivations aside from your transcripts and references.

When faced with the task of writing a personal statement or statement of intent, students often ask themselves: *Where do I begin? What type of information should I include? What exactly is the admissions committee looking for?* This resource will provide direction regarding the fundamental components of effective statement writing as required for graduate/professional school applications.

Before you start drafting your statement, it is important to know exactly what type of statement you are being asked to submit. The chart below outlines key differences between the two documents:

Personal Statement	Statement of Intent
<p>An account of your <i>personal experiences</i> that have shaped who you are and enabled you to develop the skills required for the program of interest. The statement should also convey what specifically motivated you to pursue this area of study as demonstrated through the following experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education • employment • volunteer roles • international excursions (not personal vacations) • personal life <p><u>Sample Prompts:</u> <i>Discuss your motivation to pursue a career as a _____</i></p> <p><i>Describe key experiences that have influenced your decision to pursue a career as a _____</i></p> <p><i>Discuss your career goals and the attributes that you will bring to the XYZ program</i></p>	<p>Communicates your research interests and career goals. Within the statement you are required to communicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why the subject area is of interest to you? • What you intend to research within the program? Name the professor(s) you would like to work with (if requested to do so). • The academic and/or research experiences that have contributed to your skill set? The skills you possess that will enable you to be successful in the program <p><u>Sample Prompts:</u> <i>Outline your research interests and career goals upon completion of graduate studies</i></p> <p><i>Outline the key experiences that have prepared you for graduate level studies</i></p> <p><i>Of the 3 areas of study available, provide a rationale for your selection, your key qualifications and the professors with whom you would like to study</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Skills to Highlight</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">communication skills (verbal, written, additional languages) interpersonal and teamwork skills leadership and self-management skills organization and time management skills problem solving skills and the ability to learn new things research skills/scientific literacy</p>	

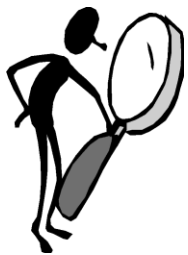


Step 1: Understand Your Audience

Admissions coordinators and committees review dozens of applications each year, therefore it is important that applicants submit a well written statement that clearly demonstrates their potential for succeeding within and completing the program. It is the responsibility of the applicant to connect their relevant experience and skills to the requirements of the program. The admissions committee is interested in applicants who have a clear understanding of the program and how its completion fits into their future career goals.



Step 2: Do Your Research



Post-graduate programs can be anywhere from 2-4 years in length. For this reason it is important for applicants know as much as they possibly can about the institution and program to which they wish to be admitted. Applicants are strongly advised to conduct research information regarding:

- Faculty credentials and/or research interests
- Research/clinical experience opportunities
- Accessibility to equipment and resources

Other factors to consider include:

- Location and/or cost of living expenses
- Program size and/or curriculum
- Student support programs (clubs, mentorship programs, extracurricular activities)

This information can be found through:

- Reviewing the school and program’s online and printed material
- Speaking with program staff, faculty, current students and graduates
- Attending Open House events or arranging a personal visit

Step 3: Self-Reflect

Conducting a thorough inventory of your academic, research, volunteer, extracurricular, employment and life experiences will provide concrete evidence of your skills and abilities as they relate to the program of interest. To start the process, make a list of all of the experiences you have had, and then reflect on each experience by answering the following questions:



- Why did I choose to participate in this activity? What did I do? With whom did I interact?
- What did I enjoy? What did I learn? Which skills did I acquire or refine?
- What did I contribute? What did others say about my performance?
- Did this experience factor into my decision to pursue the program of interest? If so, how?

Once you have completed the list of experiences, you will have to determine those which best highlight your qualifications. To decide which experiences will be included in your statement,





categorize them based on the admissions criteria they fulfill and focus on those that are most relevant and recent, in which you had the most responsibility.

Step 4: Start Writing

When writing your statement it is important to ensure that you have clearly understood the question and that you directly connect the experiences you have had to relevant components of the program for which you are applying. Providing a lengthy list of experiences without showing their value or connection to your career goals will result in a weak and unmemorable statement.

