



Department of Romance Languages

Guidelines on Writing a Statement of Purpose

Application to a graduate program advice concerning the Statement of Purpose

Be **PRECISE** and **CONCISE**: avoid sentimental and hyperbolic phrases.

First paragraph:

AVOID: banal, flat, predictable clichés (I have always loved; I have a passion for; ever since I was X years old...) Reread each sentence and ask yourself: will other candidates write the same thing? How can I introduce myself as a person whom the committee will want to meet, teach and guide?

What you want: **TO HOOK** your reader and show your **ORIGINALITY** and **CRITICAL** skills from the outset.

HOW? You can begin with a personal anecdote (travel, experience, linguistic and cultural background), an awful or amazing teaching/learning moment, a failure or a success, a transforming encounter (a book, a teacher...) or with a provocative statement or problem (about current events for example.)

The body of the statement (you decide the best order for answering these questions):

Why are you qualified to attend graduate school? Give **evidence** of all the skills you have that are relevant: reading/writing/analytical/linguistic, etc. (+ special qualities like: organization; hard-work; team-work etc.). In other words, what proves:

- a) your knowledge of culture and literature in [language?] speaking world?
- b) your capacity to read fast and synthesize complex information?
- c) your research skills (locating and quoting sources for example)?
- d) your writing skills?

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Why are you applying to the department of X at the University of Y? (Explain: What are your research goals? What specific aspects are attractive to you? How does it match your interests?)

Professional experience:

If you have a relevant professional experience (for example tutoring or community work or translating/interpreting) or a special talent (music, sports... etc), think of how it might help showcase an interesting aspect of your personality and/or skills.

Mention which faculty you want to work with and why you are the best candidate for this graduate program in particular. What prepares you to succeed in our program?

The strongest statements are **unique** to the individual writing them. Too often, statements are generic and predictable. Reread your statement and make sure your sentences capture what distinguishes you. A strong statement is **inspired** and **truthful**.

Advice for application to a doctoral program

Your application should demonstrate **motivation, intellectual curiosity**, and promise of **great scholarly achievement**.

In the admissions process, the committee considers carefully:

1) your **research goals**. Explain in your statement what research field interests you and why. Explain if you are interested by specific approaches (cinema studies; gender studies; postcolonial studies; food studies; folklore studies; translation; digital humanities, etc.). Clarify if there is a cross or multi-disciplinary or comparative aspect in your research interests.

You might already have a potential dissertation project in mind: explain its interest and originality. If this is not the case, and you want to explore several research alleys during your future coursework, explain what options interest you, what expertise you want to acquire.

Demonstrate familiarity with the research and teaching profiles of the faculty in the programs for which you are applying and how you will benefit from their expertise. Also, investigate other relevant research units (for ex. a Latin

American or Francophone Studies Center, an ethnic studies or medieval studies program; a special collection in the library or a museum, etc.) and how they might nurture your own interests.

2) your demonstrated ability to deal successfully with the rigors of a PhD program and to contribute to a vibrant intellectual community. Explain your **educational path**, relevant **research projects** you have completed (final papers, honors or MA thesis) and any **scholarly achievements** (distinctions, fellowships, grants, prizes; publications). If relevant, specify how you are actively involved on your campus or other communities.

3) your **academic record of achievement** (GPA, GRE etc.). Submit your transcript and scores. Be clear and honest in your statement about your language skills. Please note that recent B grades in your field of study might signal a problem. If a low grade needs to be explained, do so in your statement.

4) your **recommendations**. Choose recommenders who are familiar with your writing, your research interests, your academic background, and potential as a developing scholar. Meet with your recommenders to provide them with information on your work, your goals and your application. In particular, give them your CV and show them the best draft of your statement of purpose ahead of time to receive feedback on revising and improving it.