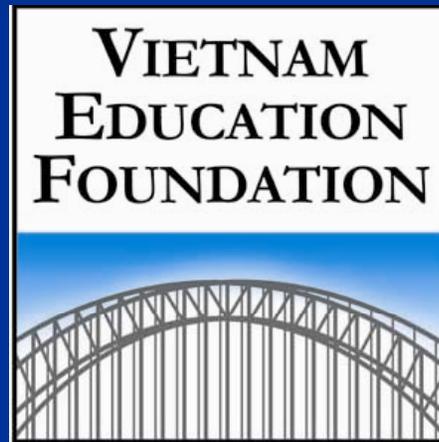
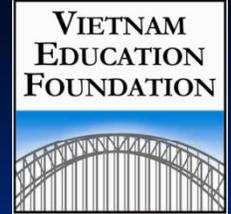


WRITING A SUCCESSFUL STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



Dr. Mark Morgan, Fulbright Scholar 2010



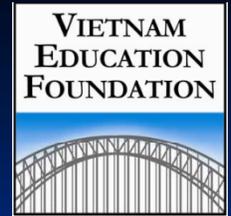
What is a SOP?

SOP should include:

- A reflection of your personality and intelligence
- A clear and outstanding image of yourself
- A demonstration of your knowledge & writing ability
- Plans for what you want to do in school

and VERY IMPORTANT

- Plans for what you want to do after school

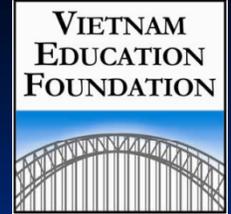


Rationale

“The statement of purpose is the single most important part of your application that will tell the admissions committee who you are, what has influenced your career path so far, your professional interests and where you plan to go from here.”

In other words, tell me a story!

How to Begin



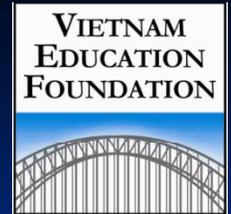
Starting Point



Write and Design

Edit

Revise (several times)

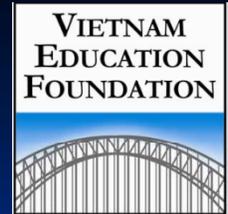


Conduct Some Research

- Research will help you write a successful SOP
 - Place your entire application package in front of you – ensure not to repeat information already displayed in:
 - CV, transcripts, letters of recommendation, test scores
 - Visit internet sites or bookstores that give advice and provide examples of successful SOPs
 - Go to the university websites you are interested in applying to
 - ensure you know the word count and include everything they are looking for.

Gather Information/Brainstorm

- Brainstorm for ideas to enhance your SOP
 - Ask yourself **why** you want to study further
 - Long and short-term goals
 - Make a list of your skills and characteristics
 - Make a list of your accomplishments
 - Academic **and** personal accomplishments
 - Illustrate your accomplishments in a different way than in your CV
 - List down everything significant or important in your life that relates to your field of study



Gather Information/Brainstorm

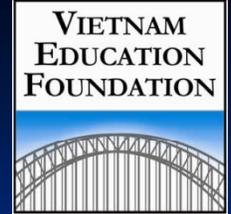
- Think about your goals and have a clear idea of what you want to achieve

- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - What do you want to achieve?
 - How do you plan to achieve it?
 - How can this particular school going to help you achieve it?
 - Why do you want to study in the US?
 - What kind of self-image do you want to present?
 - What is your plan after graduation?

Your answers should be **unique** (admission panels sometimes read several hundred SOPs)! When you can provide this information in an articulate way, you are ready to begin writing!

Design Your SOP

- Create an outline of your SOP (example)
 - I. Introduction
 - 1. Your goals
 - II. Body
 - 1. Explain your background
 - 2. Describe your professional goals
 - 3. Why graduate school in the US?
 - 4. Future plans
 - III. Conclusion
 - 1. Summarize the main points
 - 2. What can you contribute?

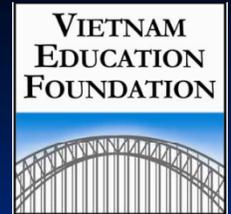


Introduction

- Create a strong opening paragraph
- Briefly explain:
 - Who you are and where you're from
 - Your goals
 - Why you have chosen this field of study
 - Why this university is among your first choices
 - (alternatively, can be included in summary)

The introduction is probably the most important part of the SOP.

Get the reader's attention! Make your SOP stand out from the rest.

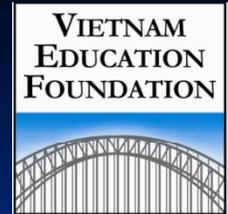


Introduction

- Here is an example of a typical first draft:
 - “I am applying to the Engineering program at the University of ABC because I believe my skills will become more enhanced in your program since it is a place where I will be challenged and I can gain the necessary experience to succeed at your school and in my country.”

Is it clear? Is it direct? Is it unique?

No! The above is obvious and too generic! Boring!



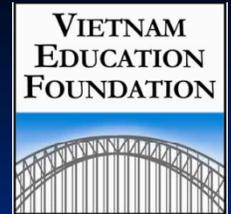
Introduction

- Imagine who will be reading your SOP
 - 5 professors “locked” in a room with 500 other applications

What does the admissions committee already know?