Concentrate on your opening paragraph

The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement.

Tell a story

Everyone has a story and the personal statement or statement of intent is the time to tell yours. The personal statement will focus more on your personal experiences whereas the statement of intent will act as an extension of your resume and expand upon academic, volunteer and/or employment experiences.

For every qualification or attribute you list, provide concrete evidence to back up your claim. Highlighting key experiences will serve as proof of your abilities. If done well, your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

Be specific

Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field and use the language of professionals in conveying this information. Refer to work/research experiences, classes, conversations with people in the field, books you have read, seminars you've attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you're suited to it. Since you will have to select what you include in your statement, the choices you make are often an indication of your judgment.

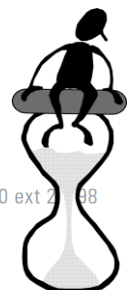
Try not to be too personal. Refrain from revealing potentially controversial experiences, opinions or political beliefs.

Watch your language

Use language that is appropriate to your experience. Be concise and do not exaggerate. Stay away from use of slang and contractions as they read as being informal. Be sure to provide an explanation of abbreviations.

Follow formatting guidelines

Statements often have character, word or page count limits, therefore use the allotted space to focus on the outcomes of your experiences and do not misappropriate space with overly detailed accounts. Also be sure to adhere to formatting guidelines (if provided) and use readable font such as Times New Roman, Calibri or Arial size 11 or 12.





Be mindful of time



It will likely take several drafts to complete the final version of your statement. For this reason it is recommended that students plan ahead to ensure they will have enough time to have their statement proofread/critiqued and implement revisions before the application deadline.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Are there any phrases that I should avoid using in my statement?

Avoid clichéd phrases/words as they present as being vague and do not add value to your statement:

- I want to help people
- I am a hard worker
- Research in this area is very important
- I want to make the world a better place
- Etcetera (etc.)

2. Is it appropriate to include details about my academic challenges or personal issues?

It is recommended that students stay away from discussion of excessively personal issues, especially when they are current or unresolved. Personal information around an illness or life event should only be included if the applicant can present the disclosure in a professional manner that is appropriate for the context of a formal application. Overly personal information may give the impression that the applicant lacks interpersonal boundaries or is seeking the program of interest as a means to “fix” themselves.

3. Is it ok to submit the same statement for a number of applications?

Re-submitting the exact same letter may seem like a convenient time saver, however it is not recommended. Although you may be applying to several programs that are similar in nature, it is to your benefit to write a customized statement for each application in which you will speak to the nuances of the program and your fit therein. Obviously you will use some of the same content, however the presentation of your qualifications should be written to match each program’s specific requirement.

4. How do I end my statement?

- I will see you in the Fall!
- Thank you for your consideration
- It will be my honor to work with you
- I look forward to the possibility of working with you

5. Where can I have my personal statement critiqued?

SCCE personal statement critique appointments can be booked via OSCARplus:

<https://www.oscarplustcmaster.ca/home.htm>.

Critiques are also available through the Student Success Centre in GH 110.





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Final Tips

- Strive to be yourself and use language that is familiar to you
- Ensure the statement is free from typos, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors
- Limit the use of humor – just because you think you are funny does not mean that others will agree
- Do not remind the school of its rankings or of its prestigious reputation
- Ensure you have directly and fully answered the question being asked

Sourced and adapted from the following resources July 2013:

Kisses of Death in the Application Process http://psychology.unl.edu/psichi/Graduate_School_Application_Kisses_of_Death.pdf

UOIT Career Centre - Personal Statement Tips <https://studentexperience.uoit.ca/content/documents/Link/Personal%20Statement%20Tip%20Sheet.pdf>

McMaster Student Success Centre - Writing Your Personal Statement http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/images/pdf/fyj/writing_your_personal_statement.pdf

Purdue Online Writing Lab <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>