

# **writing an effective statement of purpose**

your statement of purpose is

A BRIEF PIECE OF WRITING IN WHICH YOU WILL  
DESCRIBE WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU WANT.

IT SIMULTANEOUSLY OPERATES AS . . .

- **AN INTERVIEW**
- **A SALES PITCH**
- **A LETTER OF INTENT**
- **A PROSPECTUS**
- **A WRITING SAMPLE**

# GENERAL GUIDELINES

## know the application process

- ✓ understand the role of the statement of purpose in the application packet
- ✓ consider your audience (members of a selection committee)
- ✓ follow the directions given in the application packet including page lengths, font size, etc.

### THE APPLICATION PACKET

#### USUALLY INCLUDES

- the application form itself
- undergraduate transcripts
- letters of recommendation
- the Statement of Purpose

#### AND SOMETIMES INCLUDES

- a vitae or resume
- an essay other than the statement of purpose

## **pre-writing** (brainstorming, researching, outlining, listing, free-writing, clustering, etc.)

### THE INSTITUTION AND PROGRAM

Sometimes a statement prompt will ask you to say why you are applying to the particular program. For academic MA or PhD programs, this information is particularly important. For each program to which you are applying, make a list of things you like about that program. Select the most important ones to put in your statement. Here's how to find out what they are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ read catalog information about the institution & the program  | ✓ talk to students in the program & student advisors to find out <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the strengths &amp; weaknesses of the program</li><li>• the availability of teaching, research, and/or community outreach opportunities</li></ul> |
| ✓ read departmental web sites   |  |
| ✓ review lists of course offerings  |  |
| ✓ read course descriptions & course syllabi on line   | ✓ talk to faculty at UCSB, especially those who did graduate or undergraduate work or formerly taught at the school to which you are applying  |
| ✓ read faculty profiles & recent faculty publications to find out what their research interests are                     |  |
| ✓ read web pages of current students to find out about the kind of work possible at the school that you are considering | ✓ talk to department staff or look online to find previous years' admissions statistics such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#applied</li><li>#enrolled</li><li>#admitted</li><li>demographic information</li></ul>                               |
| ✓ find out the structure of the program. How much coursework will you do? How much independent research?                |  |

pre-writing (more brainstorming, researching, outlining, listing, free-writing, clustering, etc.) about

# little old YOU

You should devote several hours to brainstorming about what to include in your statement. Cast the net wide. Think about many experiences that you might want to talk about in your statement that you will ultimately narrow down to five or six or even fewer.

## SOME IDEAS . . .

- ✓ interview people who know you in different contexts--family members, peers, friends, employers, professors, teaching assistants, tutors. This works better for people applying to professional (as opposed to academic) programs for which the statement can focus more on personal qualities and aptitudes than specific research interests.
- ✓ draw on personal resources--letters, journals, emails, your blogs, photographs--to fill in the gaps in your personal history.
- ✓ make a detailed timeline of your life, especially your life during undergraduate study (use details from your life to fill in the timeline below)

grades 1-6	grades 7-12	1st yr Fall	1st yr Winter	1st yr Spring	Summer	2nd yr Fall	2nd yr Winter	2nd yr Spring	Summer	3rd yr Fall	3rd yr Winter	3rd yr Spring	Summer	4th yr Fall	4th yr Winter

- ✓ use your transcripts and whatever sources you have at your disposal--the UCSB catalog, your textbooks, the papers you wrote, the exams you took, class notes, notes in the margins of books--to help you to remember details about your coursework that your transcripts don't show. This academic material is most important for people applying to academic MA and PhD programs

