



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

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English -II (Advanced English)
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SOP- II

Welcome, to this another session in writing a successful statement of purpose as part of the writing module of this course in English. In the earlier session, we tried to make only one point; the point is the following. That a statement of purpose is the applicant's chance, is your chance to tell the possible, the prospective employer, the prospective project leader, project coordinator about yourself why you deserve that position best, and that is better done than otherwise, through points illustrated with stories, anecdotes, accounts of events and that sort of thing.

A lot of people may ask them. If you are going to write your autobiography, then are 200 words enough? because none of these applications, none of these application forms actually give you an unlimited number of words. You always have to say a lot in a little. Actually, this is so through your life unless you are an extraordinarily different, popular, another kind of writer of fiction, perhaps, there are no limits on what you can write and how much you can write. For all else, from Nobel prize-winning scientists to ordinary humble English teachers like me, like Shreesh Chaudhary, all of us work within constraints of time and space. No matter what we do.


Regardless of that, all movies are made within certain durations, all books are written within certain length, all abstracts of research papers, all research papers themselves are written that way. All classes are only of a certain duration, so it is a part of academic training. Actually, I would say it is a part of self-training in academics that we ought to learn; we ought to develop an auto clock, a bio clock that would tell us I can use no more time or no more words.

Now, if that is the case, then how am I going to describe my entire life, even if I am only 20 years old? Even if I am only 25 or 26 years old, what do I do? Even in those 25, 26, 20 years that I have been around, I have things to say. The day I spilt milk on the bed, how my mother cried and what she taught me, now this alone will take 50 words, then the teacher, then friends, all that you have said. So, what do you do? That is where this is another test you are being subjected to in writing SOP, through writing of an SOP.


An SOP reader, a reader of your statement of purpose will not only see what you have said, will also see how you have said that. Are you careful with words? Can you distinguish between useful words and useless words? Can you distinguish between cliché and jargon and simple common words that tell stories?

Do you know how to use? Do you value words? Do you use two words where others use three, or are you the one who uses four words at places where two words would suffice? So, all of these things are at test when you write an SOP. In other words, it is also a test of language. And you cannot pass this test unless you have enough practice, practice in writing. Not in listening to lectures like the present, like talks like the present, but doing what you are being advised to do, and doing so in a simple language. We will talk about that.

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- An SOP, ideally, must be written in the simplest possible language.
- It is a story, not a research paper in a scientific journal.
- Avoid all cliché and jargon. Don't say redundant things, 'There was a monkey' and 'it had a tail'.



An SOP, therefore ideally, must be written in the simplest possible language. It is a story meant for everyone is not a research paper or a scientific, for a scientific journal. No, it is not where only your peer group reads it, and all these people are trained in the basic vocabulary of science, in the basic methods of science, they are aware of issues, it is highly unlikely that your statement of purpose will be read only by your peer group there could be more.

There could be admissions officers; there could be consultants from other disciplines; there could be managers at universities and in companies who may not have undergone the same courses of studies as you have. Their jargon, their cliché might be different from yours; the same words might have different meanings in their field of work than yours. Therefore, it is

important that we must use simple language. Free from all cliché and jargon. Just saying stories and avoiding redundancy wherever we can, saving words wherever we can. That is why there is no point saying there was a monkey it had a tail; it goes without saying. Monkey has a tail. A monkey had a horn, then say that.

But if you tell the story of a buffalo, a cow, a bull, a rhino, they all have horns. What a lion, a tiger, a jackal, a dog do not have horns. If they, if you had a dog with a horn, please say that. So, avoid redundancy, avoid jargon, avoid cliché and write in simple language in simple words. Next.

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Around 1850, in Alsace, a school teacher with more children than he could afford was willing to become a grocer. This unfrocked clerk wanted compensation. Since he was giving up the schooling of minds, one of his sons would school souls.



Here is an example. A great writer, somebody called Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the greatest French writers of the last century and maybe one of the greatest in the world. This is how his autobiography begins. Such a great man and writing his autobiography called the words in English, the words. In French, it is called amo. You can check Google, and you can see his autobiography, but how simple does it say. What kind of a family was he born in around 1850 in the Alsace, a province in France, bordering Germany, bordering Switzerland.

