

How to Write a Statement of Purpose: A Step-by-Step Guide

Now that you understand how to format a statement of purpose, you can begin drafting your own. Getting started can feel daunting, but Pierce suggests making the process more manageable by breaking down the writing process into four easy steps.

1. Brainstorm your ideas.

First, he says, try to reframe the task at hand and get excited for the opportunity to write your statement of purpose. He explains:

“Throughout the application process, you’re afforded few opportunities to address the committee directly. Here is your chance to truly speak directly to them. Each student arrives at this process with a unique story, including prior jobs, volunteer experience, or undergraduate studies. Think about what makes you *you* and start outlining.”

When writing your statement of purpose, he suggests asking yourself these key questions:

- Why do I want this degree?
- What are my expectations for this degree?
- What courses or program features excite me the most?
- Where do I want this degree to take me, professionally and personally?
- How will my unique professional and personal experiences add value to the program?

Jot these responses down to get your initial thoughts on paper. This will act as your starting point that you’ll use to create an outline and your first draft.

2. Develop an outline.

Next, you’ll want to take the ideas that you’ve identified during the brainstorming process and plug them into an outline that will guide your writing.

An effective outline for your statement of purpose might look something like this:

1. INTRODUCTION

- i. An attention-grabbing hook
- ii. A brief introduction of yourself and your background as it relates to your motivation behind applying to graduate school

2. BODY

- i. Your relevant experience and accomplishments that relate to the field
 - a. Example 1
 - b. Example 2
 - c. Example 3
- ii. Your professional goals as they relate to the program you’re applying to
- iii. Why you’re interested in the specific school and what you can bring to the table

3. CONCLUSION

- i. A brief summary of the information presented in the body that emphasizes your qualifications and compatibility with the school

An outline like the one above will give you a roadmap to follow so that your statement of purpose is well-organized and concise.

3. Write the first draft.

Your statement of purpose should communicate who you are and why you are interested in a particular program, but it also needs to be positioned in a way that differentiates you from other applicants.

Admissions professionals already have your transcripts, resumé, and test scores; the statement of purpose is your chance to tell your story in your own words.

When you begin drafting content, make sure to:

- **Provide insight into what drives you**, whether that's professional advancement, personal growth, or both.
- **Demonstrate your interest in the school** by addressing the unique features of the program that interest you most. For Northeastern, he says, maybe it's experiential learning; you're excited to tackle real-world projects in your desired industry. Or perhaps it's learning from faculty who are experts in your field of study.
- **Be yourself**. It helps to keep your audience in mind while writing, but don't forget to let your personality shine through. It's important to be authentic when writing your statement to show the admissions committee who you are and why your unique perspective will add value to the program.

4. Edit and refine your work.

Before you submit your statement of purpose:

- **Make sure you've followed all directions thoroughly**, including requirements about margins, spacing, and font size.
- **Proofread carefully** for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- **Remember that a statement of purpose should be between 500 and 1,000 words**. If you've written far more than this, read through your statement again and edit for clarity and conciseness. Less is often more; articulate your main points strongly and get rid of any "clutter."
- **Walk away and come back later with a fresh set of eyes**. Sometimes your best ideas come when you're not sitting and staring at your computer.
- **Ask someone you trust to read your statement** before you submit it.

Making a Lasting Impression

Your statement of purpose can leave a lasting impression if done well, Pierce says. It provides you with the opportunity to highlight your unique background and skills so that admissions professionals understand why you're the ideal candidate for the program that you're applying to. If nothing else, stay focused on what you uniquely bring to the classroom, the program, and the campus community. If you do that, you'll excel.

To learn more tricks and tips for submitting an impressive graduate school application, explore our related [Grad School Success articles](#).

Editor's note: This article was originally published in March 2017. It has since been updated for thoroughness and accuracy.