



WRITING A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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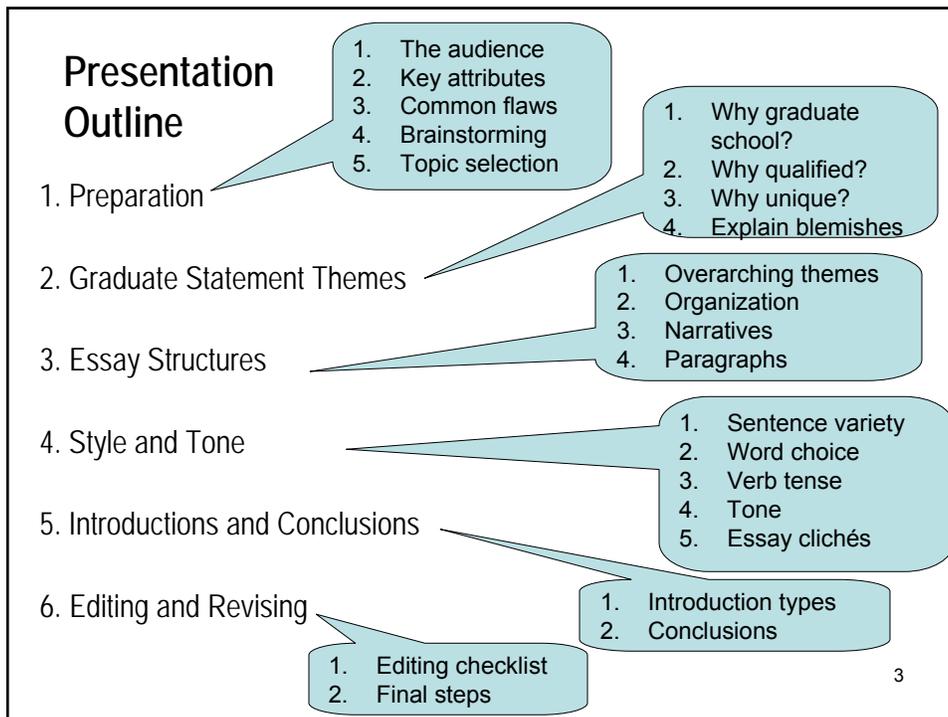
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Presentation Outline

1. What is a statement of purpose (SOP)?
2. Six important elements when writing SOP

1. Preparation
2. Graduate Statement Themes
3. Essay Structures
4. Style and Tone
5. Introductions and Conclusions
6. Editing and Revising

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What is a Statement of Purpose?

- A personal statement or autobiographical essay in 2 pages, it should provide:
 - A reflection of your personality and intellect, a clear and outstanding image of yourself
 - Your general plans for what to do in school and afterwards
 - These plans should be specific and make sense given your background and abilities
- Good statement showcase the good side of your personality; Sell yourself through this statement.
- It also shows that you have effective writing style and good communication skills.
- Two major categories:
 - General comprehensive
 - Responses to specific questions

Design Your SOP

- Think about your goals first
- 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 U.S.?
 - What is your plan after graduation?
- Answers should be unique!



1. Preparation

- **The audience**
- Key attributes
- Common flaws
- Brainstorming
- Topic selection

-A graduate admissions committee:

- **professors** in the specific program
- **students**

- Admissions committees read the essays within the **larger context** of a candidate's application (transcripts, GRE, test scores, letters of recommendation)

- Evaluate according to **different criteria** depending on disciplines

- Place in **hierarchy of admission**:

- Admit with guaranteed funding
- **Admit with potential funding**
- **Tabled (admissions purgatory)**
- Reject

- Minimum 2-10 readers/SOP

- Average reading time/SOP: 20' (laboratory & computational science programs) – 30' (other programs)

1. Preparation

- The audience
- **Key attributes**
- Common flaws
- Brainstorming
- Topic selection

- Insight into your character
- Sincerity
- Background and motivation
- Goals
- Attributes of the program
- Writing ability

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1. Preparation

- The audience
- Key attributes
- **Common flaws**
- Brainstorming
- Topic selection

- Careless errors
- Vague generalities
- Summarizing your resume
- Sensitive topics
- Gimmicks
- Long-windedness
- Big words

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1. Preparation

- The audience
- Key attributes
- Common flaws
- **Brainstorming**
- Topic selection

- Perform a self-inventory of your unique experiences, major influences, and abilities

