

## **Guidelines for a Statement of Purpose for Graduate Programs**

A “Statement of Purpose” is the part of any application that you have the most control over. You should put a lot of effort into it to best serve your application.

Each statement should be tailored to the specific program and university. We expect that you have will have researched the PSC website <https://psc.ua.edu/> to understand the programs offered, the fields of concentration, the classes previously taught, and the areas of expertise of the faculty. You might also look at the lists of recent events, current students, and recent graduates. Note that some information might be dated but that will not be held against you.

*In your statement you must explain to the admissions committee what you wish to study, what you hope to get out of the program, and why you think there is a good fit between the program and you. Your statement should include the following elements:*

### **a. Introduce yourself, your interests, and motivations**

Quickly introduce yourself by briefly addressing one or more of these questions: Why do you seek to attend graduate school? What do you want to get out of it? What are you're interested in? How do you know you are ready for graduate school? What sparked your desire for graduate study?

### **b. Summarize the most critical aspects of your undergraduate (and any previous graduate) work**

You want to show that you are prepared for graduate work by explaining your intellectual development up to this point. You might note classes taken but it is more important to address the academic literatures, theories, research methods & tools (quantitative and/or qualitative), and/or research questions that you are familiar with. You might want to note any specific research you have conducted and/or substantial writing efforts (such as a senior or MA thesis).

### **c. Discuss any relevant recent and current activities**

Discuss any relevant activities and experiences outside formal schoolwork. You might note job experiences (in government or private sector), travel, and/or volunteer work.

### **d. Explain your academic interests and future goals**

This is most important and often longest section of the statement. You need to explain your academics interests and how you seek to advance them in the program. Your task is to convince the admission committee that you are a good fit for the program (and more broadly, the university). A good fit requires that the program understands what you want to study and that the program feels it can offer it to you (and that you are prepared and motivated to do the work).

While interests often change in the first year of graduate school (as your intellectual horizons expand), you should try to explain what you would like to study in some detail to show that you understand the discipline (and better, the subfields) and so the department can assess if it can accommodate those interests. You might identify specific research questions or topics. You might note what your likely field(s) of concentration (such as American politics, comparative politics, international relations,...) will be. You might try to explain how your research interests intersect with department faculty and course offerings.

End your statement in a positive manner, indicating your readiness for the challenges ahead of you and maybe your goals for after graduation.

**Additional advice:**

The statement is also your chance to highlight the most important aspects of your application, to demonstrate your fluidity with writing, to show your familiarity/mastery of relevant knowledge, and to express your uniqueness or identity.

Be sure to give careful attention to editing as well as how you use language and organize your essay.

Do not simply repeat items from your CV. Reference the most important items and put them in context of how they make you who you are.

This statement should be an academically focused essay, not necessarily a personal essay. You can add some personal details here and there, but be sure to keep the focus on your academic background and future potential.

See also the following websites for more advice about graduate school:

<https://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/apply/statement-purpose/>

<https://gradschool.cornell.edu/diversity-inclusion/recruitment-2/prospective-students/writing-your-statement-of-purpose/>

<https://history.ua.edu/graduate-program/prospective-students/admissions/advice-for-writing-a-strong-statement-of-purpose/>

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/18/so-you-want-to-get-into-a-political-science-ph-d-program-episode-i/>

<https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9780801484575/guide-to-methods-for-students-of-political-science/>

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520288300/grad-school-essentials>