

Main Sections (Castellanos, 2000)

- Background Paragraph – who are you, where do you come from, family ancestry? Why do you want to pursue the field? What is your passion?
- What most interests you about the field? What do you want to study? What is your area of expertise?
- Experiences (show your abilities) - Academics, research, practical experience, leadership, community service - Provide specific examples - 1 paragraph per area (at minimum)
- Why graduate school? Why this specific program? What you want to learn in your training. What can the program faculty/curriculum teach you?
- Why are you a good match for the program? Who do you want to work with if accepted? How does your research/work parallel the faculty and program emphasis?
- What will you do after the training?

Important Points to Highlight

- How do your academics relate to your field of interest?
- What motivated you to pursue your area of interest?
- Identify the experiences that show your interest for the field.
- Identify the specific faculty who worked with you, who mentored you and what research you conducted under their guidance.
- Identify the names of organizations your interest for in providing service.

Questions to Answer: (Castellanos, 2000)

1. What would you like to study in graduate school? Area of specialty (children, adults, PTSD)?
2. Is there a faculty with similar research interests at the school of application?
3. Have you conducted research (alone or with faculty)?; What specific topic interests you?
4. Have you done research with McNair, UROP, SURP, HONORS and other research programs?
5. Have you received money for conducting research?
6. Have you attended professional conferences? Have you presented a poster or panel presentation?
7. Have you studied abroad?
8. Have you participated in any internships?
9. What leadership roles do you have? Are you part of a student organization, a national organization? Besides membership, have you held a position to any organization?
10. What have you done for service? What type of involvement do you have with the community? How does this relate to your interest of study?
11. What makes you a competitive candidate? What makes you different? What makes you stand out?
12. What are your short and long term goals?

Other Questions to Consider

- What writers and which particular articles in your field of study have had the greatest development of your thought?
- Who were your favorite professors in college, and why? How has each influenced you?
- What is the best paper or essay you ever wrote in your major, and what makes it good?
- What do you consider the most important book, play, article or film you have ever read/seen, and how has it influenced you?
- What is the single most important concept you have learned in college?
- If you can think of other educational milestones or guideposts, write about them and highlight their lessons.

Main Points

- Gather and evaluate your statements
- Know your program – refer to it in the paper
- Research the faculty and their research
 - ✓ Who is a good match for you?
- Sound realistic in stating your goals
- Closing paragraph must have a strong sense that you are qualified and will be successful

Other Points

- Support your statements with examples
- Focus on your strengths
- Be concise, concrete and coherent
- Organize your statement to be logical and read it out loud for proofreading
- Monitor the length of your paragraphs—Average of 4-6 sentences. (A paragraph is not a whole page).
- Implement the funnel effect—go from general to specific.

Dr. C's 7 Basic Writing Tips

Tip# 1: Don't use CONTRACTIONS.

Tip# 2: Do NOT use SLANG or COLLOQUIAL phrases.

Tip# 3: TOPIC SENTENCES—use topic sentences need to summarize the main idea or theme of the paragraph.

Tip# 4: Do NOT use VAGUE/BASIC LANGUAGE.

Bad: Overall, the internship experience was very nice.

Good: Overall, the internship experience was very beneficial; it taught the intern effective marketing skills.

Tip# 5: Do NOT use PASSIVE VOICE (Watch forms of the verb "to be"). Passive voice occurs when the verb does not show a clear relationship between the subject and predicate.

Bad: The desk seems to be brown.

Good: The desk is brown.

Tip# 6: EXPLAIN QUOTES/EVIDENCE (A+B = C). Your argument will always have a pretense (A), evidence (B), and a conclusion (C).

A: At-risk behavior in children is influenced by a variety of sources such as television.

B: Ross, Smith, and Barney (2004) demonstrated that violent TV programming caused at-risk behavior in children.

C: Findings that support a correlation between violent TV programming and at-risk behavior demonstrate the influence of outside sources upon children.

Tip# 7: Remember that WHICH and THAT are NOT interchangeable. WHICH is used for personal nouns or pronouns, and THAT is used for objects, ideas or non-personal nouns.

Bad: The copier, which is now broken, was used to make the copies.

Good: The copier, that is now broken, was used to make the copies.

Good: My friends, which are much older now, are very mature.

Exercises for Statement of Purpose

1. Explain in some detail your interest in the major you wish to pursue. What sort of graduate program are you applying to? How will this program of study further your career goals? What are your career goals? Are you interested in research and teaching? Why? Explain your interest. Does your career have a community or social goal, as well as a personal one?

How did you become interested in the field? Was it through your studies in school? Did your personal background influence your choice, your family, or the community in which you grew up?

2. What are the qualities and skills that make you special? Are you conscientious, dedicated, hardworking, concerned for others, curious, independent, cooperative, creative? Identify which of the following skills most apply to you: research and information gathering; communication; leadership; interpersonal (working well with people); creating and developing; organizing and implementing; working with social or other issues; teaching and training.

3. Relate a success story from your life and identify the qualities and skills involved in your achievement. The experience does not need to be glamorous or newsworthy. Ordinary projects or accomplishments can be real achievements.

Look for an experience that made you feel proud or good about yourself. What is it that you did? What was your role? What kinds of qualities and skills enable you to accomplish what you did?

~James Culhane, UCI (LARC), 2000

Final Thoughts (Castellanos, 2006)

Myths

1. A statement of purpose can be done in one sitting.
2. Anyone should provide me feedback on my statement of purpose.
3. I should not include anything about my personal background. I should only focus on my academics.
4. All statements of purpose are 1-2 pages
5. You need to justify your G. P. A and bad grades

Directives

1. You will need to write your statement of purpose 3-4-5 times before it is well done.
2. Pick a faculty in your field to provide feedback on content and get someone to read and revise your grammar – preferably not a peer.
3. Include information about your family, your childhood if it shaped your educational interests. Highlight your work in the community, leadership involvement, etc.
4. Certain programs expect 3-4 pages. Some programs even accept single spaced entries. Make sure you know the limit. Otherwise, others will outshine you because you are following different criteria for submissions.
5. Some applications have a section for you to explain your G. P. A or a bad grade. Many DO NOT use their statement of purpose space for these explanations.