

What is a statement of purpose?

It is a short *essay* (*maximum length of one page typed and single-spaced, approximately 500 words*) describing your graduate educational and career interests.

What is your vision for your program of study and research?

Identify the nature of any fundamental concepts, questions-problems-opportunities, and applications that you intend to investigate during your graduate studies.

Identify the subject areas or disciplines that you want to master and combine in your interdisciplinary program of study.

Identify the general types of employment or examples of employers you envision for your subsequent career.

Summarize research, teaching, job, or volunteer experiences relevant to your plans. This statement is important because it allows us to identify appropriate faculty in various disciplines who share your interests and could serve a mentor role.

You should aim for a thematic narrative, which deals with the development of your interest in the topic discussed, in your project proposal, rather than a mere listing of when you were born, where you went to school, etc. For example, a successful Marshall University candidate began his personal statement of interest in electrical engineering with an account of how he wired a tree outside his house to light up at Halloween (age 8). Once again, the help of a faculty member, especially one who knows something about writing, is invaluable here. Start early; it will take longer than you think to perfect this part of your application.

The statement of purpose is the graduate program's way of assessing your writing skills and intellect. Put a lot of effort into your statement. When discussing your undergraduate career, highlight the positives and ignore the negatives, if you can. Most departments consider everything about you. **They really do look at the whole package.** Thus, if you are weak in one area, do not panic. As long as you have something that can offset the weakness, you still have a chance. Feel free to discuss this fact (without whining). Above all, be sure that you are explaining weaknesses; not excuses. Remember, admitting responsibility for things shows maturity.

Good luck!