Contact Us   What We Do   GradNews   Events   Login ▾

Berkeley Graduate Division

Student Resources   Faculty / Staff   Donors / Friends   🔍 Search

Writing the Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose should convince readers– the faculty on the selection committee– that you have solid achievements behind you that show promise for your success in graduate study. Think of the statement of purpose as a composition with four different parts.

Part 1: Introduce yourself, your interests and motivations

Tell them what you're interested in, and perhaps, what sparked your desire for graduate study. This should be short and to the point; don't spend a great deal of time on autobiography.

Part 2: Summarize your undergraduate and previous graduate career

a) Research you conducted. Indicate with whom, the title of the project, what your responsibilities were, and the outcome. Write technically, or in the style of your discipline. Professors are the people who read these statements.

b) Important paper or thesis project you completed, as well as anything scholarly beyond your curricular requirements.

c) Work experience, especially if you had any kind of responsibility for testing, designing, researching or interning in an area similar to what you wish to study in graduate school.

Part 3: Discuss the relevance of your recent and current activities

If you graduated and worked prior to returning to grad school, indicate what you've been doing: company or non-profit, your work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned. You can also indicate here how this helped you focus your graduate studies.

Part 4: Elaborate on your academic interests

Here you indicate what you would like to study in graduate school in enough detail to convince the faculty that you understand the scope of research in their discipline, and are engaged with current research themes.

a) Indicate the area of your interests. Ideally, pose a question, define a problem, or indicate a theme that you would like to address, and questions that arise from contemporary research. This should be an ample paragraph!

b) Look on the web for information about departments you're interested in, including professors and their research. Are there professors whose research interests parallel yours? If so, indicate this. Check the specific program; many may require you to name a professor or professors with whom you might work.

c) End your statement in a positive manner, indicating your excitement and readiness for the challenges ahead of you.

Essential Tips

1. What the admissions committee will read between the lines: self-motivation, competence, potential as a graduate student.

2. Emphasize everything from a positive perspective and write in an active, not a passive voice.

3. Demonstrate everything by example; don't say directly that you're a persistent person, show it.

4. If there is something important that happened to you that affected your grades, such as poverty, illness, or excessive work, state it. Write it affirmatively, showing your perseverance despite obstacles. You can elaborate more in your personal statement.

5. Make sure everything is linked with continuity and focus.

6. Unless the specific program says otherwise, be concise; an ideal essay should say everything it needs to with brevity. Approximately 500 to 1000 well-selected words (1-2 single space pages in 12 point font) is better than more words with less clarity and poor organization.

Graduate Admissions

Why Choose Berkeley?

Admissions Requirements

Tuition Costs & Fees

Applying for Graduate Admission

Fellowships for Entering Students

Writing the Personal Statement

Writing the Statement of Purpose

Requesting an Application Fee Waiver

Admissions FAQ

Admissions Help Desk

Accepting Your Offer of Admission

Online Application

✉ Help Desk

Online Application System Status:

Tweets by @UCBGradAdm

Support Graduate Education

Learn more about the Campaign for Berkeley and Graduate Fellowships.

Give Now

Graduate Division

Contact Us
Privacy Statement
Graduate Publications
Workshop & Event Calendar
Website Feedback

Systems

Tango: Fellowships & GSI Hiring
Applicant Review System (Jazzee Review)

Admissions Management System (Jazzee)
GLOW (Gradlink on the Web)

Our Sites

GSI Teaching & Resource Center
Berkeley Graduate Lectures
Tanner Lectures
Back-Up Child Care
Graduate Mentoring Awards
SMART Mentoring
Grad Dashboard (for Faculty & Staff)

The Graduate Division oversees graduate admissions, fellowships, grants, academic employment, preparation for teaching, mentoring activities, professional development, track academic progress and degree milestones.