



Crafting an AWESOME

Statement of Purpose

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1. Objective

The goal of your Statement of Purpose (SOP) is to outline your suitability to pursue a graduate program. You need to highlight your past technical achievements, current interests and work experience, and future directions you'd like to explore. Additionally, you need to justify why you'd be a good fit for the program, and how it'll help you achieve your future goals.

2.1. Introduction

Write a brief paragraph describing your general areas of interest (eg. Machine Learning) and your area of specialization (eg. Computer Vision for healthcare). This will route your application to the appropriate faculty and grad students for review. You should also describe why you find these fields exciting.

2.2. Previous Experience

Write 2-3 paragraphs describing your previous projects and internship experience. Elaborate on your approaches to tackle these projects and describe the skills you acquired and the results (eg. published a paper) . Make sure you connect these projects to the area of interest you described in the introduction. Prioritize high impact projects which are most relevant to the course you wish to pursue.

2.3. Current Work

Write about your current work. If you're a student, this is a great opportunity to talk about your thesis or final project. If you're a working professional, describe how your work is connected to your specific interests. If you're switching disciplines (eg. Mech -> CS), your past work may not be as relevant, so dedicate a good portion of your SOP to your current work (eg. Software Development).

2.4. Future Goals

What do you see yourself doing a few years down the line? What are your short- and long-term goals? How are they related to your interests? Describe how going to grad school will help you reach them. Talk about the skills you hope to acquire in university. Note that it's totally okay to have multiple possible careers in mind! No one expects you to have everything figured out right away :)

2.5. Program Fit

Continuing the previous thread, describe why this particular university and program would be a great match for you. Describe classes, research, and other specific factors about the university which excite you. Then highlight why you'd be a great fit for the program - how has your undergraduate life and work experience prepared you to excel in grad school? Connect it with previous paragraphs.

2.6. Conclusion

Briefly summarize what makes you an excellent candidate. You can also write about other factors not mentioned elsewhere. Are there extenuating circumstances for your academic performance? Did you face and overcome any hardships as a student? It is very important for international students to frame their academic record in the right context for the best possible evaluation.

3. Flow & Style

Don't use flowery language. Keep your SOP concise and dry. Remove any sentence which doesn't provide information about your suitability to pursue the program. Smoothly transition between paragraphs. Projects don't always have to be described in chronological order. Your SOP is not a standalone document, so make sure you maintain synergy with your LORs and your CV.

4. Formatting

Proofread your SOP multiple times and run it through Grammarly. Readability is vital!

Headings are a great way to make your SOP more readable. Don't use single spaced lines or narrow margins or tiny fonts. Don't write more than 2 pages. If you're applying to the US, use letter size (8.5 x 11) instead of A4 (8.27 x 11.69). This will ensure that your SOP doesn't get mangled when it is printed out.

5.1 Advice – Part 1

Writing a great SOP takes time! Start early and iteratively refine it until it starts to look good. Show it to other folks and get their feedback - ask your profs, your seniors, and current grad students to review it. Make sure you also read the prompt - different universities may have slightly different instructions for scope, content, word count, line spacing, or number of pages.

5.2. Advice – Part 2

Don't look at other SOPs if possible! You may end up reusing phrases or sentences and that could trigger plagiarism detectors. Also, don't plagiarize! Your application will be read by domain experts so feel free to use technical terminology while describing your projects. Don't waste all your space describing past work - reserve about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a page to describe future goals, program fit, and other stuff.

Thanks!



Questions? If you connect with me on LinkedIn, I'd be happy to answer any specific questions you may have!

Further Reading: I highly recommend checking out the following guide for grad school applications! I drew upon its contents (section 3.3) and my own application experience while creating this document.

<https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~harchol/gradschooltalk.pdf>

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