Writing a Graduate School Statement

Graduate and professional schools often require a written statement as a part of the application. The terminology differs, but may include "statement of purpose," "personal statement," "letter of intent," "personal narrative," etc. Some statements require specific information—for example, the applicant’s intended area of study within a graduate field. Others are unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of information. Some applications call for one statement, while others require responses to a series of six or more questions, ranging from 250 to 1000 words each. The statement is always important, but the emphasis placed on the statement varies from school to school and from field to field.

Determine your purpose in writing the statement

Usually the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant who should be chosen. You may wish to show that you have the ability and motivation to succeed in your field, or you may wish to show the committee that, on the basis of your hands-on experience, you are the kind of candidate who will do well in the field. Whatever its purpose, the content must be presented in a manner that will give coherence to the whole statement.

- Pay attention to the purpose throughout the statement so that extraneous material is left out.
- Consider who your audience is (admissions committee) throughout the statement. Remember that your audience is usually made up of seasoned professionals in their field--you are the beginner.

Determine the content of your statement

Be sure to answer any questions fully. Analyze the questions or guidance statements for the essay completely and answer all parts. Usually graduate and professional schools are interested in the following matters, although the form of the question(s) and the responses may vary:

- **Your purpose for pursuing graduate study.** This means you must have thought this through before you try to answer the question.
- **The area of study in which you wish to specialize.** This requires that you know the field well enough to make a decision and are able to state your preferences using professional language.
- **Your intended future use of your graduate program.** This will include your career goals and plans for the future.
- **Your specific preparation and fitness for study in the field.** This is the opportunity to join and correlate your academic background with your personal/extracurricular experience to show how the combination makes you a qualified candidate.
- **Any problems or inconsistencies in your records or scores, such as a bad semester.** Be sure to explain in a positive manner and justify the explanation. Since this is a rebuttal argument, it should be followed by a positive statement about your abilities. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to provide this information outside of the personal statement.
- **Any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in the application, such as a significant or full-time workload outside of school.** This, too, should be followed with a positive statement about yourself and your future.
- **You may be asked, "Why do you wish to attend this school?"** This requires that you research the school and program, and can describe what its specific appeal is for you.
- **Above all, this statement should contain information about you as a person.** They know nothing about you unless you tell them. You are the subject of the statement.
Determine your approach and style of the statement

There is no such thing as the “perfect” way to write a statement. There is only the one that is best for you.

There are some things the statement should not be:

- Avoid the "what I did with my life" approach.
- Avoid the "I've always wanted to be a " approach.
- Avoid a catalog of achievements. This is only a list of what you have done, and tells nothing about you as a person. Normally, the statement is far more than a resume.
- Avoid lecturing the reader. For example, you should not write a statement such as "communication skills are important in this field." Any graduate admissions committee member knows that and does not need to learn about the field from the applicant. Some admission applications do ask applicants to address their understanding of the field.

These are some things the statement should do:

- It should be objective, yet self-revelatory. Write directly and in a straightforward manner that describes your experience and what it means to you. Do not use "academese." This is not a research paper for a professor.
- It should form conclusions that explain the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself and your field, your future goals, and career plans. Draw your conclusions from the evidence your life provides.
- It should be specific. Document your conclusions with specific instances, or draw your conclusions as the result of individual experience.
- It should be an example of careful persuasive writing. Career counselors can help you by reviewing your draft statement.
- It should get to the point early on and catch the attention of the reader.
- It often needs to be limited in length, no more than two pages or less. In some instances it may be longer, depending on the school's instructions.

Other online resources include:

www.admissionsessays.com

owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/