How to Write an SOP

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What is the statement of purpose (SOP)?

- Your personal statement about
  - who you are
  - what has influenced your path so far
  - your professional interests
  - where you plan to go in the future

- It is generally for school admission or TA/RAship/internship application

Why an SOP is important?

- It is your chance to talk directly to the faculty members.

- It reveals something about your writing ability (it's *unfortunate* for poor writers).

- It brings out your *uniqueness*.

- This is a great opportunity to look inside yourself, and be rewarded via a better understanding of who you are.

The purpose of an SOP

- Persuade the admission committee that
  - you are an applicant they should choose.
  - based on your experience, you are the kind of candidate who will do well in the field.

Your audience are usually people who are experts in their field. Sometimes it is hard to impress them based on what you think, but you need to at least show them you can think.

What to include in an SOP

- Your purpose in graduate study.

- The area of study in which you wish to specialize.

- Your special preparation and fitness for study in the field.

- A justification of the problems in your records or scores.

- Any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere.

- Why do you wish to attend this school?

- Your career plan.

The style of the SOP

- There is no gold standard for SOP, only the one that is best for you and fits your circumstances.

- It should be objective yet self-revelatory.

- It should be specific. Document your statements with specific instances or draw your conclusions as the result of individual experiences.

- It should be an example of careful persuasive writing.

- Everything should be concrete and relevant to your professional background.
  - Don't say "I am diligent, responsible, and smart". Prove it!!

Write your Unique SOP

- A bad example:
  - *"I studied blabla as an undergraduate at XYZ University. There, I had the opportunity to take part in the blablabla research project, where I became fascinated with the questions of blabla and their implications for society. I am pursuing doctoral study in bla bla in order to deepen my understanding of these topics and extend my research further into the area of bla bla bla."*

- To distinguish your essay, add something *unique* to it without throwing in *irrelevant information* that will annoy your readers. One of the best ways to do this is to discuss briefly an idea in your field that turns you on *intellectually*.

Tips

- Before you start writing, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it.

- Use concrete and *professional* ideas or examples from your life experience to distinguish yourself from other applicants.

- Try to start your SOP with an attention-grabbing lead.

- Try to end your SOP with strong arguments.

More Tips

- Be yourself, be honest.
- Do some research about the school/department/faculties before writing.
- Every words should be informative and relevant. Don't write things such as "I like computer science and always want to be a computer scientist", or "I am a professional ping-pong player".
- Don't emphasize on things that are already in the resume (e.g. My GRE score is 2300).
- Show your SOP, preferably, to your advisor or the professors who are writing your recommendations, and get some feedback before you send it in.

Writing Proposal SOP for Stanford UGVR program

- Carefully read the position descriptions
  - Target 1~2 that suits you the best
- Describe why they should choose you based on
  - Expertise: how your previous training benefits
  - Motivation: why you want this internship so much
  - Continuity: what you plan to do to benefit both sides
  - Sincerity: write from your heart
- Describe what you expect to learn from this internship, and how this might have an impact on your future
- Demonstrate that you can think, and is ok with English writing.

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