A school teacher with more children than he could afford was willing to become a grocer. Once again, here is the story of a lower-middle-class family where you have more people than food, more people than clothes and beds for everyone to sleep in. But without saying all that in one sentence, the writer gives you the picture. That is the kind of control or language that we have to aim at. Go next.

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- This is the story of the family of Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), an eminent French writer.
- There is only one uncommon word here, unfrocked.
- All great stories, be it the *Holy Bible*, the *Ramayana* or any other are told in simple language.
- What is a simple language?- It has simple sentences and simple words. A sentence with only one verb is a simple sentence, a one or two-syllable word with well-known meaning is a simple word. These two make a simple language.



This is the story of the family of Jean-Paul Sartre, a great writer Born in 1905 and died in 1980. In this entire thing that you saw in that paragraph, there is perhaps only one uncommon word unfrocked otherwise, they are all words of everyday use. So all great stories you will see go and look up the Bible, look up Shakespeare, look up Milton. Lookup any great writer in any language you like. The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, The Panchatantra, The Upanishads, The Holy Quran in classical Arabic, other books other scriptures of other religions, look at all of them and you will find that they are all written in the simplest possible language because they are not written for only one group, one school, one set of people they are written for the world.

But, what is a simple language? If you look up a dictionary, you will find that simple does not have a simple definition. So, let us define it another way. A simple language has simple sentences in simple words, right? And what is a simple sentence? A simple sentence is one, which has only one verb. A simple sentence does not have two verbs; it has only one verb. A sentence with only one verb is a simple sentence. It is a sentence, which has only one or two syllable words, not multisyllabic words. They do not say in the foreseeable future in my perspective; they say on the other hand it is simpler. As far as I can see, finished, everything is simple as far as, as I, can, see, all monosyllabic words of everyday use.

So these two features, simple words in simple sentences, make simple language. But writing simple language is not easy. We have been for so long used to listening and speaking in

quote-unquote in simple manner ourselves that learning this might take time, but it may be worth your while, invest that time. Next.

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VIDEO CLIP

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc>

Please watch the section 00:00 – 03:00

Source: Stanford

Video description: Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford Commencement Address.

We are using three minutes of this video for academic purposes.



It is true even of spoken presentations. A lot of great speakers through the ages have always spoken simple language. Look at this little talk by Steve Jobs; you can listen to all of it, you can watch it. And I encourage you to watch it more than once. Watch it for its contents. See how people born in humble families can also make it big through hard work, determination and discipline, and of course, then, if you have all this and God is already there.

So, how these people can. So listen to it, not just for it, but listen to it not just for the stories it has to tell you. Of course, listen to it for that too, but listen to it also for language. And you will find that all great stories are almost always told in simple languages, in a simple language. Next.

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So, among the following sentences which is the simplest?

- a. My parents were not rich.
- b. My parents were not wealthy.
- c. My parents were not affluent.
- d. I was born in a family which was not very affluent.



Let us identify a simple sentence here. There are four sentences here. Which of these four is simple or the simplest? Go to the next.

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- The first is the simplest. It has only one verb, and only common words.

Let us look at some examples:



Obviously, the first, it has only one verb, and only common words. Otherwise, others have things like affluent, wealthy, maybe more fluent than more frequent than affluent, but it is less frequent than rich. So let us use the simple language. And I am going to give you some examples, how the use of simple language makes these statements of purpose powerful statements; look at it.

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My journey of self exploration began well before I can recall. I watched science fiction movies about robots and extraterrestrials and became enthralled by the idea of a machine with emotions. When I was 16 I discovered my inspiration for poetry. Poetry was to me a longing for what lies beyond pedestrian reality.



This is an example of the other kind, my journey of self-exploration etc., etc. The writer is trying to say something, but in words that may be beyond the understanding of many and where lots of people may have different opinions, different understanding their journey of self-exploration would mean one thing, and the writers might mean another. Go next.