- Long- and short-term goals
- Skills and characteristics
- Background/accomplishments: Personal & academic
- Consult friends, relatives, colleagues, or professors for ideas

-Write an experimental creative essay in which you are the main character

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List of Qualities Desirable in 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 pull off in an application essay)

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List of Qualities Desirable in Applicants

- **Initiative** (as in 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** (as in 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** (as demonstrated by your ability to stay with a task until you complete it; this is particularly relevant for programs requiring a dissertation)

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List of Qualities Desirable in Applicants

- **Leadership** (as shown in your ability to inspire others to work together to reach a mutual goal)
- **Risk Taking** (as shown in your ability to deal with uncertainty in order to reach your goal)
- **Insight** (as reflected in your ability to use introspection to understand aspects of yourself, such as your preferences and your motivations)
- **Optimism** (as reflected in your ability to find positive aspects in seemingly negative situations)
- **Compromise** (as in your ability to be flexible in negotiating with others; at a more abstract level this can mean the ability to reconcile ideological opposites or dialectical pairs among others or within yourself)
- **Overcoming adversity** (as demonstrated by your resourcefulness in dealing with serious problems such as divorce, death, illness, etc.)

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1. Preparation

- The audience
- Key attributes
- Common flaws
- Brainstorming
- **Topic selection**

- Finding the pattern that connects
- Conveying something meaningful
- Painting a complete portrait
- Standing out
- Keeping your reader's interest
- Staying grounded in detail
- Answering the question
- What to avoid
 - Resorting to gimmicks
 - Focusing on the negative
 - Repeating information that's listed elsewhere in the application
 - Being too controversial
 - Seeking pity

2. Graduate Statement Themes

- **Why graduate school?**
- Why qualified?
- Why unique?
- Explain blemishes

- Early exposure to your field
- Goals
- Research interests
- Addressing the school

2. Graduate Statement Themes

- Why graduate school?
- Why qualified?
- Why unique?
- Explain blemishes

-Research experience
-Field experience
-Unrelated work experience
-Extracurricular activities

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2. Graduate Statement Themes

- Why graduate school?
- Why qualified?
- Why unique?
- Explain blemishes

-Highlight your differences (how unique aspects of your background will enable you to contribute to the academic community)
-Unique elements directly related to academic interests, but tied effectively to your goals or integrated with their character and background.

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2. Graduate Statement Themes

- Why graduate school?
- Why qualified?
- Why unique?
- Explain blemishes

-Certain parts of your application may call for an explanation (e.g., Undergraduate grades, entrance exam scores)
-Try to transform such blemishes into something positive (e.g., from low grade **emerged a renewed love for and pursuit** of the study of history throughout the rest of my college education.)

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3. Essay Structures

- Overarching themes
- Organization
- Narratives
- Paragraphs

-The upfront approach
-The gradual approach

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3. Essay Structures

- Overarching themes
- **Organization**
- Narratives
- Paragraphs

-Hierarchy of evidence
-Showing progress
-Juxtaposing themes
-Dramatic appeal

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3. Essay Structures

- Overarching themes
- Organization
- **Narratives**
- Paragraphs

-How to Incorporate a Narrative

- The Origin
- The Flash forward
- The Bookend
- Within the Body

-What to Include

- Show active contribution
- Emphasize the process
- Paint a vivid picture

-Gleaning Insights

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3. Essay Structures

- Overarching themes
- Organization
- Narratives
- Paragraphs

-Transitions
-What not to do
-Supporting evidence
-Resolutions

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4. Style and Tone

- Sentence variety
- Word choice
- Verb tense
- Tone
- Essay clichés

-Simplifying
-Varying constructions
-Combine two short sentences into one compound sentence
-Use prepositional phrases, and vary their location
-Use the many conjunctions available to you--however, when, while, as, because, for, since, although, though--and vary their location
-Use participles and gerunds (a verb + "ing" --> noun)

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4. Style and Tone

- Sentence variety
- **Word choice**
- Verb tense
- Tone
- Essay clichés

-Whenever possible, use the shorter, simpler word
-Use precise language
-Use nouns and verbs rather than adverbs and adjectives
-Avoid repetition

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4. Style and Tone

- Sentence variety
- Word choice
- **Verb tense**
- Tone
- Essay clichés

-Defining passive voice
-When passive voice is acceptable
-Avoiding passive voice
-Achieving active writing

