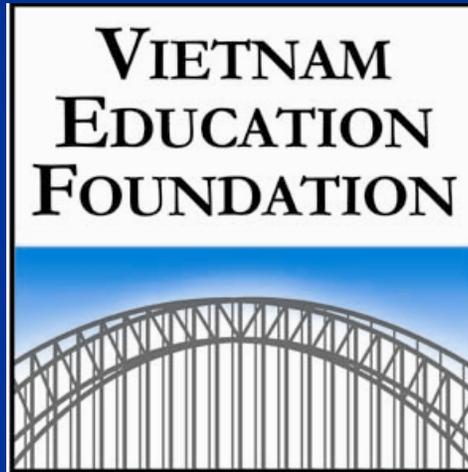


WRITING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



October 2008



What is a Statement of Purpose?

“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.”



What is a Statement of Purpose?

A personal statement, or autobiographical essay, should include:

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

and **VERY IMPORTANT**

- Plans for what you want to do after school



What is a Statement of Purpose?

A good SOP displays the good side of your qualities

- Sell yourself through the statement

It shows that you use an effective style of writing and good communication skills



What is a Statement of Purpose?

Some universities say:

- University of Michigan:

“The Statement of purpose should be a concise, well-written essay about your background, your career goals, and how Michigan’s graduate program will help you meet your career and educational objectives.”

What is a Statement of Purpose?

Some universities say:

- University of California at Berkeley:

“The personal statement is an important part of your application package. Depending on the topic you choose, the essay you write provides additional evidence of your intellectual and creative achievement. The essay is also the only opportunity for the readers of your application to get a feel for you as a person as well as for you as a student. The essay is also the place where you can put your academic record into the context of your opportunities and obstacles.”



What is a Statement of Purpose?

A Statement of Purpose (SOP) is also known as:

- Letter of Intent
- Statement of Interest
- Personal Statement
- Goals Statement
- Personal Narrative
- Application Essay



How to Begin Writing Your SOP

Begin Your Statement of Purpose

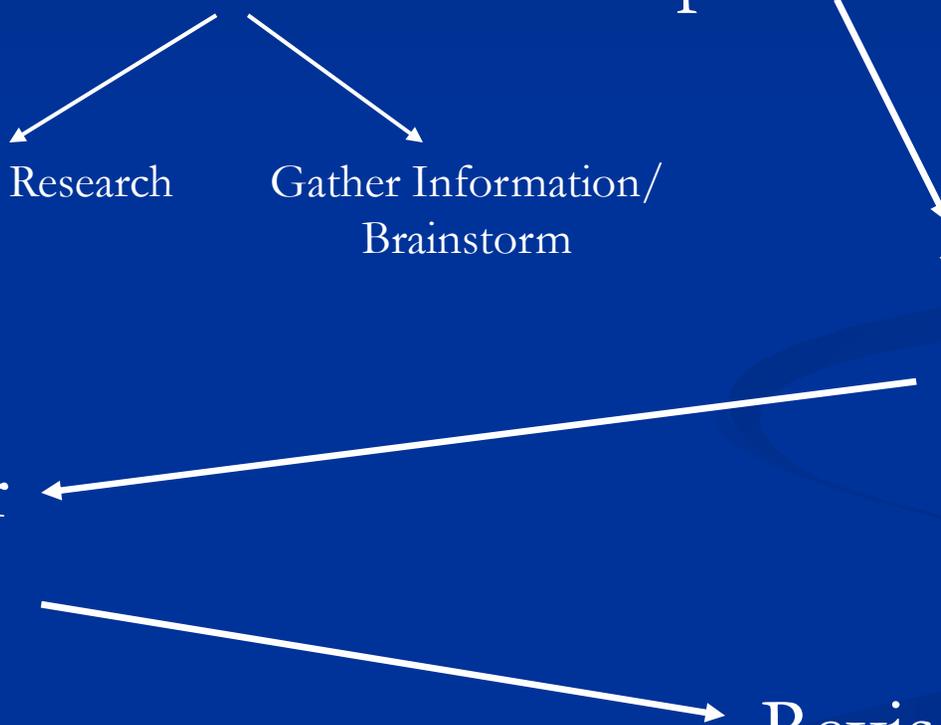
Conduct Research

Gather Information/
Brainstorm

Write and Design
Your SOP

Edit Your
SOP

Revise Your SOP





Conduct Research

- Research sources that 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 provide them with 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
 - Personal accomplishments, academic 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
 - Make a list of people you admire or have greatly influenced you. Consult with them for ideas.
 - Family, friends, teachers, etc.
 - ... and so on



