

# Writing your Statement of Purpose

## Pre-writing: Reflection

Answer these questions about yourself:

- What are your motivations for attending graduate school?
- What are your professional and personal goals for the future?
- Why is this kind of program a good fit? (i.e. public policy instead of law school)
- How do your interests, skills, and goals match with the program you are applying to?
- What 1 to 2 significant events deeply affected you? How? And What did you learn from them?
- How and when have you demonstrated leadership?
- What experiences have enabled you to understand and empathize with those of different backgrounds and cultures?
- What are your greatest strengths & assets? What makes you a strong candidate for this particular program?
- What characteristics do you have that will help you be a good \_\_\_\_\_student? (i.e. medical, law, Ph.D., MPA, etc.)
- What about you should you share that will not be in other parts of your application?

Answer these questions from information you've collected from websites, conversations with current students and faculty, and/or campus visits.

- What is unique about the program?
- What are the values and culture of the program and institution?
- What are the professors' areas of expertise?

## Statement of Purpose "Dos"

- Demonstrate your writing skills, but still make sure you ANSWER THE PROMPT
- Statements of purpose are all about WHY—why you're applying, why you're a good fit, why you'll succeed in the program
- Follow the required page limit or word count
- If creating statements for multiple schools, write the essay for your top choice first
- Customize each statement to show your interest in that specific program
- Share what faculty or courses interest you
- Be realistic: passion is great but also address how you will succeed
- Make sure to have a strong introduction that grabs the audience's attention
- Double check grammar, mechanics, and spelling
- Be sure it is clear, focused, and organized writing
- Use concrete nouns and active verbs
- Use details, evidence, or examples to illustrate your main points
- Have multiple critics: take your drafts to the University of Iowa Writing Center, Career Advisors at the Pomerantz Career Center, and faculty in the field you want to enter

## Statement of Purpose "Don'ts"

- Avoid clichés and be careful with humor
- Don't use the same generic statement for all schools
- Don't dwell on crisis
- Don't explain the field, program, or school. The experts will be the ones reading your essays.
- Don't cram too much information into the essay or be repetitive of other parts of application

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For more information about the  
Pomerantz Career Center, visit [www.careers.uiowa.edu](http://www.careers.uiowa.edu)

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