

Statement of Purpose Checklist



I probably don't need to tell you that your statement of purpose is VERY important.

Sure, your grades will still be the first thing the college admissions guys look at when considering your application. But to truly stand out among the thousands of applicants who apply for graduate school every year, your statement of purpose needs to be pretty special.

To help you along the way, here's the checklist that Vappingo's editors use to quickly make sure that every statement of purpose we edit or rewrite cuts mustard when it comes to gaining those sought-after university places.

1

Does the statement have a "hook"?

The one aspect of personal statements that our clients seem to struggle with the most is the "hook." The hook is the all-important first paragraph that grabs the attention of the admission committee members and makes you stand out from the rest.

YAY

"I once worked in a hotel behind a bar. I did the same thing every shift: serve drinks. There wasn't much for me to learn, and I didn't feel particularly fulfilled in life. One day, I decided enough was enough. I knew I could achieve more with my life. The next day I applied to college so that I could get the education I needed to find a job."

VERSUS

NAY

"For what seemed like the hundredth time, I glanced at the clock; the minute hand had barely moved since I last checked. As I stood behind the musty deserted bar in a run-down hotel that had seen better days, I suddenly realized that I had to take control of my own life and make positive steps to change. Otherwise, I would become as dull and lifeless as the hotel at which I now worked."



The hook shouldn't be telling the reader how to feel. The quickest and easiest way to hook someone into any piece of writing is to make them feel like they *actually experienced* an event for themselves.

The second opening statement will grab the attention of the members of the admissions committee much faster than the first.

Why?

Because it forges an emotional connection.

As such, when you're drafting your personal statement, make sure you shoot for an opening like example one.



Action step:

Open your statement of purpose with a clear and compelling hook.



□ Does the statement of purpose tell a story?

Admissions committee members are human beings. Just like you and I, they like to be entertained.

Instead of describing the events of your life in a dull and rote fashion, you should progress from your hook to tell the review committee the story of how you have to got to where you are today and how you decided where you want to be in the future.

We come across a lot of SOP opening paragraphs that read like this:

“ Having completed my undergraduate studies in chemistry and gained practical work experience in the medical setting, I am now keen to progress my academic career further by completing a master's degree in microbiology. ”

Lame ↙

If your first draft looks like this, rewrite it immediately.

“ From the very first time I looked down a microscope and saw the way the cartilage cells were shaped and positioned within the cartilage matrix, I was hooked. I could feel my heart beating in my chest as I observed the brilliant complex structure/function relationship between the various cartilage components and the health and viability of the tissue. Suddenly, I was no longer a lab technician performing standard tests, I was someone who had the potential to make a contribution to knowledge of osteoarthritis and, ultimately, serve those suffering from this painful and debilitating disease. ”

Great! ↘

- Start with a time and/or place. Examples: Last year; When I was eight years old; Three years ago; When I first saw; During my usual shift at the data center; etc.

- Incorporate the five senses. Reproduce what it felt like to be in that particular place at that particular time. What could you see? Smell? Touch? Taste? Hear?



Your objective should be to firmly plant the reviewer in your shoes and to involve them in the story of your life. We remember stories much better than we do statements.

Why?

Because, again, we forge a connection with stories.



Action step:

Tell an interesting story that starts with a bang!



Is the story supported with data and facts?

It's not enough for your story to be entertaining. It also needs to be convincing.

When it comes to a formal document like a statement of purpose, there is nothing more convincing than facts and data. Achieve an ideal balance between quality and quantity and you will not only provide a story that catches the reader's attention in a deep and meaningful way, you will also present a **believable** story.

Let's say you spent your college vacations building houses for people affected by the Haiti earthquake. You could say:



One summer, I volunteered for an initiative that aimed to provide shelter for families who had lost their homes in the Haiti earthquake. We helped many people and it gave me an enormous sense of achievement.

That sounds great; well done you! But what impact did your participation in this initiative actually have on the people you aimed to help?

You could consider switching it up a little:



In the summer of 2011, myself and 32 additional volunteers participated in an initiative that aimed to retrofit the houses that were seriously damaged during the 2010 Haiti earthquake. We helped 55 families to upgrade their homes and strengthen them against future natural disasters. It gave me an enormous sense of achievement to watch families move back into their homes from the temporary camps they had been living in since the earthquake. Our seven days of manual labor achieved much more than simply giving people a roof over their heads, it gave the families a renewed sense of comfort and security.

