



democratising access to higher education

Writing Personal Statements and Statements of Purpose (SoP)
Sunday, 23 October 2022



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Project EduAccess

Access to higher education is a privilege most people from marginalised communities are systematically denied through cost, information and dispositional barriers.

Project EduAccess is a modest attempt to improve inclusivity in HEIs by removing these barriers for marginalized communities in South Asia.

We hope to achieve this by providing expert mentorship, support and guidance to learners in South Asia.

Meet your panelists



Ishaan Sethi

MSc Evidence based Social
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PhD Education
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MSc
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Masters of Education Learning
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Meet your panelists



Amrita Shenoy
MSt World Literatures in English
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Nooria (Anjali)
MPhil Development Studies
University of Oxford



Chandni Chawla
LLM Human Rights, Justice and Conflict
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Aadarsh Mishra
DPhil in Engineering Sciences
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What is a Personal Statement / SoP?

Almost every graduate program requires some sort of an admissions essay in the application. It comes under different names: *Statement of Purpose*, a letter of introduction, a personal statement, a cover letter, and so on.

In this part of the admissions process universities give their applicants an opportunity to show what's beyond their grades and test scores. After all, *every person is more than just a number*.



More than just grades

- The most important thing about the statement of purpose (or personal statement) is that it ties together grades, test scores, and application and expands upon it, giving admissions officers a much more expansive window into who you are as a student and a person.
- The letter will tell them “**who you are**” and “**what you want to be**” in a much more detailed and personal way than the other components in the application package.



Basics

Length and Formatting

- For most grad school programs, your Statement of Purpose should be between 500 and 1,000 words, depending on the level of your program and your academic history and achievements.
- A grad school SOP **usually does not exceed two pages** when written in a traditional font at a readable size of 11-point or 12-point.
- Leave enough whitespace in the margins to make the statement **easy to read** for the admissions committees .
- Your SOP letter should also be double-spaced and **follow standard formatting rules** for university essays.



Basics

Questions to Answer

The following questions should be clearly answered in your SOP (in relatively this order):

- **WHO** are you (as a person and a student)?
- **HOW** did you become interested in this topic/field of study?
- **WHAT** have you done so far in the field of your choice?
- **WHY/HOW** do you want to study this field?
- **WHY** do you want to study at this university/program and **WHY** are you a good fit?



Basics

Style

Although the SOP letter is **more informal than a research paper**, make sure that your language is not only free of grammatical errors but that it is of an academic level that **reflects your educational level and qualifications**. Apply the following standards to the writing and drafting process:

- Compose using “**graduate-level**” academic writing.
- Make your **language more personal in tone** than research writing.
- Use the **active voice** and **first-person point of view** more often.
- Write **chronologically**, starting from your **most important actions** and achievements during your undergraduate years.
- Use lots of **details** — list course names, professors, methods, and specific schools and programs.



How to Write your SoP?

Let's break it down into three steps

1

2

3

How to Write your SoP?

1

2

3

Research the **university** and the **program** you are applying for. Make sure you are confident you are a **good fit for both of them**.

Pay very close attention to the university's **values, policies, history, faculty, and achievements**. This knowledge will help you stand out from the crowd and show your sincere interest in the university. Even if that seems silly, admissions committees do look for this in your letter.

How to Write your SoP?

1

2

3

Think about the **motive** and answer it in one sentence or less. This thesis will be your **starting point** for writing the rest of the letter.

Then elaborate by describing your **background**, your **hobbies** and how they **relate to the degree** you are applying for. Perhaps you changed your views on your education because of an experience, people who inspired you and valuable advice you received from your mentors.

Connect the dots and start writing.

How to Write your SoP?

1

2

3

After you've written your first draft, set it aside for a day, **breathe**.

Next, make sure you've answered the prompt and give it a **proper read through** to correct any errors. You can use tools like Grammarly etc. to check for grammatical mistakes.

Ask your **friends, family members, and colleagues** to look at it. You don't have to make all the changes they suggest, but having someone read your draft with a fresh set of eyes is one of the most effective ways to edit your work.

How to Structure your SoP?

1

Introduction

An introduction catches your readers' attention with a powerful statement.

In one or two sentences, [state your name] and why you are applying to [university] and [program].

This is your thesis, which you will elaborate on in the next paragraph.

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Middle

Now elaborate. Start by describing your background, experiences, and interests.

What made you decide to pursue a Master's degree? What are your goals now? How will the program help you achieve them? What will you contribute?

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Conclusion

Address your thesis; express sincere hope and confidence that the university/program you chose is a perfect fit for you.

State why you believe you are a perfect fit for it. End on a pleasant and polite note.

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Brainstorming Questions?

Academic/Professional Interests and Motivations

- What most **interests** you about this area of study?
- **Why** are you interested in this area and topic?
- When did you **first start** to show an interest? How did you **exhibit this interest**?

Academic Background

- What majors, classes, or other **academic experiences** have you had in this field?
- Which of your work, research, and/or **extracurricular experiences** are related to this field?

Publications/Professional Accomplishments/Awards

- What work have you **published** or **written** (thesis, dissertation, etc.) related to this field?
- Which **awards** have you received that show my ability?
- What are your short-term and long-term **goals**?
- What do you **hope** to accomplish academically?
- What sort of research or professional work do you want to do in the **future** with your graduate degree or Ph.D.?



Brainstorming Questions?

Recent Research/Professional Activities and Preparation

- What work have you been involved in recently that has prepared you for this program?
- What have you been involved in recently to show your interest in this field?

Why are you interested in this university and graduate program?

- What does this university/program offer you that other schools don't?
- Which courses and professors most interest you?
- What makes you a "good fit" for this institution?
- What will you bring to this program?

What makes you stand out as a graduate school candidate?

- What other information about you should the school know that will attract them to you?
- Do you have any unique abilities or circumstances?

Do you have any weaknesses or missing elements you need to explain?

- Do you have any semesters of low grades that you may need to account for?
- Any inconsistencies or big changes in your academic or professional direction?



General Tips

- Follow the requirements

Check the exact **requirements** for motivation letters on your university's website. Some organizations may ask for **specific questions** you won't find in this ppt.

- Be original

Do **not copy and paste** the same letter to all the universities you are applying to. Write an original letter based on what you know about this particular program. Put some effort into it.

- Be simple and concise

Your writing needs to be **concise and to the point**. To shorten any text, ask yourself this simple question: "If I delete this word/phrase/sentence, will the meaning of my letter change?" If the answer is "no", delete it.



General Tips

- **Be personal**

Know whom you are writing for. Do your **research before writing** to them: read their work, learn about their experience and interests.

- **Answer the questions**

When you finish your first draft, **take a break** for a day or two; then return to the original prompt and make sure your letter answers it.

- **Write properly**

Proofread, proofread, **proofread**. Ask your instructors to give it a read-through. Upload it to Grammarly or the Hemingway App. Use all available resources to make sure your writing is impeccable.



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