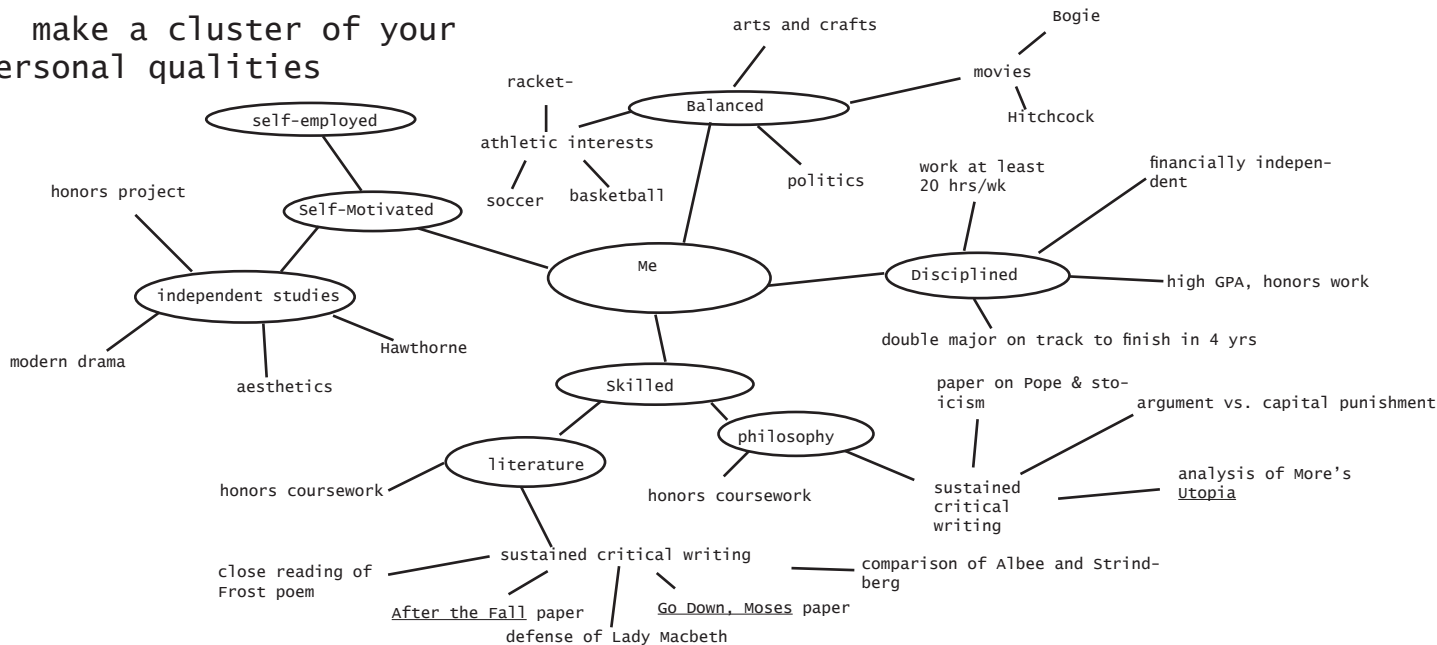
### NOTE WHAT TRANSCRIPTS SHOW & DO NOT SHOW ABOUT AN APPLICANT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

S04 06114 CHEM 109C	A	U	4.0	4.0	4.0	16.00	HONORS
S04 14092 EEMB 3	A	U	3.0	3.0	3.0	12.00	
S04 14241 EEMB 3L	A	U	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.00	
S04 37192 PHYS 6C	A+	U	3.0	3.0	3.0	12.00	
S04 37309 PHYS 6CL	A	U	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.00	
S04 TOTAL Deans Honors		U	12.0	12.0	12.0	48.00	24.00 4.00
-----							
M04 01768 CHEM 6B	A+	U	2.0	2.0	2.0	8.00	A
M04 TOTAL		U	2.0	2.0	2.0	8.00	4.00 4.00
-----							
F04 52266 EEMB 108	A	U	5.0	5.0	5.0	20.00	
F04 46342 ESS 131	B+	U	4.0	4.0	4.0	13.20	
F04 46375 ESS 149	A-	U	4.0	4.0	4.0	14.80	

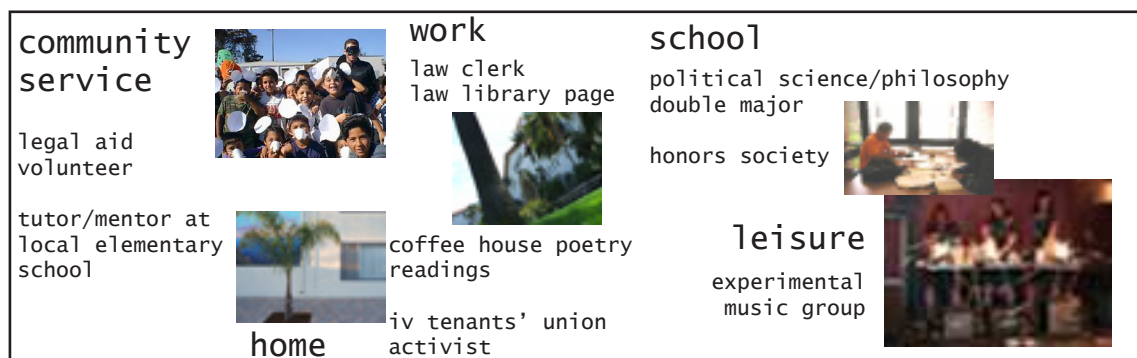
**SHOW**  
grades  
units taken  
courses taken credit/no credit  
major(s) & GPA  
term courseload & performance  
course names & number  
upper & lower division work  
number of years in school  
name of institution(s) attended

**DO NOT SHOW**  
why grades were received  
what grades mean  
difficulty of courses taken  
course requirements  
course format  
descriptive course titles  
specific work performed in courses  
information about faculty  
applicant's relationship with faculty

