WCP ESSENTIALS:
Statements of Purpose

Statement of Purpose (SOP) is the name often given to the letter or essay written as part of an application to a university/college program (International study, Bachelor's Degree, Master's or PhD). These letters are sometimes referred to as "Personal Statements" or "Motivation Letters", although technically there are differences between these types of documents. The following are some general guidelines to keep in mind when writing and formatting a Statement of Purpose; but keep in mind, requirements can vary from program to program – always do your research before starting.

Core Information

Admissions committees (the people who will actually read the SOP) are generally interested in certain core pieces of information, such as:
- What you want to study at graduate school and your motivation for applying to the program
- The experience you have in your chosen field, your background, and qualifications
- Your future objectives: What you plan to do with your degree once you have it

The following prompts can be used as a starting point to build the statement of purpose.

> **NOTE:** Before you start, do some research. Learn as much as you can about the program, the types of courses you will be taking, the school and its facilities and the professors who will be teaching the courses. This information will be useful when explaining your reasons for selecting the institution and program.

Organization & Content

For purposes of planning and organizing, a statement of purpose can be thought of as comprising four distinct parts, each part consisting of 1-3 paragraphs; each paragraph providing information related to the core questions listed above. **But remember**: the SOP should be formatted as a single, unified essay, unless stated otherwise in the application requirements.

Part 1: Introduction & Background
A direct "I am applying for the graduate program at…" is ok, but many sources recommend starting with an interesting statement that gets the reader's attention, e.g.:
- A statement that demonstrates your passion for your field of study: what is it about your chosen field or area of specialization that really interests you?
- A statement that helps establish the theme or "back-story" for the essay – this could be an experience that prompted you to choose your area of specialization.
- A quote from a famous or renowned individual that links to your own point of view on your field of study or circumstances for applying.
- **Then:** Briefly explain how you became interested in your chosen academic field;
- Explain what lead to your decision to apply for graduate-level studies.

> **NOTE:** At some point in the essay you will have to state clearly and specifically the name of the program and institution to which you are applying. This could appear at some point in the introduction section; or it could be incorporated into Part 3.

Part 2: Academic Work & Experiences
The purpose of this section is to show that you are prepared, both academically and personally, for graduate-level studies.
- Provide a brief overview of your previous academic work: courses you have taken (especially those that had an impact on you and your academic outlook); academic projects you have taken part in; other relevant experiences that link to your personal, academic, or professional development or objectives; special achievements or accomplishments that demonstrate your motivation and abilities.
- If you are applying for a PhD program, provide a summary of your previous research and how it shaped your future research goals
- You can also mention personal problems you have encountered (poverty, illness, excessive work requirements, etc.). **However,** discuss such issues in terms of how they shaped your outlook and objectives, and how you overcame such obstacles. DO NOT try to win sympathy or pity from the admissions committee.

Part 3: Reasons for Applying
At this point in the essay, your academic interests and commitment to your field of study should be clear. Part 3 should explain the underlying reasons for your application, i.e.:
- What do you hope to gain from graduate studies: what specific knowledge or skills do you expect to acquire? (This should link to your academic and/or career objectives);
- Why are you are interested in this particular program? (You could mention program objectives, study focal points, research opportunities, etc.);
- Why are you interested in this particular university? (NOTE: Explaining your interest in the program might be enough; but if there is something special about the institution that attracts you, you could mention that as well, e.g. institutional reputation; renowned professors/researchers; other benefits and/or opportunities the school might provide, etc.).

Part 4: Summary & Conclusion
This part beings the essay to a close. It can be relatively brief and may include:
- A statement that summarizes your long-term academic and/or professional goals;
- A statement that summarizes your reason for selecting the institution and/or program;
- A final remark regarding your hopes of being selected for admission;
- A reference back to the central theme or back-story of the essay as a way of ending the composition.

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Format

> **NOTE: Always check application requirements before beginning your SOP.** Some schools have specific SOP requirements regarding word/page length, line spacing, content, etc. Some programs use online application platforms and *do not require* a formatted application letter.

Visual Layout:
- Statements of purpose are often formatted as essays using the traditional paragraph "indentation" style, though some writers choose to use block format (paragraphs separated by a space),
- Page margins should be about 2.54 cm on both sides of the page (the "normal" margins setting in MS Word).
- Single-spacing can be used for statements of purpose unless otherwise stated.
- The applicant's name and the name of the program for which they are applying can be inserted as a header.
- Insert page numbers for SOPs that are more than one page in length.

Length:
- Statements of purpose for master's degree programs are typically between 750 and 1000 words.
- SOPs written for PhD programs may be longer, though 2 pages (formatted to the specifications listed in this guide) is often the recommended maximum.

Font Size & Style:
- Font sizes 11 or 12 are recommended.
- Times New Roman, Cambria, or Calibri are recommended, but any "readable" font is acceptable,
- Avoid colored fonts. Use standard black.

Writing Style:
SOPs often use a "narrative" writing style, telling "the story" of the applicant, their personal and academic history, their academic and professional plans for the future, their personal goals in life, etc. Some writers prefer a more formal, business-like tone for their application essay. Either is acceptable as long as it adheres to the following rules:
- Do not include unnecessary information: focus on the purpose of the letter. Be clear and to the point.
- Do not use slang, technical jargon, abbreviations, or references that might confuse the reader.
- Do not try to use humor, make jokes, or try to sound clever or witty – this can easily be misunderstood by the reader.
- Do not include highly personal or "emotional" content (unless it is to make a unique and necessary point)
- Do not use meaningless phrases like *"since I was a child I have wanted to be a radiologist"* or *"West University is the best University in the world"*. Give <u>real</u> information that is relevant to the application.

Final Note:

Writing a Statement of Purpose takes time – don't wait until the last minute to get started. Your goal should be to write the best SOP you can. Give yourself plenty of time to plan, write, and revise your work.

To Get Help with your SOP

Make an appointment in the SSH Writing Center:

- Go to www.nazarbayev.mywconline.com.
- Create an account and schedule a time to meet with a WCP writing tutor.

Remember: You can schedule an appointment at any stage of your writing – from planning and creating an outline, to reviewing your final draft.

Works Consulted:

The following were used in the making of this Essentials guide.

Berkeley University Graduate Division "Writing the Statement of Purpose", retrieved from: https://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/apply/statement-purpose/

Prep Scholar, "9 Steps to Write a Great Statement of Purpose for Grad School", retrieved from: https://www.prepscholar.com/gre/blog/graduate-school-statement-of-purpose/

The Princeton Review, "How to Write Statement of Purpose for Graduate School", retrieved from: https://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school-advice/statement-of-purpose

University of Illinois: "How to Write a Great Statement of Purpose", retrieved from: http://mcnair.ucsb.edu/documents/4.09DiversityForumResearcher.pdf

University of Texas at Tyler: "Tips for Writing a Statement of Purpose", retrieved from: http://www.uttyler.edu/graduate/statementofpurpose.php

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