

## Quick tips for writing a letter of intent/personal statement for a graduate program

A personal statement or letter of intent is what it says, a statement outlining your intent to enter a program, explaining why you want to do this and why you are equipped to pursue this course of study.

### Key content

You can assume that the institution really wants the answers to five questions:

- What are you applying for?
- Why are you interested in (and suited for) this particular field or program?
- Why do you want to take the program at this particular university?
- What makes you an ideal candidate? (in terms of [some or all] experience, work skills, academic record, etc., and also in terms of what personal assets and qualities you bring to the program)
- How would taking this program fit in with your long term career goals, and what are they?

### Key principles for the writer:

- **The letter is the real test and demonstration of how strongly you want to enter this program.**  
e.g. If you have a true passion for law, medicine, politics, this should become apparent in paragraph one; every further paragraph should expand on, echo and support this with new info.
- **The letter should show instead of just tell**  
e.g., if you want to seem diligent and conscientious you should be giving examples that prove this rather than continually stating it.
- **The reader's time is valuable**  
The letter should only state the important things.  
The letter should be well organized around thematic paragraphs, each beginning with a strong topic sentence.
- **This letter is challenging to write!**  
It usually takes many drafts to create something effective  
Start early, get advice, and follow up with additional appointments if possible.

### A word about format:

- The personal statement is not a real letter so does not need to be set up as one. Some people title it "personal statement", or "letter of intent". The document should include the person's name on each page, possibly in small type in the right hand corner of the header, in case it becomes detached from the rest of the application.
- Font size is usually 12 point.
- Length is sometimes specified in terms of pages, numbers of words or even characters! Some places ask for two pages, not always specifying whether this means single or double spaced. If the draft is single-spaced, spans more than two pages, and seems long and repetitive, it probably is. More is not always better.

### A word about content for graduate research program letters of intent

For a graduate research program, specify your research interests and area, and give succinct information about past projects. Listing actual courses taken is usually unnecessary. Doing your homework, finding out about the program and faculty on staff, is a good step. If you have already approached a faculty member about the possibility of working with them and have received an encouraging response, you could mention this too.