

Writing Your Statement of Purpose for Graduate or Professional School A Guide to the Process

Daniel Kiefer 105 Holt 909-748-8580

The statement of purpose is a writing assignment in subtle argument, requiring all the work of any writing task: brainstorming, building, organizing, and revising.

1. Brainstorming

Write down your own strengths as a member of the profession you want to enter: teacher, artist, doctor, social worker. Where do you excel in doing what the work requires? Ask your professors and advisors for help in assessing your attributes. Honestly, why do you want to enter the profession? Examine your own interest in the work and how it has developed. Be specific, concrete, individual, and write freely for your own sake.

2. Building

Write out the evidence for your success in your field. Such evidence will include stories of how you discovered your own particular interests; examples of your own distinctive pleasure in pursuing the work; instances of the accomplishments that matter to you. Why does the work you have chosen satisfy you? What do you intend to do, in school and beyond? As a humanities or science student you will engage the intellectual questions in your field; as a professional student you will emphasize your life-work.

3. Organizing

Write more and more, using your evidence to argue that you will succeed in your profession. What distinguishes you in your work? Arrange the evidence into topics, i.e., your

- a. **experience** in the field
- b. **engagement** with the work
- c. intellectual **advancement**, and
- d. hopes for **study** and **practice** in the profession.

Lead off each topic with a striking and sparkling topic sentence.

4. Revising

So far you've been writing for yourself, in order to discover your own aims. Now consider your audience, namely, teachers training the members of the profession you have chosen, future colleagues who love what is distinctive about your experience and your mind. Show your draft to professors in your field who have read plenty of such statements.

Make sure that every sentence is one only you could write. Cross out everything that anyone else might say, everything you should say, and write your own specific sentence instead. Find a tone of voice that expresses your own confidence and genuine enthusiasm. Give every sentence good structure and phrasing, every paragraph design and fullness. Reduce your conclusion to one sentence, and revise your opening to make the case for your particular success.