

## Guidelines for Writing a Statement of Intent

The letter of intent or personal statement is a standard component of most graduate and professional school applications.

- it must be no more than 1.5 pages, single-spaced
- it must include your name that of the program to which you are applying
- it should be addressed to the Admission Committee
- it should explain any gaps in employment and/or poor academic performance
- it must be saved as a PDF and submitted with your resume in one email

The statement of intent provides an opportunity to explain -- through narrative, example, and analysis -- aspects of your personal, educational, and professional history that may have led you to pursue an advanced degree at a particular institution. Admissions committees rely heavily on these letters to put a face on impersonal test scores and grade point averages.

For this reason, it's important for you to use details and thoughtful self-presentation to make your face one that stands out in a crowd. Your essay should demonstrate your ability to make connections between your experience, education, and the program you have chosen. The most challenging aspect of this document is making those connections in a relatively small amount of space.

**Be focused.** Decide what point you want to make overall: that you are a proven achiever, that you can deal with challenges, or that you have something special to contribute to the program.

**Be coherent.** Being "together" is a quality of writing as well as of character. A clearly organized letter can create a picture of a clear-minded and sensible person. You might want to create an outline or a diagram of main points. Check the topic sentences of each paragraph in your finished piece to see if they flow in a logical sequence.

**Be interpretive.** You need to make an impression concisely, so don't use your letter just to repeat the facts stated in other parts of the application. Provide explicit answers for the questions that may arise in the mind of the reader. Use nouns and adjectives that name qualities (outgoing, curiosity, confident) and verbs that show action (coordinated, investigated, tried). Use ones that suit the evidence you are offering.

**Be specific.** There's no point making claims unless you can back them up. Refer to the facts you have listed in other parts of your application ("as my academic record shows"), but be sure to offer enough examples in your letter so that it can stand on its own. Say that they are just instances, not your whole proof ("An incident from last summer is an example..."). The concrete language you use for these specific references will also balance the generalizing words of your interpretive points.

**Be personal.** Your letter substitutes for an interview. In effect, the readers have asked you to tell stories, mention details, and expand on facts. Mention things you might not have put into the rest of the application--your ethnic background or political interests, even. Don't be afraid to mention problems or difficulties and stress how you have overcome them. Use "I" rather than phrases like "this writer" or "my experience" or "was experienced by me."

