



Writing Your Academic Statement of Purpose (ASOP)

What is it?

Each applicant must submit an academic statement of purpose (ASOP). The ASOP is one of your primary opportunities to help the admissions committee understand your academic objectives and determine if you are a good match for the program you are applying to. The goal of this document is to impress upon the admissions committee that you have a solid background and experience in your area of interest and that you have the potential to be successful in graduate study.

Why is it important?

The ASOP is one of the most important pieces of your graduate school application because it:

- Gives the reviewers an understanding of your academic background and interests.
- Allows you to illustrate in your own words what sets you apart from other applicants.
- Helps them determine if you are a good match for the program to which you are applying.
- Shows your communication style and ability.

Information to Include:

Introduce yourself and your academic interests

- Provide simple background information on your area of interest and how it became of particular interest to you.
- Here you can also share with them how and why you decided to pursue a graduate degree in this field.

Describe your academic background, preparation, and training

- Skills you have learned from academic, lab, or research experiences (e.g., undergraduate coursework, research opportunities, scholarly writings, jobs in the field, presentations, etc.). Whenever possible, give specific examples and illustrate the points you are making; don't just simply tell them.
- Research you conducted – project title or focus, research mentor, *your specific role*, what you learned, and the outcome. If there were challenges, don't be afraid to mention what you learned from them. This shows persistence and resilience in the face of adversity—these are also things they are looking for!
- Important papers or thesis project you completed, as well as anything scholarly beyond your academic degree requirements.
- Relevant work or internship experience as related to the field you are applying to.

Show them you are making an informed decision

- Indicate what you would like to study in graduate school in enough detail to convince the faculty that you understand the scope of research in the discipline and are aware of research trends.
- Show them that you have thoroughly researched the program, its faculty, and research focus areas, and why you are applying to this program specifically. This will help you write a more informed essay that is relatable to the faculty who will be reviewing your application.
- Describe why you are a good fit for the program and why the program is a good fit for you.
- If there are specific faculty you are interested in working with, check the program's ASOP instructions and determine how best to mention this in your essay. Some programs require you to name a professor(s) with whom you would like to work.
- Are there any aspects of the program that are of particular interest to you (immersion program, opportunities for collaboration with others outside of the institution, research centers associated with the program, etc.)?
- Include information that is important to you outside of the program – supportive environment for first-year students, access to amazing literary resources, opportunities to participate in professional/career development programming, etc.
- Professional goals – you may wish to outline what you plan to do after you complete the program as a way of underscoring the importance of your choice to pursue graduate study.
- Share any extracurricular opportunities you have had that show leadership, ability to work with a diverse group of people, teaching skills, etc.
- Research degree applicants should identify specific faculty members whose research interests align with your own interests.

Important Things to Remember:

Details

- Pay attention and follow instructions very carefully – every program is different and some have specific items/topics they want you to address.
- Unless otherwise noted, this is an academically focused essay, not necessarily a personal essay. You will likely add some personal details here and there, but be sure to keep the focus on your academic background and future potential.
- Proofread and pay close attention to details – they really matter!
- Have others from a variety of perspectives read your essay before you submit it – they should be looking at it in terms of content, style, and grammar. Remember, those outside of your field can provide you with valuable perspective and feedback.
- Keep in mind that you can continue editing your ASOP after you have submitted it to programs with earlier deadlines.

Length, Format, and Tone

- Unless otherwise noted, one to two pages in a standard font and size is typical.
- Include your full name and proposed program of study at the top of each page – if faculty are not reading an electronic version of your essay, pages can become separated.
- Write with confidence and in an active voice – doing this makes your sentences clear and less wordy/complicated.
- Language should be positive and focused. Since faculty are the ones reviewing your application, it is fine to use discipline-specific terminology, tone, and style in your ASOP.

Final Checklist

Have you...

- Described your academic background in enough detail to show your experience and preparedness in the field?
- Shown that you are a good fit for the program you are applying to?
- Defined why you want a graduate degree in this field?
- Demonstrated that you are self-motivated, persistent, competent, and have the skills necessary to be successful in graduate school?
- Followed the ASOP instructions as defined by the program you are applying to?
- Polished, proofread, and had others review your ASOP?