

Writing a winning graduate school statement  
(sometimes called the statement of purpose)

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Gives you chance to set yourself apart

Consider how you fit where you are applying

Show you have motivation

Illustrate that you have experience

Persuade the admission committee that you are the applicant that should be chosen.

Focus on goals

(cut extraneous information)

Realize that the committees have to review many applicants.

- If you do not catch their attention in the first paragraph, you will not get their attention.

- If you caught their attention in the first paragraphs, they will still not read the eighteenth.

Follow instruction of the specific program, if given.

Some may ask questions you would normally not address.

Answer all questions given – preferably in the order as they are given.

List accomplishments – but not a laundry list. Nota bene: This is not your vitae, which is often also enclosed.

Do not volunteer negative issues, but explain those that are unavoidably apparent (bad grades in one semester)

In explaining the negatives, address how you learned from the mistakes.

To not lay blame on anybody (including yourself).

If possible, explain in terms of hardship – worked long hours to support yourself – learned time management skills

Explain any inconsistencies (a year-gap in your resume)  
do it in positive manner.

What preparation and experience you have

Be specific about goals (area of study)

give examples of your involvement in such work as an undergraduate.  
You can change later

How is the particular graduate school the right conduit to your goals.

If you like the work of a particular faculty member – include the name, but only if you read their work and also were already in contact with them

You are the subject of the statements. Even if your decisions were influenced by other people, the committee should not learn more about them than about you.

Avoid

This is what I always wanted...  
especially in context of enormous goals...  
    Develop universal cancer cure  
    Find infinite source of energy  
    Eliminate world ignorance  
    Teach pigs to fly

Do not list your achievements as a list (this belongs into a vitae)

Do not lecture the committee about the field you want to study  
    “Chemistry is the branch of the natural sciences dealing with the composition of substances and their properties and reactions.”  
    They know it.

Do not use overly academic language  
    (However, do not oversimplify)

Explain the value and meaning of your experience.  
Outline your future goals  
Use persuasive style – you are the one to be hired  
Capture the interest of the reader – this does not mean to be dramatic.

Best possible written presentation  
Write, review and edit several drafts of your own.  
Ask somebody (more people) to review your material.  
Do not pay a consulting firm to write your material – if you get accepted, the expectation will be that you will always write at such a level.