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4. Style and Tone

- Sentence variety
- Word choice
- Verb tense
- **Tone**
- Essay clichés

-Too casual
-Too formal / detached
-Sounding confident
-A Note on humor

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4. Style and Tone

- Sentence variety
- Word choice
- Verb tense
- Tone
- **Essay clichés**

-Clichés are simply common expressions
-Be as specific and personal as possible, thereby emphasizing your uniqueness
E.g.:
-the value of diversity
-importance of teamwork
-true value of making a difference in people's lives
-broadened my horizons

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5. Introductions and Conclusions

- Introduction types

- Jump right in
- Show your originality
- State a problem
- Being offbeat

- Conclusions

- Synthesize, don't summarize
- Expand on broader significance-
Within Reason
- Don't add entirely new information-
except to look ahead

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6. Editing & Revising

- Editing checklist

- **CONTENT**
- **STRUCTURE**
- **STYLE**

- Final steps

1. Are you answering the actual question given in the prompt?
2. Have you been sincere and personal?
3. Is your essay within the word limit?
4. Will your reader find the essay interesting?
5. Are you showing rather than telling?
6. Does your introduction grab the reader's attention?
7. Do you explore your experiences in sufficient depth?
8. Does your essay contain a high level of detail and concrete evidence?
9. Have you avoided unsubstantiated claims?
10. Do you offer specific, personal insights rather than trite generalizations and clichés?
11. Does your essay reveal anything meaningful about your character?
12. Do you avoid summarizing information that can be found elsewhere on your application?
13. Will your essay make you stand out?
14. Does your conclusion leave a lasting impression?

6. Editing & Revising

- Editing checklist
 - **CONTENT**
 - **STRUCTURE**
 - **STYLE**
- Final steps

1. Can you identify an overarching theme? Have you articulated that theme in the essay?
2. Does your theme have multiple layers and genuine depth?
3. Do you have a reason for placing every paragraph where it is?
4. Do your paragraphs flow smoothly? Are there any gaps or jumps?
5. Does each point build upon previous points, or does your essay sound like a list?
6. Have you written insightful transitions and resolutions that highlight your key themes?
7. Are your stories well integrated into your essay?
8. Is the essay clear and coherent? Have you strengthened its impact by using the optimal structure?

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6. Editing & Revising

- Editing checklist
 - **CONTENT**
 - **STRUCTURE**
 - **STYLE**
- Final steps

1. Have you achieved a simple, straightforward style?
2. Have you varied your sentence constructions?
3. Have you avoided unnecessarily fancy vocabulary?
4. Have you avoided passive voice?
5. Have you achieved active writing through the use of strong verbs?
6. Have you avoided overusing adjectives and adverbs?
7. Is your tone conversational, rather than too casual or too formal?
8. Have you conveyed confidence, enthusiasm, and passion?

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6. Editing & Revising

- Editing checklist
 - **CONTENT**
 - **STRUCTURE**
 - **STYLE**
- Final steps

Read your essay out loud
Have your essay professionally edited

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When should you write the SOP?



- **NOW**
- **The more time you spend on the SOP, the better it will be; plan to use at least 50-100 hours to write your SOP**
- **Write down ideas and outline a draft**



Summary Points

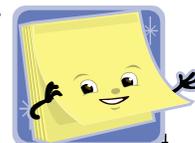
- SOP: A personal statement or autobiographical essay, a reflection of your personality and intellect
 - **Convince the school** why they should choose you—your interests and abilities should match what the school needs AND offers
- Six important elements when writing SOP
 1. Preparation
 2. Graduate statement themes
 3. Essay structures
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 5. Introductions and conclusions
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Things to Remember



- **Be accurate**—be sure to check grammar, spelling and facts
- **Be confident without being arrogant**
- **Be consistent** in structure of essay
- **Be brief, clear, and communicative**—give only information that is directly related to your academic/employment goals; **GET TO THE POINT**



Things to Avoid



- Don't state that you have always wanted to be a scientist/mathematician; be specific about how you became interested in field
- Don't be lofty or sentimental (e.g., stating that it's always been your dream to go to this school)
- Don't use overly long sentences
- Don't use passive voice
- Don't conclude with a new point, summarize instead and stay focused throughout essay

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Last Step for SOP

- **Carefully reviewed by you, family; have friends and professors read your SOP and provide suggestions**
- **Send your SOP to reviewers for two electronic reviews.**

Useful Web site:

http://www.essayedge.com/graduate/essayadvice/course/six_final_steps.shtml



**THANK YOU
&
GOOD LUCK!**



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

“The Internet can help us accomplish incredible things, but it can be a double-bladed knife if not adequately secured,” my professor said when I studied the subject “Computer Network” at the university. Initially, I did not completely agree with him, but gradually he turned out to be correct. The more I work and conduct research, the more I understand the importance of network security. As a result, I have been inspired to start my research career and have wanted to become a network security research professional.

