



Statements of Intent: Overview

Though there are two different genres of written statements, both share a common goal and an audience. The goal is to convince an audience of your qualifications: for graduate school, for law school, for financial support, or for post-doc positions. The key to writing a strong statement is to understand what you should be demonstrating and how it connects to the evaluation process. These tasks often require you to link abstract qualities to your experience or research. In other words, you are making an implicit argument. Why are you prepared for this task? How will you contribute to the organization? Why do you stand out from other candidates? Think of these statements as functional documents, presenting why you should get the money, acceptance or position.

Both forms share a similar presentation, organization, and style. Eaton (2009) summarizes the challenges of these statements as “rhetorically complex, demanding at least a minimum knowledge of the field, either through coursework or through experiences.”¹

Personal Statements demonstrate your desire and preparation. Eaton (2009) suggests that your personal statement should demonstrate your written skills, as well as the seriousness of your application. It should show that you are invested in this field and are aware of the new challenges ahead.

Letters of Intent present your research project, demonstrate your preparedness, and argue the significance of it to the academic field. Its purpose is to demonstrate your scholarly accomplishments or your new research. It needs to be accessible to a wide audience and explain the significance of the work you are doing. Argow and Beane (2009) suggest answering these questions: What have you done? Why should the committee care? What will you do in the future? ²

Presentation: How to Sell Yourself

Read the Instructions

One of the best ways to figure out what you should be doing is to read the instructions. Failing to follow the instructions is one of the most common complaints of committees. Faced with a stack of applications, committees quickly eliminate those who don't follow the instructions. By not following

The Test

Imagine that your ~~is~~ is reading your statement. Would ~~be~~ be able to understand the general idea? Would ~~be~~ be able to tell you why it would be important? Your statement should be able to pass this test.

One Size does Not Fit All

experiences. The following chart is a potential starting point.⁵

Balance Abstractions with Examples

It is one thing to say that you pay attention to detail, but it's another to demonstrate it. Can you give

| | | | | |
|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Achieved | Analyzed | Arranged | Assessed | Clarified |
| Collected | Conducted | Determined | Discovered | Enforced |
| Established | Handled | Initiated | Modeled | Piloted |
| Predicted | Proposed | Screened | Simplified | Tested |
| Translated | Unified | Widened | | |

You need to develop a confident voice that suggests you are aware of the obstacles in the future. Active verbs will build towards this confident voice by describing past accomplishments through the actions you took.

Just Read It: Best Ways to Revise Your Statement

No matter how brilliant the content, all statements are judged, implicitly or explicitly, in terms of quality of writing. For many programs, the personal statement is a way to judge the applicant's written communication. Since we can't avoid it, let's embrace it.

Full Sentences

Most ideas are constructed at the sentence level. Clearly constructed sentences are crucial for a reader to understand your claims. Hence, instructors tend to comment on unnecessarily long sentences.⁸ To find these sentences, read your paper backwards. Start with the last sentence of your statement. You will be able to see the long sentences. Additionally, you will be able to see short sentences, or possible sentence fragments. When revising, keep in mind your own ability to understand the sentence. If you can't easily understand the sentence, your reader will be confused.

Word Choice

Sometimes we can't find the right word. We may compromise by using an inferior choice.

Make sure that the number also matches any pronoun.
For example, the children are at their homes.

Voice

In a personal statement, you will use the word “I”. However, it is important to try to keep the same voice throughout the statement. If you use “I”, don’t switch to “one.” Similarly, don’t use “us” or “we” unless you are suggesting that the audience is already in agreement. Using “us” or “we” can be off-putting to readers as it suggests their pre-existing involvement or agreement.

How to Find These Errors

Writing Support Services has an extensive handout on revision that can help you with your statements: [Strategies for Revising Essays and Research Papers](#).

- 1. Look for one problem at a time:** You can’t find everything at one, so focus on your most common errors.
- 2. Start with the revision that will require the most rewriting:** Focus on paragraphs, sentences and clarity of content before looking for smaller errors or typos.
- 3. Print it out:** You will find more errors on the printed page than on the computer screen.