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- There is hardly a simple sentence. All keywords, such as 'self-exploration', 'watched science-fiction movies about robot and extra terrestrials and became enthralled...' are uncommon words.
- Compare it with the following where every word and every sentence is simple.



There is hardly a simple sentence here, simple words or simple sentence here. All keywords such as self-exploration, watched, science fiction, extraterrestrials and enthralled, they are all uncommon words. Now compare this with an SOP that became successful.

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In college, we learnt a range of topics from the basics of Economics like Micro Economics, Macro Economics to those like 'History of Economic Thought' and 'Fiscal Economics'. However, the focus was more on gaining bookish knowledge, and, so, though I understand the basics of Economics, I do not understand clearly the many ways in which economics touches our life. I want answers for questions like why there is emphasis on economic parameters like GDP, when this growth is never inclusive, why the development of some economies is hugely kinked, why is it so important to have a stable political economy for the economy to develop and so on.



In college, we learnt a range of topics from the basics of economics etc, etc, it goes on. Except perhaps the names of subjects, all other words are familiar to you growth, never, why, development, hugely, kinked, why, all of these words. Next.

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- Similarly, we should not use unnecessary words. They are redundant.
- Story-telling need not take more words than allowed, but many people do not see the value of words. They often write more words than necessary. Look at the following example:



So, let us use simple words monosyllabic, bisyllabic at the most. If necessary, trisyllabic as well, but not definitely not deliberately difficult, deliberately infrequent words, that takes you nowhere. Similarly, we should not use more words than necessary, and storytelling need not take more words than necessary than permitted.

If you have been asked to write about your entire life in 200 words, please believe me, you can, but it is only that you may have to do more than one draft. Maybe two or even three drafts of four go on cutting and pruning, go on cutting and pruning and also adding until you are satisfied and until the limits within which you have to write are satisfied. Go next.

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My seventeen years of teaching experience and the ability to lead and control various departments can surely add value to your esteemed organization. At present I am working at the Leo Academy and my superiors consider me as a valuable asset for the organization.



A number of words here are unnecessary, you need not go round, or my 17 years of, you would not touch your nose this way, you can touch it straight this way. Rather than say my 17 years of teaching experience and the ability to lead and control various departments can surely add value to your esteemed organization, it will be simple. I have taught for 17 years, I have worked in various departments, and I can be useful to you. You are still saying the same thing in a better manner.

At present, I am working at the Leo Academy, not bad, but it could be simpler. You could simply say, presently, I teach at Leo or Leo Academy. My superiors consider me as a suitable asset for the organization. Fine, but you can still say simply, in a simpler manner. My colleagues treat me as an asset for the company enough. You are still saying the same thing or saving words. Next.

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- The same thing can be said in fewer and simpler words- 'I taught for seventeen years. I can work with different kinds of people'.
- Look at the example of redundancy in this quote.

Do we need 'my' before seventeen years. Similarly 'lead and control', or 'surely' or 'at present I'm working atschool and my superiors....'.



Look at more examples of redundancy. For example, when you say lead and control, one would do or when you say surely, at present I am working at this is cool in my superiors. Yeah, it is possible, but then it is also possible for you to make them briefer. You can simply say at present I teach at a school, at present I teach at Presidency College. It is easily possible for us to write within limits provided we apply our minds to it. Most of the time the problem is, SOP writers do not apply their minds. Go next.

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Look at the example of redundancy again:



- 'A valuable asset', 'young and energetic'. Many of these words add little to their sentence. Similarly look at the following instances of jargon and cliché.
- 'Independent researcher' and 'a team player'. How can you have both.
- 'Complete dedication'- Dedication is enough.
- 'Enjoy challenging assignments'- What are they.
- 'Prove myself'- To whom and for what
- 'English Post-Graduate' etc.



All these examples. Let me illustrate one or two for instance. A valuable asset; if it is an asset it is valuable. Many of these words add little to their sentence. Why would say it round out

way? Why simply say many words add little of substance or little to a sentence. Similarly, look at the following instances here again, independent researcher and a learner player.