Gather Information/Brainstorm

- Think about your goals
- 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?
 - What kind of self-image do you want to present?
 - Why do you want to study in the US?
 - What is your plan after graduation?

Your answers should be unique!



Gather Information/Brainstorm

- Know yourself
 - Be sure what you want.
 - Be sure why you want it.
 - How can this particular school help you?
 - What are your strengths and weaknesses?
 - Review your personal and intellectual development in your academic career.

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?
 - III. Conclusion
 - 1. Summarize the main points
 - 2. What can you contribute?

Introduction

- Create a strong opening paragraph of 5 sentences
- Briefly explain
 - Who you are
 - Where you're from
 - Your goals
 - Why you have chosen your field of study
 - Why the university is among your first choices
 - (can include in summary)

The first sentence is the most important part of the SOP.

Get the reader's attention!



Introduction

- “Writing your personal statement can be one of the most satisfying – or frustrating – writing experiences you'll ever have.”
- Here is an example of a typical first draft:
 - I am applying to the Engineering program at the University of Yadda Yadda 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 extra information!



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 you will be challenged
- They know it is a place you can receive a good education
- They know your skills will improve

Avoid extra information – keep it simple and focus on you!



Introduction

- “Hook” the reader!
 - As a young boy from a farming family in rural Vietnam I often helped my father fix broken electrical equipment that he collected in his spare time. I became fascinated with electronics, and with the money we earned from selling the repaired equipment I decided to pursue an education in electrical engineering to improve the living standards of those near home.

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

Yes!

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

Body of Your SOP

- Each paragraph should deal with one central subject
 - 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 of Your SOP

- Support your subject
 - Give evidence, convince the readers that the content of your SOP is truthful and accurate.
 - If you prove your statements, the reader should agree with your conclusion.

Body of Your SOP

- Structure your SOP carefully and logically
 - Organize the structure of your content/subjects in 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.
 - These “connecting sentences” keep your SOP flowing smoothly.



Body of Your SOP

- 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 the field of study interesting?
 - Related research/experience after university
 - Future plans after receiving degree?
 - What do you want to continue studying?
 - 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
 - Restate the main points of your SOP.
 - What can you contribute?
 - Provide additional ideas and information that challenge the reader and the application committee to continue to think about your SOP.

- Keep it brief and to the point!



Style and Tone

- A unique approach makes you “one of a kind”
 - Tell stories (briefly)
 - Use motivated language
 - Be precise
 - Be inspired

Stimulate the lives of the application committee
“locked” in the room reading many other SOPs!

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, as, because, etc.
 - Use participles and gerunds
 - A verb +ing -> noun

Style and Tone

- Word choice
 - Use short, simple words
 - Use precise language, avoid ambiguity
 - Use nouns and verbs rather than adverbs and adjectives
 - Avoid repetition!

Style and Tone

■ Tone

- Be active and assertive in your language
- Be confident without being arrogant
- Use humor when appropriate
- Avoid sounding too casual
- Avoid sounding too formal
- Relax! Be yourself

Style and Tone

- Avoid essay clichés – common expressions
 - Be as specific as possible, emphasize your uniqueness!

