Template for an Effective Statement of Interest for

Grad school Applications and External Funding

In the genre of proposal writing, the statement of interest asks you to perform exactly what the title indicates: state your interest! However, actually performing this task is much harder than it initially appears. The following template will not do the work for you, but act as a guide as you complete this difficult, yet rewarding, task.

A statement of interest is related to the cover letter in that you are presenting the skills that you will bring to the table. In essence, your statement of interest should generate interest! Please note that many grad schools supply an outline of what they want in a statement of interest (and a personal statement is different from a statement of interest). However, many do not.

Before you get down to writing your statement, you need to answer the following questions in order to build a strong outline. Your outline will act as a reference point and a guide when you write your statement of interest.

1. Why am I interested in going to graduate school? Is it a particular question that has dogged me throughout my course work? Am I interested in a particular field? Why does this field interest me? What kind of schools offer programs in my areas of interest?
2. What skills have I acquired in this area? Have I worked with someone on a research project or presented at a student conference of some kind? Have I achieved an exceptionally high grade in a particular area? What specific courses have I taken that directly relate to my field of interest? In short, you need to list your training and accomplishments in your field of interest.
3. If you are writing a statement of interest for grad school, then you might want to briefly state why you attained lower grades in a particular year BUT always put such information in a positive light.
4. What are your career objectives and long term goals?

**The Template**

1. The opening paragraph needs to be strong and incredibly clear. While the rest of your statement also requires clarity and coherence, the opening statement makes your first impression. Don’t start your statement with phrases like, “I have always loved X” or “I have always known that X was my destiny [or calling].” These statements do not tell your reader anything he or she doesn’t already know. You need to state clearly why you are interested in a particular field of study (or, if you are writing a statement of interest for a grad school, then you need to also state why that school is the one for you). You don’t need to start with your name or write the statement like a letter. This is a strong statement about your interests! In terms of external funding, the committee wants to see that you have specific interests and the skills that will allow you to successfully pursue those interests. You can use phrases like, “My primary interest lies in the field of X, in which I will explore Y and Z.” Then you need to expand a bit about why you are interested in X and also how you intend to explore Y and Z.
2. The next paragraph should expand on the interests you laid out in the first paragraph. Don’t be wordy and use tons of small prepositional phrases. You will irritate your reader and that is never a good thing to do. Committees have hundreds and hundreds of applications to review and if yours is wordy and confused, then your application will go on the “reject” pile. You may find that in explaining your research and/or interest in a particular field that you start to talk about your training. This is fine. For example, if you are interested in medieval literature, you should mention that you have taken courses in your proposed field. You should list the course title and then briefly state how this course influenced you. You might want to say “The research seminar in medieval studies sparked my interest in contemporary representations of Beowulf.” I am fascinated in the continued importance of Beowulf not only as a public text, but also as a means to understand ourselves.”
3. You need to wrap up your explanation of your interests and get into the heart of who you can work with on this project and any accomplishments that should be highlighted. Don’t try to list everything. Don’t forget that you append a list of scholarly achievements to your external funding application. In addition, you have space for this list on most grad school applications. However, simply listing a significant award in your field does not tell the committee what it took to win it. Such BRIEF explanations need to be in the statement of interest. You might also want to list one or two faculty members that you can work with on this project. In terms of external funding, you can’t be quite as succinct as your grad school statement of interest. However, you can write something like “I have contacted potential supervisors, X and Y, who have both shown an interest in my project.” You MIGHT also have done enough research to be able to state the importance of your work to the field, but you need to be careful about such proclamations when you are just starting out. Just like in a cover letter, there is a fine line between promoting your accomplishments and appearing to be arrogant. Don’t forget your RELEVANT “real world” experience and perhaps reiterate the perspective that you bring to your field of interest (you should have stated this in your opening, but restating and connecting it to your experience is always a good idea).
4. The conclusion is as difficult as the opening statement. The urge is to write something like, “I hope to hear from you soon” or something of that nature. Your goal in the conclusion is to wrap up everything you’ve just said in a pithy couple of sentences. Don’t be afraid to use the introductory phrase “in conclusion,” because it can help you to organize your thoughts. You can restate your field and the contribution that you plan to make. A specific conclusion is not always necessary so, in the end, you need to make the decision about how to exit your statement of interest.

As a final piece of advice: revise, revise, revise, and then revise again. You need to solicit advice from faculty and have others read through your work.

Good Luck!