

## **Graduate School Applications:**

### **WHAT IS A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?**

**The Statement of Purpose (SoP) is the single most important part of your graduate school application.** As the name signifies, the Statement of Purpose is your personal statement about who you are, what has influenced your career path so far, your professional interests and where you plan to go from here. It need not be a litany of facts; it can contain anecdotes that convey important information about yourself and your career path. However, it must be well-written.

This is because the SoP is the only part of your graduate school application packet over which you have full control. Your academic and extra-curricular records are in the past. Most people only take one or two shots at the GMAT, GRE or MAT, and these scores could be adversely affected by conditions on the test day. It is important to choose recommendation letter writers carefully, but while you hope they give you the best possible recommendation, this is not within your control.

The SoP is your chance to talk directly to the admissions committee. It is your chance to make yourself stand out among a multitude of similarly qualified candidates and convince the admissions committee that you have what it takes to be successful in their program. You should give as much thought to your SOP as you do to preparing for the MAT, GRE or GMAT. If you plan correctly, you can give yourself enough time to submit a well-written, thoughtful, polished essay that will boost your chances for admission. Equally important, this is a great opportunity to look inside yourself and be rewarded by a better understanding of who you are. Writing a reasonably good Statement of Purpose is not an impossible task. It requires care, attention and patience. And enough time for you to be able to write several drafts, show them to people (e.g., your high school English teacher, your campus Writing Center, etc.) and polish the essay until you get a version with which you are happy.

### **NUTS AND BOLTS OF WRITING A SOP**

Show your interest in the academic program to which you are applying. Rather than saying that you find history interesting, it is more convincing to demonstrate your interest by talking about any projects you may have done and what you learned from them. If you have taken the initiative to do things on your own, now is the time to talk about them.

Know the program and program faculty to which you are applying. Mention special strengths of the program or research interests of faculty in the program. If there is a professor with whom you would like to work, mention that in the SOP.

Show that you have thought carefully about further studies, know what you are getting into, and have the confidence to go through with it. Have the admissions committee like you! Avoid sounding opinionated, conceited, pedantic or patronizing. Read your essay carefully, and have others read it to find and correct this.

Keep the essay focused. Each sentence you use should strengthen the admissions committee's resolve to admit you. So while you may have done several interesting things in life, avoid falling into the trap of mentioning each of them. Your essay should have depth, not breadth. The resume is where you should list achievements. Remember that you have very little space to convey who you are, so make every sentence count.

**Pitfalls your essay must avoid:**

- It's repetitive of your resume
- It could have been written by anybody
- It's dishonest
- It contains grammatical, spelling, or mechanical errors
- It has highly personal and emotional content that should be avoided

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these Statements of Purpose?

1. It has been my goal for several years to pursue a doctorate in Educational Administration. I have been a middle and secondary school teacher in several public schools in Mississippi. I have taught affluent students in the suburbs of Jackson and poor children in the Mississippi Delta. These experiences have given me the opportunity to witness first-hand the inequitable way in which funding of public schools is administered. Although I have immensely enjoyed my time as a classroom teacher, I realize that true educational reform must be systemic, rather than a band-aid approach typically taken in most school districts. The faculty in Educational Administration at The University of Alabama are nationally known for their expertise in public policy, and it is my desire to study with them so that I can gain the knowledge and skills I need to be an effective educational leader. My ultimate goal is to work in some public policy capacity, preferably as a superintendent or with the Mississippi State Department of Education. As my resume, transcripts, and MAT score attest, I am a serious student with a strong record of public service to children in Mississippi. Obtaining a Ph.D. in Educational Administration will give me the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, theory, and practice I need to be a better change agent in Mississippi.
2. Hello, my name is John Doe, and I am very intersted in pursuing a doctorate in social work at the University of Alabama. I was born in 1962 and raised by my mother in Cleveland, Ohio. I didn't know my father very well, so I had to learn the hard way about growing up. When I was thirteen, I decided to join the ministry. When I was 24, I became a minister and have been a pastor to several churches in the Southeast. Last year, I went through an ugly divorce and because of that I can no longer be a minister. This made me realize that I wanted to do something different with my life, I decided that social work would be a good fit for me. I promise if I am admitted into the program I will be a very good student who the university would be proud of. Thank you for your time!