- **They know** what program you are applying to
- **They know** they have a strong/leading school
- **They know** it is a place you can receive a good education
- **They know** their laboratory has modern equipment
- **They know** you will be challenged
- **They know** your skills will improve

Avoid this information – keep it simple and focus on **you!**



Introduction

- Pretend its like fishing, “hook” the reader!
 - As a young boy from a farming community in rural Vietnam I often helped my father fix broken electrical equipment that he collected in his spare time. I became fascinated with electronics, so I decided to pursue an education in electrical engineering to improve the quality of life for those living near my hometown.

Is it clear? Is it direct? Is it unique?

Yes!

- Make the reader want to continue reading.
- Make the admission committee remember you!

Body

- Each paragraph should deal with one main idea
 - The subject should be introduced early in a topic sentence, and should tell the reader what to expect in the paragraph.
 - Several subjects in one paragraph will confuse the reader.
 - If the central subject has several supporting points, break it up in to several paragraphs.

Body

- Support your subject
 - Give evidence, convince the readers that the content of your SOP is truthful and accurate. **DON'T LIE!**
 - If you prove your statements, the reader should agree with your conclusion.

Body

- Structure your SOP carefully and logically
 - Organize the content/subjects in such a way that leads the reader through the points of your SOP.
 - Do not confuse the reader.
 - Transition between paragraphs by linking them together logically. Flow like a river.

Body

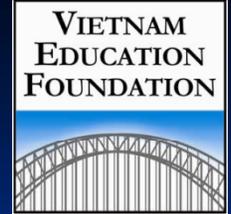
- A suggestion of what can be included in the body of your SOP:
 - Explain your background
 - Where and what did you study?
 - Past research/projects
 - Explain how you acquired the skills to earn your degree
 - Description of professional goals
 - Why is this field of study interesting?
 - Related research/experience after university
 - Future plans after receiving degree?
 - What do you want to study?
 - What are your specific interests
 - Why is this program needed for further development?
 - Why the United States?

Be flexible when writing and do not stick to a set outline.

Conclusion

- Say what you have done
 - Re-state the main points of your SOP.
 - What can you contribute to the university?
(both within the faculty and to the university's reputation)
 - Make the application committee continue to think about your SOP and remember you.

- Keep it brief and to the point! It is not a novel.



Style and Tone

- Avoid essay clichés – common expressions
 - ex.: “After graduation, I want to return to Vietnam to help improve my country.”

- Be as specific as possible, emphasize your uniqueness!

Examples:

- the value of diversity
- importance of teamwork
- broadened my horizons

Style and Tone

- Sentence variety
 - Keep it simple!
 - Combine two short sentences into one compound
 - Eliminate run-on sentences
 - Use conjunctions, and vary their location
 - However, although, though, since, while, when, similarly, etc.
 - Vary your language, make sure it's not repetitive

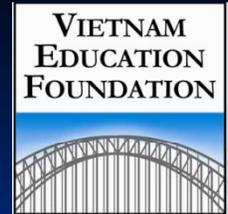
Style and Tone

- Word choice
 - Don't try and “show off” your vocabulary: use normal and simple words
 - Use precise language, avoid ambiguity
 - Avoid repetition!

- Avoid being too formal or too casual.
 - Too formal: wearing formal clothes to a soccer match
 - Too casual: wearing pajamas to a nice restaurant

Recommendations

- An example of organizational structure:
 - Hook/introduction that will make you stand out
 - Transition into your background of study
 - Related extracurricular activities
 - Publications or professional accomplishments
 - Explanations about problems in the past
 - Why did you choose this graduate school?
 - Future plans
- This is only an example – it's not the only way.

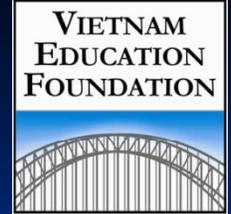


Recommendations

- Give examples of your leadership qualities
 - Ex: clubs, sports teams, entrepreneurial endeavors, new ideas, creations, volunteer experience, etc.
- Some key words to consider using
 - Initiated, created, established, directed, managed, led, developed, discovered, organized, etc.
- Use quotes from famous people (U.S.)
 - “The buck stops here” “Walk softly and carry a big stick”
- Demonstrate your ability and passion to do research
 - This quality is important for graduate students

Editing

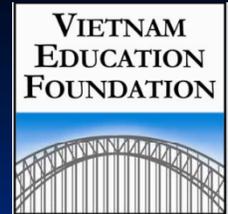
- Edit your SOP for:
 - Structure, style, content.
- Proof-read your SOP for mistakes, flow, etc.
- Ask your friends and colleagues (a native English speaker would be advantageous) to proof-read and edit your SOP.
- If possible, have your SOP proof-read and edited by a professional. An SOP is much like a resume – different styles exist!



When should you begin?

NOW!

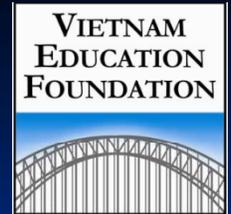
- The more time you spend on your SOP, the better.
- Plan to spend several days on this process.
- Make sure that you are aware of the application deadlines for each university and **write them down**.
- If your SOP is being reviewed by a VEF editor, send it **early** (at least 3 weeks before deadline)



Reminders

- Mention in that you are a VEF Fellow nominee.
 - You don't have to describe VEF and its process in detail – that information is included in your letter of reference
- Avoid sending the same SOP to every university.
 - Tailor each SOP according to the requirements/expectations of that university.
 - The admissions committee will know a “rubber stamp”
 - They will also take notice when you include specific references to people, labs, etc. in the departments.

Questions?



Thank You
and
Good Luck!

Special thanks to VEF for assistance in compiling the information in this presentation.