

# Statement of Purpose (SOP)

## for graduate and undergraduate applicants

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For all graduate and undergraduate applicants to most foreign schools, the Statement of Purpose (SOP), or the Objective Statement, is an important part of their application packet. The admission committee gives the applicant a chance to project his best qualities, justify the inconsistencies in the academics or test scores and convince the committee that he has the spark and the thirst for knowledge that could add value to the school's existing student community. Writing a good SOP is not difficult but it requires care, attention and patience. It is necessary to put in this hard work to come up with an essay that is unique.

**A good SOP should contain** (not necessarily in this order):

▶ **A mention of your career goal or future objective**

The schools seek to admit candidates who have an informed interest in the subject and will successfully apply their education in challenging jobs. The study program should add value to your current profile. You should be able to substantiate the objective statement by providing relevant background behind the mentioned interest since career goals cannot be thought of in a day. Introspection is very important to be able to do a good job in wording this point.

▶ **Description of your personality as an individual and more importantly a student**

Some of the qualities that you could speak about are:

- ◆ creativity and curiosity
- ◆ pride in your work and an enthusiasm for learning
- ◆ a capacity for teamwork
- ◆ the ability to think independently
- ◆ being a well-balanced person

Providing examples of instances when you exhibited these qualities would add more weight to the statements.

▶ **Reflection on your previous education, learning, your research interests and research work**

- ◆ Academic performance
- ◆ Courses that interested you beyond regular class-work
- ◆ Class participation
- ◆ Readings through journals

The above should be a brief account since you need to be aware of the word limit when writing such essays. The optimum length of the SOP is one and a half A4 size sheet. Some schools set a word limit of say 500-



1000 words for the objective statement, while some ask you to only write about your career goals or how you see the study program helping you achieve your career goal.

▶ **Description of projects and seminars done beyond the course curriculum**

- ◆ Internships and summer projects
- ◆ Workshops and seminars attended
- ◆ Learnings from the above

The research orientation of a student is evident from his/her participation in such activities. Schools do not expect fundamental research from the students but they look for genuine interest in research, especially when applying for graduate courses. These points are more relevant for graduate application.

▶ **Work experience details**

- ◆ Role in the Company
- ◆ Important Projects in line with your research interests
- ◆ Contribution to research

The above are not applicable to undergraduate applicants.

▶ **Reasons for choice of the university for further studies**

- ◆ Faculty Profile
- ◆ High intake of international students
- ◆ Research areas the university is active in
- ◆ Low cost of living
- ◆ Cultural diversity
- ◆ Resources for students
- ◆ Low student faculty ratio

While schools look for the best students, they want to make sure that the school suits the student's requirements.

▶ **Concluding with a conviction of proving an asset to the university**

- ◆ Sound confident about successfully completing the course
- ◆ Demonstrate your motivation and determination
- ◆ Show your integrity, common sense, reliability, and personal capacity to excel in a challenging program

**Background work:**

- ▶ Ask yourself why you want to study further. Put down your reasons on paper and try to expand on important points.
- ▶ Research on schools you are planning to apply to and learn about the school and the work in areas of your interest.
- ▶ Write to students at the universities to find out more about the school and the requirements.
- ▶ Reflect on your research interests and ways to portray them effectively.

**Writing Tips:**

- ▶ Start off the essay in a strikingly interesting manner. Start with a famous quote or some proverb that you very strongly believe in. The entire essay should reflect the same belief.
- ▶ Break up the content into paragraphs or sub-headings under which you would elaborate.
- ▶ Each paragraph should make a complete statement independently and also logically lead to the next paragraph.
- ▶ Avoid slang and abbreviations. Remember the reader is a foreigner and might not be familiar with some terms that we normally use.
- ▶ Do not put information that is already available through transcripts and application forms.
- ▶ Highly personal and emotional content should be avoided unless it makes a unique and creative point.
- ▶ Mention extra-curricular activities that have helped you become a better graduate student. Example: Membership in associations connected with social work like NGOs working with the underprivileged or college associations engaged in welfare activities etc.

**Polishing:**

- ▶ Start a new paragraph whenever you proceed to a new issue.
- ▶ Extra-curricular activities that might contribute in making you a good graduate student might be added. Example: Involvement in dramatics, sports or social service activities.
- ▶ The SOP needs to touch all the relevant points but at the same time be concise and crisp in expression and contents.
- ▶ Adding anecdotes, quotations and talking about your mottos and principles should make it more interesting and readable.

**Course Specifics:**

- ▶ For undergraduate applicants, the committee looks at more out-going, and bold individuals with a

**University remarks on SOP****UC Berkeley**

Usually the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant who should be chosen. You may wish to show that you have the ability and motivation to succeed in your field, or you may wish to show the committee that, on the basis of your experience, you are the kind of candidate who will do well in the field.

**MIT**

Your SOP gives a chance for MIT to get to know you as a student. It helps the admissions staff get acquainted with you as a complete personality. What excites you? What motivates you? What is your career plan?

**Cornell**

The SOP is of particular importance. Cornell seeks to admit students who have an informed interest in the subject and will successfully apply their education in challenging jobs.

**San Jose State University**

You are the subject of the statement.

The school is interested in the following:

- ◆ Your purpose for graduate study
- ◆ The area of specialization
- ◆ Your future course of action after graduation
- ◆ Your special preparation and fitness for study in the field
- ◆ Any problems or inconsistencies in your records or scores

consistently good academic performance, as they adjust to the new culture and environment and maintain the same efficiency levels. Prior participation in extra-curricular activities thus acts as a scoring point to the profile.

- ▶ For PhD students, the essay needs to be highly technical in its content. The essay needs to concentrate in totality on the research background and the future work the applicant anticipates to be doing. Most of the applicants already have a master's degree and hence abstract of the master's thesis is preferable to showcase research abilities. ■



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