

HOW TO WRITE A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The statement of purpose is probably one of the most important parts of your application because it defines who you are in both academic and personal uniqueness. It is the only document they have to observe your style of writing and personal qualities.

Many universities are looking for a good fit for their program. By reading a student's statement of purpose, they can determine if the student's interest and qualifications match what the program needs. Below are a few sample essay questions from various universities' websites. While the wording may vary between each university, most of them say and require the same information.

"Please provide a statement describing your field of interest and the objectives of your educational program and professional career. This may include specific programs within your chosen major/field of study."

- *Texas A&M University*

"Applicants must submit a brief (maximum two pages) personal statement describing his/her educational background, special interests, and reasons for wanting to enter into graduate studies in the geosciences at the University of Utah. If the applicant has previously communicated or interacted with particular faculty members in this department and/or has contemplated the possibility of working with a particular professor on a graduate research project, that information should be included in the personal statement."

- *University of Utah*

"In 750 to 1,000 words, state your professional plans and career objectives (Goal Statement). Please include your personal qualities and development and how they have influenced your career choice; your reasons for this particular degree in relation to your academic background, professional work experience, and career goals; and your reason for selecting your program."

- *George Mason University*

- ★ **Be sure to mention specific professors you would like to work with. They should be those you have been in contact with during the application process.**
- ★ **If appropriate, include interest in receiving funding through research or teaching assistantships.**

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Below is a suggested outline, formatted to simplify the various parts of the statement of purpose. It is meant to be the meat of your statement while allowing you to fill in the rest with supporting sentences.

1. Opening paragraph – good, solid paragraph outlining your overall interest in the graduate program at the university.

2. What are your professional goals following graduation and why you feel that a Master's/PhD will help you attain those goals?

A. Goal #1 (1 sentence)

a. Reason #1 why a master's will help you reach Goal #1 (1-2 sentences)

b. Reason #2 why a master's will help you reach Goal #1 (1-2 sentences)

B. Goal #2 (1 sentence)

a. Reason #1 why a master's will help you reach Goal #2 (1-2 sentences)

b. Reason #2 why a master's will help you reach Goal #2 (1-2 sentences)

C. Goal #3 (1 sentence)

a. Reason #1 why a master's will help you reach Goal #3 (1-2 sentences)

b. Reason #2 why a master's will help you reach Goal #3 (1-2 sentences)

(If you have 3 goals, it would be appropriate to have only 1 reason for each goal, but they need to be very solid reasons.)

3. What specialty areas will you probably be preparing yourself for?

A. Specialty area 1; 1 reason why (2 sentences total)

B. Specialty area 2; 1 reason why (2 sentences total)

4. Why do you think that (Name of University) can offer you what you need in a Master's/PhD program?

A. This is where they want you to tell them why you picked them out of all the other country's program to apply to—what makes them unique?

a. Is there a specialty they offer that coincides with your path of interest?

b. Is it the location that provides unique opportunity for study?

c. Do their professors have a reputation that you like/prefer? i.e. work closely with students, etc?

SAMPLE STATEMENTS

Sample #1

My goal is to attend a well respected university, with a strong Geology graduate program. I want to be involved in a program that will both provide and allow me the opportunity to grow, develop and be challenged in my understanding of a subject area that I feel is my niche. As such, I have selected University of California-Riverside as a top choice of graduate schools to which I am applying.

My professional goals are two-fold. I want to be employed in a leadership role where I make decisions in advancing geospatial technology within government, corporate and educational organizations. Earning a Master's degree in Geology will provide me with opportunities to broaden my geospatial analysis and problem-solving skills. It will also allow me to use additional resources and advanced tools and methods of data processing. My second goal is to teach at the university level to help students develop critical and spatial thinking skills. I believe as a Master's level student, I will gain a focused expertise in areas of particular interest to then teach to students. Also, the process of earning a Master's degree will allow me to work more closely with research faculty which, in turn, will help me build a foundation of essential skills for faculty-student interactions. In addition to these goals, I plan to continue my education by earning a Doctorate degree in a field related to remote sensing and geospatial analysis.

As I further my study at the graduate level, I plan to integrate remote sensing and GIS into spatio-temporal analysis for pre- and post-natural disaster and emergency management preparation. My current research project involves using these skills as I correlate high mountain snow-pack levels with high flood stages in southeastern Idaho. As a benefit from this research, local government officials are better able to prepare for possible flooding hazards along major river channels. To help other researchers and policymakers benefit from this research, I recently presented a poster at the BYU-Idaho Undergraduate Research Conference in December 2011 and will present at the Geological Society of America conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico in May 2012.

From this research experience, I have developed an interest in short- and long-term effects on human sustainability. Specifically, I enjoy working on projects that explore how dynamics of physical geography, including geomorphic and climatological processes, influence how humans adapt to environmental change. Several Geography faculty members, including Dr. Ryan Stevens, study similar topics and methods which would provide excellent learning experiences to help me use specific spatial analysis tools in my study. Dr. Stevens' work on optics and radar integration for land cover mapping aligns with my interest of developing and using remote sensing techniques in many different aspects of geology. I would enjoy working with him and his team to promote scientific research and tools to developing nations across the world.

After careful consideration, I have selected to apply to the University of California-Riverside for three specific reasons which correlate with my goals of education and professional development. First, I feel the program's emphasis on student research will allow me to gain in-depth, hands-on experiences as I work one on one with professors well versed in my areas of specialty. Second, I want to utilize the University of California-Riverside's government and international networking resources as I transition from graduate studies into a professional career. Third, the Geology program allows for an interrelated field of study approach. Not only will I be involved in specialty area student research, but I will also gain a broader understanding of how other fields, such as geomorphology and climatology, affect change within geography, making me a better-rounded geoscientist. Beginning my professional endeavors starts with a solid foundation of education and experience, both of which I will build as a geography graduate student at the University of California-Riverside.

Sample #2

I am an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University-Idaho and will graduate with a B.S. in Geology in April 2012. I am applying to begin a PhD graduate program in Fall 2012. My research interests, abilities, and professional goals would be a great asset to the Department of Geosciences at the University of Arizona.

My interests lie in geodynamics and modeling. Many questions in geology can be approached from a modeling perspective. I intend to explore how physical experimentation, field data, and mathematical models complement one another to answer geologic questions. Although I have broad interests, at the University of Arizona I want to study physical processes involved in magma chamber and eruption dynamics as well as thermal convection and its role in plate tectonics.

I am interested in combining geology with concepts from physics, chemistry, and mathematics to address geologic questions. I am particularly interested in how mathematics can be used as a tool to explore earth processes, to predict how dynamic systems will behave, and to gain perspective of unobservable processes. Nothing is more satisfying to me than creating a working model.

Research goals that I have align with the interests of Dr. Brian Waters and Dr. Patricia Leonard. Several of their projects fit well with my interests and professional intentions, and I look forward to developing potential projects with them. Dr. Waters and I have been in contact through email and at the AGU Fall meeting about potential projects. I am excited about the scope of his research, and it would be a privilege to be mentored by him.

Graduate studies at the University of Arizona will complement my multi-disciplinary approach to modeling geologic problems. In addition to the exceptional facilities of the Department of Geosciences, I plan to take advantage of resources available in the Computational and Applied Mathematics department as a support for validating and testing research models. As a doctoral candidate, I intend to build professional relationships with colleagues across various universities in several academic disciplines. A PhD from the Department of Geosciences at the University of Arizona will serve as the beginning of a successful academic career.