Five years of study at the Hanoi University of Technology (HUT), the best technology university in Vietnam, provided me with a solid background and good practical skills in Information Technology. Proudly, I graduated with distinction and was ranked fifth out of 38 students in my class.

My interest in computer networking dates back to my undergraduate years at HUT. Since the Internet first came to Vietnam in 1997, its magical abilities to help people do research, do business, and entertain have amazed and motivated me to major in Information Technology. In spite of an initially difficult time due to the lack of adequate training available at my high school, my quick adaptability and hard work paid off. Not only did I do well in core subjects, but I also focused extensively on other subjects of interest such as Computer Network, Distributed Systems, Data Transmission, Network Devices and Network Programming. I completed assigned projects on these subjects extremely well. As a result, my professors exempted me from the final exams.

Although Network Security was only slightly emphasized in the program, I focused heavily on it according to my advisor’s suggestion. I was extremely well-prepared to defend my thesis entitled “Study of the Network Protection Techniques and Building an Internet Firewall.”

In addition to an outstanding academic record, I also have had valuable work experience. In my fourth year in university, I worked as an intern for the VASC Software and Media Company (VASC). I was in charge of developing software to help build an online newspaper. I had an opportunity to know the real applications of the Internet and learned HTML, ASP, MSSQL and Windows Socket Programming. During my senior year at university, I joined a research group at the Vietsoftware Company. I worked on the Internet firewall issues and built a HTTP proxy with useful features like the ability to block suspicious addresses and filter web content.

Upon my university graduation in 2002, I worked in the R&D department of the Vietkhang JSC, a new ISP in Vietnam. I did research on various topics including the Internet’s protocols and techniques for improving security of each protocol, the wireless network known as 802.11b/g, wireless network security using WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy) and WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access). Importantly, I participated in building a Vietnamese Linux Distribution, which gained us the First Prize of the National Software Contest known as “Vietnam Intellect.” In addition, I have been working on several

[University]
Department of Computer Science

projects for the Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF), for instance developing an Online Management System to handle all online data and developing some Websites in PHP and MySQL.

In 2004, I obtained a scholarship from the Center of International Cooperation for Computerization in Japan. As a result, I went to Japan to take part in an IT course on networking and open source software development. This course updated me on new networking technologies and strengthened my practical skills. It broadened my view and extended my network of professional colleagues. Most significantly, it consolidated my plan to undertake further study overseas.

Gaining so many benefits from the Internet, I wanted to give something back. In order to establish a forum for people from my hometown in Vietnam to interact with each other, I created the [province name] Online Network (NDOL) in 2002. This is a network for people from [province name] province. This had nothing to do with research or my work. Yet, it taught me skills to deal with security issues of a web server and software systems that served a large virtual community. It was a success and currently has more than 10,000 members/users.

I balance my work and personal lives. In my leisure time, I like reading, watching movies, searching the Internet, listening to music, and bowling. These hobbies help me relax and recharge my energy for more productive work.

My future plan is to become a research professional at a university or research institute in Vietnam. It will help me make a better contribution to the development of Vietnam in general and to the information technology field in particular. In order to realize this career plan, I definitely need further professional training. With a great learning environment, notable faculty members, a diversified student body, excellent facilities, and easy access to the latest information, [university name]'s graduate program in IT is a perfect choice for me. In addition, the research topics and research accomplishments at the Distributed Computing Lab, the Laboratory for Service-Oriented Computing Environment, and the Center for Advanced Intelligent Systems in the TTU Department of Computer Science really fascinate me. I plan to focus on Distributed Computing and Network Security. I am also interested in doing research on Service-Federated Assurance and Security in the SORCER Lab.

Through my research regarding your institution and development, I am confident that Texas Tech University and my plan are a good match. Your doctoral program combined with my academic background, experience, and intense interest in the field will surely enable me to realize my dream as a network security research professional.

I hope to have your serious consideration and that I will be joining your school soon.