



WCP EXTRA:

Statements of Purpose, Motivation Letters, Personal Statements...What's the difference?

University program admissions committees typically ask for a Statement of Purpose, Motivation Letter, or a Personal Statement (or a combination of these documents) as part of their application package. Some programs provide detailed content guidelines for applicants; other times the requirements are vague or even confusing. The fact that the names of these documents are often used to refer to the same thing makes matters worse. Technically, however, they are different. The chart below provides an overview of the key features of each:

Statement of Purpose	Motivation Letter	Personal Statement
Format: Commonly referred to as an SOP, a statement of purpose is usually formatted as an essay of one or several pages (depending on application requirements). Focus: What you want to do Content: The purpose of the SOP is to provide an overview of your academic and professional interests; your background and qualifications as an applicant; your future academic and professional goals; and why you have selected the program for which you are applying.	Format: Also known as a Letter of Motivation or LOM, motivation letters are formatted either as an essay or a letter (i.e. with a salutation at the beginning, and a sign-off at the end). Focus: Why you are applying Content: The purpose of the motivation letter is to explain your reasons for applying to the program you have selected. This will likely incorporate details such as your future academic and professional goals and possibly past experiences that influenced your choice.	Format: Also known as a Personal Essay, personal statements may be written as a short essay or as a single paragraph (depending on application requirements). Focus: Who you are as a person Content: The purpose of the personal statement is to provide information about who you are as an individual and as a student; and how your life experiences have shaped your character, worldview, and work-ethic. It is more "biographical" and often less formal than the SOP or LOM.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

From the chart, it could be argued that a statement of purpose is all-encompassing, bringing together both the motivation letter and the personal statement. In fact, they all have overlapping features that blur the distinctions between them.

The motivation letter, for instance will naturally include details of your background, past experiences, and future objectives as a means of explaining your motivation for applying. You could also mention your research interests and specific features of the program or institution as contributing factors to your motivation. As such, some sources argue that motivation letters and statements of purpose are essentially the same thing.

Likewise, personal statements often include details such as the program to which you are applying; your specific research interests and how you developed these interests; as well as any other relevant experiences or accomplishments that add to your qualifications as an applicant.

The bottom line: Do your research. Locate and follow whatever application letter guidelines the program offers. If necessary, contact a representative to learn more about their requirements. **Remember:** your letter should be clear, concise and to the point; well-written and error-free – give yourself plenty of time to write and revise your letter.

SOURCES CONSULTED:

Cambridge Coaching.com: Statement of Purpose versus Personal Statement: Knowing the Difference
Retrieved from: <http://blog.cambridgecoaching.com/statement-of-purpose-versus-personal-statement-knowing-the-difference>

Masters Portal: Write a Successful Motivation Letter for Your Master's
Retrieved from: <https://www.mastersportal.com/articles/406/write-a-successful-motivation-letter-for-your-masters.html>

Prepscholar.com: Statement of Purpose vs Personal Statement: The 2 Big Differences
Retrieved from: <https://www.prepscholar.com/gre/blog/statement-of-purpose-vs-personal-statement/>

UCLA Undergraduate Writing Center: Personal Statements and Statements of Purpose
Retrieved from: <https://wp.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/personal-statements-and-statements-of-purpose.pdf>