Examples:

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

Desirable Qualities of Applicants



- **Seriousness of purpose** (to pursue graduate education)
- **Intellectual ability** (to handle graduate study)
- **Intellectual curiosity** (about the field you wish to enter)
- **Creativity** (as reflected in the way your mind addresses issues in the field of your choice)
- **Open-mindedness** (to ideas, people, and circumstances different from your own)
- **Maturity** (as demonstrated by being responsible and trustworthy)
- **Concern for others** (either by devoting time to social service activities such as tutoring or by being considerate and empathetic to others' feelings; the latter is more difficult to illustrate in an application essay)

Desirable Qualities of Applicants



- **Initiative** (the ability to start a project or take on a responsibility on your own)
- **Enthusiasm** (as demonstrated by your eagerness to engage in activities)
- **Confidence** (in your ability to handle difficult situations and novel challenges)
- **Being Organized** (the ability to stay on top of multiple tasks)
- **Sense of Humor** (as in your ability to find humor in difficult situations; in many ways this is an index of maturity)
- **Diligence/Persistence** (your ability to stay with a task until you complete it; this is particularly relevant for programs requiring a dissertation)

Desirable Qualities of Applicants



- **Leadership** (your ability to inspire others to work together to reach a mutual goal)
- **Risk-taking** (your ability to deal with uncertainty in order to reach your goal)
- **Insight** (your ability to use introspection to understand aspects of yourself, such as your preferences and your motivations)
- **Optimism** (your ability to find positive aspects in seemingly negative situations)
- **Compromise** (your ability to be flexible in negotiating with others)
- **Overcoming adversity** (as demonstrated by your resourcefulness in dealing with serious problems such as divorce, death, illness, etc.)

Recommendations When Writing



- The SOP should portray you as:
 - Passionate about your field of study
 - Intelligent
 - Well-prepared academically and personally
 - Able to take on the challenges of graduate school in the US
 - Capable of rapport with professors and fellow grad students
 - Capable of finishing the graduate degree on a timely basis
 - Potentially an outstanding representative of that school in your future career

Recommendations When Writing



- An example of organizational structure:
 - Passionate hook
 - Transition into your background of study
 - Related extracurricular activities
 - Publications or professional accomplishments
 - Explanations about problems in the past
 - Why you have chosen this grad school – what attracts you

Recommendations When Writing



- Your style of writing can paint a picture of what you look like!
 - Bad grammar, typos, poor structure/flow
 - Wearing filthy clothes to a formal event
 - Too many words, using too much jargon
 - Wearing formal clothing to a social gathering

Carry a conversation. Be careful. Be a perfectionist!

Edit Your SOP

- Proofread your SOP for mistakes, flow, etc.
- Copyedit your SOP for consistency.
- Ask your friends and colleagues to proofread and edit your SOP.
- Have your SOP proofread and edited by a professional.

Edit Your SOP

■ Content

- Have you been sincere and personal?
- Is your essay within the word limit?
- Will the reader find your essay interesting?
- Are you showing rather than telling?
- Does your essay contain detail and concrete evidence?
- Have you avoided unsubstantiated claims?
- Have you avoided clichés?
- Does your essay reveal your character?
- Does your essay avoid repetition that can be found elsewhere?
- Will your essay make you stand out?
- Does your conclusion leave a lasting impression?

Edit Your SOP



■ Structure

- Have you illustrated a theme in your essay?
- Do you have a reason to place a paragraph where it is?
- Do your paragraphs flow smoothly?
- Does each point transition in to the next? – avoid a list!
- Are your stories integrated well into your essay?
- Is the essay clear and coherent?

Edit Your SOP

■ Style

- Have you achieved a simple, straight-forward style?
- Have you varied your sentence structure?
- Have you avoided unnecessarily fancy vocabulary?
- Have you avoided a passive voice?
- Have you achieved active writing through the use of strong verbs?
- Have you avoided overusing vocabulary?
- Is your tone conversational, rather than too casual or too formal?
- Have you illustrated confidence, enthusiasm and passion?

Revise Your SOP



“Nothing good is ever written, it is re-written.”

Nobody writes a perfect first draft!



When should you begin?

NOW!

- The more time you spend on your SOP, the better.
- Plan to spend between 50 – 100 hours writing your SOP.

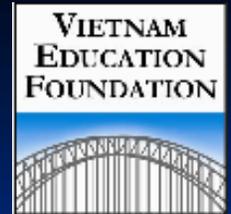


Reminders

- Mention in your SOP that you are a VEF Fellow nominee.
- 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
or
Suggestions?



Thank You
and
Good Luck!