

GRADUATE WORKSHOP

Writing the Statement of Purpose
Selecting a Writing Sample

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WHAT MAKES A GOOD STATEMENT OF PURPOSE?

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- Although you won't always know who is on the committee to read applications, show that you know the strengths of the department and that you have knowledge about the faculty and their scholarship.



DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE

- ⦿ Your purpose is to persuade them that you have what it takes to succeed in graduate school.
- ⦿ Show them that you are:
 - Focused
 - Determined
 - Disciplined
 - A good match for their program

INDICATE YOUR PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS AND FIELD OF SPECIALIZATION

- ◉ If you have a strong interest in an area of literature, develop your essay around the problems and issues you would like to explore.
- ◉ Be specific and provide examples.
- ◉ Refer to the scholarship of a certain faculty member if appropriate.
- ◉ If you don't have a particular area of interest, at least show that you are interested in specific periods, genres, authors, or critical theories.

WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE?

- ◉ What can you offer this graduate program?
- ◉ How do your background experiences shape your literary interests?
- ◉ How have your coursework, internships, writing projects, and mentors contributed to the way you approach literature?

WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO THIS PROGRAM?

- Give specific reasons why you are applying to this program.
- Align your research interests to those of one or more professors.



MISC. POINTS OF ADVICE

- Spend lots of time on your statement of purpose! It is the one thing in your application that will set you off from other applicants.
- Be honest.
- Have faculty members read your statement.
- Revise as many times as you can.
- Give faculty members who will be writing your letters of recommendation your Statement of Purpose.
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ADVICE ON WHAT NOT TO DO:

- ⦿ Avoid empty phrases such as how much you “love” literature and reading. They already know that!
- ⦿ Avoid cliches.
- ⦿ Be confident, but not cocky.
- ⦿ Avoid trying to be funny; what if they don’t get it?
- ⦿ Avoid showing them how “well-rounded” you are; they don’t care if you can play sports, cook or grow vegetables. They care about your suitability for graduate work.

SELECTING A WRITING SAMPLE



PREPARING YOUR WRITING SAMPLE

- ◉ Your writing sample should be exceptional work for which you received an exemplary grade.
- ◉ Your writing sample should fit that program's focus.
- ◉ Consult with faculty to determine which sample might be the most appropriate for each program.
- ◉ If possible, work with the specific faculty member for whom you wrote the sample as you go about revising it for submission.

PREPARING THE WRITING SAMPLE

- How might you revise the sample to make it more accessible to a general audience not familiar with the course in which you wrote the paper?
- What context do you need to offer for the argument or any texts discussed so the general reader can follow along?
- What editorial changes need to be made?
- Follow page limits if they specify them.
- Revise, revise, revise!