

Statement of Purpose workshop

March 25, 2017

Outline

- First things First! What's the format? 2. Why is it important? 3. Why do you need to write it and what are schools looking at when reviewing statements?
- Aligning current experience/qualifications with graduate school/ language you can use in your SOP
- School selection, researching the schools before application and how to reach out to faculty and staff before you apply.
- Do's and Dont's of an application

Define the personal statement

- What is it?
- Why do you need it?
- What's the format?

Introduction

- Dream/Goal (first couple sentences)-committees want to see direction and goals
- Name of Program, School/Institution, Identifying Information (like being part of a federally-funded program)
- Why did you choose it?
- What sparked your interest in the program? Fit vs. Match

Body

- Show evidence of your experience that connects to your resume
- How are you the right person for this?
- Include what makes you unique and stand out –and most of all a good fit with the program
- So, inspired by someone?

Wrap up!

- Extracurriculars, Volunteer activities
- How the program helps you achieve?
- Tie back to your dream/theme

Things to demonstrate to the graduate school committee

- Compelling story
- Distinguish yourself
- Highlight strengths
- Future/forward thinking
- Overall package

Tips while writing

- Do LOTS of brain dumps, talk through.
- Question question question—start this process early.
- Document all ideas...don't delete anything at this stage.
- Write, write, and write!

Tips post writing

- Ask for reviews
- Friends, colleagues, professors, mentors
- Remember that good writing is LOTS of re-writing!
- Leave sufficient time

How to be the Fish that Stands Out in the Pond?

Why Are you 'Worth it'? Tying up Your Story with Your Goals





<https://www.metabunk.org/sk/5-mile-concentric-overlay-nums-lnet.png>

http://cdn.onlinewebfonts.com/svg/download_69568.png

STRUNK AND WHITE'S WRITERS STYLE GUIDE

OMIT THE NEEDLESS.



PREFER THE ACTIVE
TO THE PASSIVE.



DON'T BE TOO FANCY. BUT TAKE NO SHORTCUTS.



AVOID STYLES THAT ARE
LOOSE, INDEFINITE, OR COLLOQUIAL.



AVOID AWKWARD CONSTRUCTIONS.



EDIT, EDIT, EDIT!



USE FIGURES OF SPEECH SPARINGLY.



STRIP DOWN
TO ESSENTIALS.



ONE MUST MASTER THE RULES OF
STYLE IN ORDER TO TRANSCEND
THEM.



School and Program Selection

More than 4000
universities in U.S.

How do you pick the ones you can apply to?

The goal is to pick a balanced list of programs to apply to, to maximize your chances of admission.

Step 1: Do your research

Before you start your application, before you even pick your schools, the very first step is to extensively research the schools you want to apply to.

Compile a list of schools you can potentially apply to.

How to create this initial list of schools

- Talk to your professors, colleagues, your friends.
- Search online for the best graduate programs/schools in your field.
- You can even look at the university rankings in your area to assemble this initial list of schools. (A good place to start is <https://www.usnews.com/>)
- Pick as many schools as you can. This is just the rough cut of schools that you can potentially apply to. NOT THE FINAL LIST.

Step 2: Rank the schools you picked

Ok! I have the list, now what? - Rank them!

- Do your own research on the programs. Create your own ranking.
- Rank them according to the criteria that matters to you. These can include:
 - the amount and quality of research being carried out at each school.
 - faculty members.
 - ranking (if that matters to you, although it frankly shouldn't!).
 - Tuition fee and cost of living if you plan on funding your degree yourself or financial aid offered to graduate/PhD candidates if you are looking to be funded by the school.
 - the location - east/west coast, midwest, a large city or a college town.

Step 3: The Magic Formula

Step 1: Pick the total number of schools you want to apply to. A good number to start with is 6 although you can pick 9, 12 or as many schools as you want.

Step 2: Evenly divide that number into three tiers:

- **Dream Schools** – Highly competitive schools, best in your area of study, very difficult to get in. Ivy's etc.
- **Middle Tier Schools** – Schools you have a good chance of getting in (based on your profile), good programs, slightly less competitive.
- **Safe Schools** – Schools you can definitely get in.

And Voila!!! You have the list of schools to apply to.

Step 4: MOAR research!

You didn't think it was over, did you?