Awesome!

Can you see the difference?

By providing the reader with facts and data, you enhance the quality and authenticity of the story and create a lasting impression.



Action step:

Whatever story you tell, add numbers and specific facts to make it more powerful.



Does the SOP avoid the use of clichés?

The majority of statements of purpose our proofreaders come across are full of stock phrases and high-level claims that mean absolutely nothing to the average admissions committee member.

If you want your SOP to be read and, more importantly, you want to secure an interview, steer well and truly clearly away from clichés and meaningless jargon.

Take a look at an example:

“ I am a hard worker who gives 100% to every task.



If only we had a dollar for every SOP we come across in which the applicant claims to be a hard worker.

No one is likely to declare themselves a slacker are they?

Everyone works hard, and those that don't are likely to lie about it and say they do work hard; you have just wasted a line of your statement of purpose telling the recruiter that *you are exactly the same as every other applicant*.

This is no good when your objective is to stand out.

“ Proven track record of achievement spanning three years.

Lame ↙

What exactly did you achieve during those three years?

“ Successfully signed twelve new customers in first six months, contributing additional revenue to the department of approximately \$160,000 USD per year.

Great! ↘



Action step:

Ditch the clichés and concentrate on telling it how it really is.



Is the essay tailored to the university?

The majority of candidates make the same fundamental mistake: They write a statement of purpose that's all about themselves.

Think about it like this: Would you be interested in dating someone who talks about themselves all night?

If your cover letter waxes lyrical about how great you are and nothing else, don't be surprised if application after application disappears into a deep, dark hole never to see the light of day again.

Every single university is different. Every course of study is different. One size does not fit all. To take your statement of purpose to the next level, you need to tell the admissions committee three things:

- 1) You understand their university and the community they have created.
- 2) You understand the program on offer.
- 3) You understand the type of student they are looking for.



If you don't communicate this understanding, you will not convince the committee that you are a good fit.



Action step:

Stick the generic SOP in the trashcan and tailor every statement of purpose specifically to the university you are applying to.



Is the tone and language appropriate?

The majority of SOPs that Vappingo's proofreaders and editors encounter are extremely formal; They would put the Magna Carta to shame!

Try and achieve the delicate balance between ensuring your statement of purpose is taken seriously and communicating a little of your personality.

Why?

This is what will make you memorable and set you apart from the other candidates.

Important! Don't be tempted to use big words in an attempt to convince the admissions committee that you're a clever clogs. You're not writing a new philosophy of being. You're writing a letter to a stranger. You're trying to communicate a message, efficiently and effectively.




Action step:

Use slightly formal language that is injected with your own character.



Statement of Purpose Perfected



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Is the story believable?

It's important that you don't confuse *telling a story* with completely fabricating a pack of lies.

But what happens if your life thus far has been pretty standard? What happens if you don't have a compelling story to tell?

The story outlined in your statement of purpose doesn't need to be the next New York Times' bestseller. It just needs to be three things:



It's really, really easy to achieve this:

If you are true to yourself in your statement of purpose, you will automatically write an essay that is realistic and believable.



Action step:

Avoid the temptation to make things up. Tell the story as it really happened and you'll get **MUCH** better results.



Is the candidate convincing?

Ask yourself a simple question:

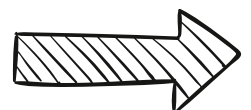


Is this *really* the course I want to study and the place I want to study it?

The whole purpose of the admissions essay is to persuade the admissions committee to accept you on a particular course of study.

How can you possibly do this if you are not convinced yourself?

You must be categorically sure of what you want to study, why you want to study it, and why this particular program at this particular university is perfect for you.



Always proofread your final statement of purpose carefully and ask other people to check your work. Making sloppy or careless mistakes will cost you dearly.

It's a good idea to have a professional editor look at it. They may have served on a committee, and should help you to put your best foot forward.



Action step:

Hire a professional proofreader or editor to make sure your statement of purpose is *absolutely perfect*.

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