How can you have both? Here there was another example. Somebody had said, I am an independent researcher, and then he also said, I am a team person. Now, are you independent, or are you a team member because they are contradictory. A good team member is one, who has, who speaks last, who collects all opinions and then who comes up with the best. It is not someone who begins with the beginning and in an arrogant manner.

So, for example here independent researcher and a team player, how can you be both. How can you have both? Complete dedication, can dedication by itself may not be enough. Enjoy challenging assignments, but what are your assignments first, that is important more important for writer to know, sorry, readers to know, so that your application can be placed in a perspective. Prove myself, to whom and to what. English postgraduate. What does it mean?

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ACTIVITY

Look at the following examples and identify all those words which can be easily taken away without affecting the meaning.



These are ambiguous examples, misleading. They do not tell you much about the writer behind, writer of these words. Go next.

Look at the following examples and identify all those words, which can be easily taken away because they are redundant.

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I wish to pursue Phd to get a decent job. With ever increasing unemployment in our country, a Phd from a reputed institute will allow me to survive without struggling economically. A Phd will give me the training to understand the world and report truths filtered down the ages in a subject I like. It will make me adept at finding details that have been missed.

IITGN is a premier institute and it can provide me the resources to make an impactful study. The resources range from not only texts that I presently use pirated copies of but an overall environment conducive to good research. I would like in coming years to be able to spread awareness by teaching, lecturing or informing policy in my area of study. Critical thinking about animals is necessary. I would want to be a part of conservationist agencies and movements for if we don't save the keystone species, we won't save ourselves. Lastly, my research is not only about what makes us humans but what makes us animals first.

My journey of self exploration began well before I can recall. I watched science fiction movies about robots and extraterrestrials and became enthralled by the idea of a machine with emotions. When I was 16 I discovered my inspiration for poetry. Poetry was to me a longing for what lies beyond pedestrian reality. I believe there is a personality predisposition that makes one inclined towards the pursuit of philosophy and poetry. The predisposition is one of heightened sensitivity and adrenalin rush. Without sensitivity there is no inspiration and without the adrenalin rush there is no Jonathon Livingston Seagull. Right from the "beginning" I have longed for freedom. Creativity is born out of that very need for freedom.



Look at the first two paragraphs. I wish to pursue PhD. to get a decent job. Okay, wonderful. With ever-increasing unemployment in our country, a PhD from a reputed institute will make me to survive without struggling economically. In other words, it says a PhD will help me get a job with better money, better pay packages than otherwise possible. Fine no harm. The candidate is being Frank, but must we take so many words? I wish to pursue PhD to get a decent job with according to fewer words.

With a PhD I can get, a PhD can get me a better job or PhD can get me a better job. Doctorate can get me a better job with ever increasing unemployment in our country a PhD from a reputed institute. Simply say, why do you have to say so much, a good PhD. A good PhD comes from a good university, which would not simply because you are good looking would give you a degree, you have to earn it, a PhD can help you get a good job that is enough. A good job with good money, perhaps.

You will save a lot of words. It will make me adept at finding detail, at finding details that have been missed a PhD program, ideally it ought to. Perhaps, in your case it would, but is this the best way to say, it will make me adept at finding details that have been, you can say this all this in a much simpler sentence. PhD can train me into finding missing details, finished.

Similarly, you look at the next paragraph. Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar is a premier institute, and it can provide, what is premier. Have we compare it with other places

in Gandhinagar, in Gujarat in rest of India. So, it is a premier Institute and it can provide me the resource to make an impactful study.

Once again, a number of unnecessary words. You could write it in a simple language, IIT Gandhinagar can help me get facilities for research. So, you have a large sentence with 20 words compressed into maybe seven or eight, without losing on meaning without losing clarity that is very important. While writing in fewer words, we must take care of it. This does not mean, writing in fewer words does not mean writing sloppy or writing words that do not communicate. You might have noticed we still use simple words.

I have given you another paragraph, which we would like you to do, and you will learn how to write a good SOP. And if you are not satisfied with your first draft do it again, do it again do it again, do it as many times as you can and then check because these things do not require a lot of knowledge. These things require an orientation, a sensitivity from all of us to know whether this is a simple language or this is not. Thank you very much. Good luck.