- Now that you have your final list of schools, do extensive research on the programs offered, faculty, their research projects.
- Find the research projects that fascinate/inspire you and the ones that might align with what you might want to do or might be related to work you have already done. And refer to these projects/professors/research groups in your statement of purpose.

Reaching out to the faculty

You want to reach out to the faculty? Great!

But before you do, make sure you **read their web page thoroughly**.

Some professors clearly ask the potential candidates to not contact them because in these cases the decision lies with the admission committee and not the individual professors.

Contacting them despite their clear message not to, will only leave a bad impression and will not help your application at all.

Go through the FAQs and all the available resources you can find before asking questions from the faculty members.

Professors are a tad narcissistic (in general, there are always outliers!)

Much like all of us, professors like to talk about themselves and their work.

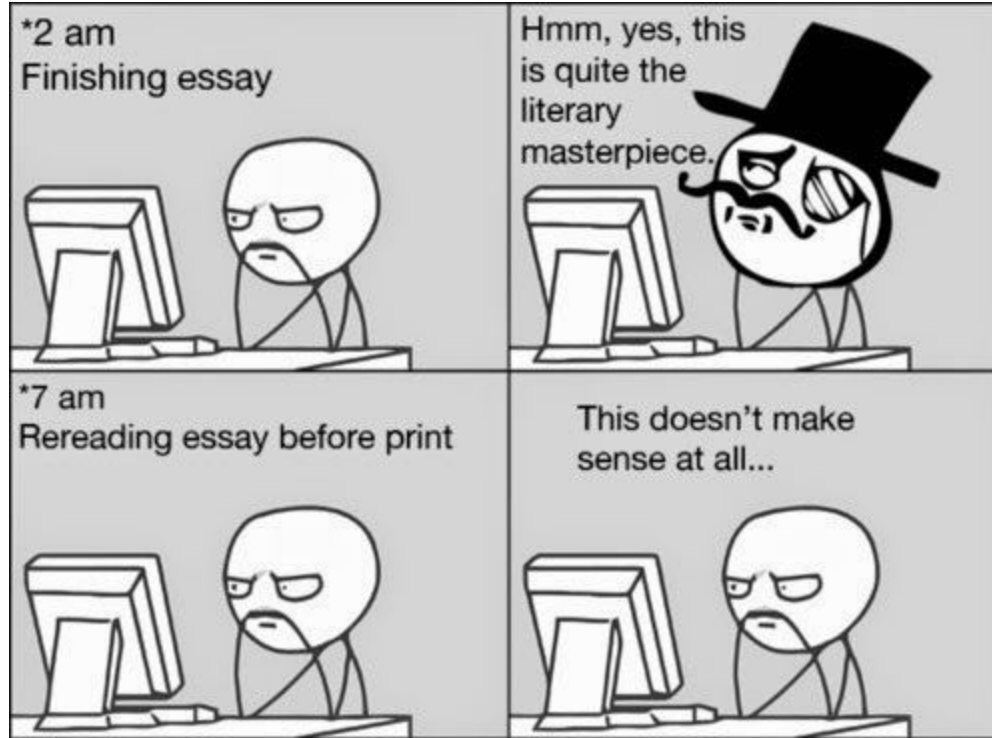
So don't forget to **do research on their work** before you reach out to them and start your correspondence with them by referring to their project/research.

Ask questions specific to their area of expertise. **Abstain from asking general questions** related to admissions or the program. Contact the admissions staff for such queries.

Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back from the professors. They are busy people (and a rather forgetful lot). But also don't bombard them with emails, **be patient**.



May the force be with you!



<http://insearchofmyzenlife.blogspot.com/2014/10/a-statement-of-purpose.htm>

Do's and Don'ts

- What's a good start?
- How much about yourself?
- Length and other instructions?

Do's and Dont's (Cont'd)

- Cliche beginnings



"Shoot for the moon, and even if you miss, you'll land among the stars."

<http://mashable.com/2013/10/28/over-used-quotes/>

Do's and Dont's (Cont'd)

- Typo's:

“I have always wanted to go to Stanford University as it has been my childhood dream to study in MIT”

- Irrelevant personal facts
- Negativity, dwelling on failures
- Jargon
- Humor

Do's and Don'ts

1. Topics to include: your motivation, research, practical, academic experience
2. Separate Statement of Purpose for every college that you apply to
3. Positive, upbeat
4. Actionable, specific
5. Memorable!
6. Relevance, relevance, relevance!