✓ make a cluster of your personal qualities



✓ make a map of the different parts of your super-fabulous life

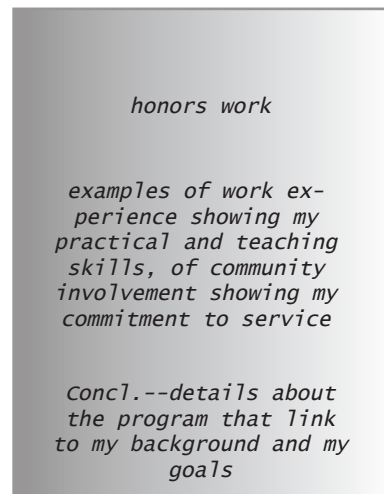
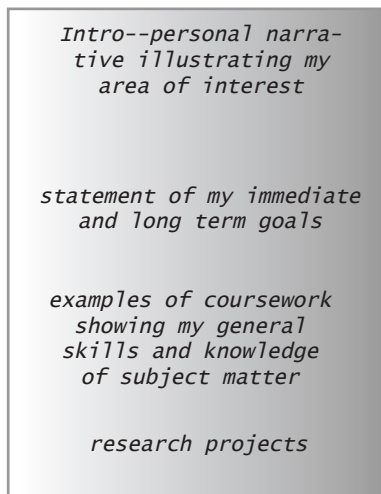


✓ read statements of purpose written by people in your field of interest

- if you have any graduate-student friends, ask if they will let you read their statements
- compare notes with peers who are writing statements of purpose
- ask the graduate advisor in your department if sample statements of purpose are available
- look online for sample statements

## PLANNING YOUR ESSAY

- ✓ Choose the most relevant & most vivid examples from your brainstorming
- ✓ Draft in sections in the order easiest for you
- ✓ Practice page visualization



# what you write

- ✓ Develop a set of thematics that you want to carry through the whole essay (advanced understanding of a current debate in your field, commitment to public health, multicultural understanding)
- ✓ Discuss experiences that illustrate these thematics
- ✓ Assess or explain each concrete detail in terms of its meaning for you. These explications of meaning should be consistent with your thematics.
- ✓ Tell the truth

## DANGERS LURKING JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little white lies</li> <li>• empty flattery</li> <li>• overgeneralizations             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the philosophical</li> <li>the one-dimensional</li> <li>the juvenile</li> <li>the painfully obvious</li> </ul> </li> <li>• narratives of discovery</li> <li>• autobiographies</li> </ul> | <p>this program is my first choice ...</p> <p>this program is the finest in the country ...</p> <p>life in the universe is ever-changing ...</p> <p>my only goal in life is ...</p> <p>I have always wanted to be a doctor ...</p> <p>I believe that my undergraduate education has prepared me for ...</p> <p>at that point I knew I wanted to ...</p> <p>and when I was twelve my family moved to ...</p> |
|---|---|

✓ Show; don't tell

WORDS AND PHRASES THAT  
TELL RATHER THAN SHOW

### ADJECTIVES

stimulating	significant
enthusias- tic	interesting
invaluable	challenging
exciting	rewarding
helpful	satisfying
remarkable	gratifying
appealing	meaningful
important	responsible
fascinating	useful

### VERBS

like  
enjoy  
appreciate  
help people  
means a lot to me  
can contribute  
feel good

## TELLING

My work as a  
teacher's aide  
was challenging.

The program is ap-  
pealing to me be-  
cause of its ex-  
cellent faculty.

I will put my  
writing and ana-  
lytical skills to  
good use at Boalt  
Hall.

## SHOWING

*My work as a teacher's aide in a bi-lingual third grade classroom included planning and implementing lessons in English and Spanish, organizing recess activities, and working individually with students who needed extra help with reading and writing skills.*

*I have chosen Princeton in part for the opportunity to work with and learn from Professors Joshua McCormick and Sharon Reed. Professor McCormick's realignment of contemporary understandings of the economics of shelter informed all of my data analysis in my work on homelessness in Washington D.C. Professor Reed's work on poverty among women, of course, aligns closely with my own concerns about the sex of homelessness.*

*I also plan to use the analytic skills developed in my undergraduate studies in Philosophy and the critical reading and writing skills developed in my studies of Literature to contribute to the law school's journal and to teach legal writing in the undergraduate pre-law program.*

# AND NOW THE REAL FUN BEGINS: REVISION STRATEGIES

## √ Revise

- For Content
  - check evidence for detail and accuracy
  - are you expressing a clear set of thematic?
  - are you explaining the importance of the experiences that you describe in the statement?
- For Structure
  - check paragraph order, breaks, and transitions
- For Style & Presentation
  - check for clarity, conciseness, grammar, spelling
- Look at your word choices
  - are any of your words vague or imprecise?

## √ Get Feedback

- list 5 people whose opinion and/or writing ability you trust to ask for feedback
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_
- ask for feedback from different people
- ask for feedback at different stages of the writing process
- ask each reader a limited number of questions
- ask each reader specific questions
- ask each reader to describe their reactions rather than evaluate or assess

For additional information about the writing process, see the following CLAS handouts:

Prewriting Strategies  
Transitions and Logical Cues  
Revising Sentences  
Clarity  
Style  
Punctuation Pattern Sheet  
Passive Voice

For individual assistance at any stage in the writing process, drop in or sign up for an appointment with a CLAS writing tutor--open Monday-Thursday 9 to 5, Monday-Wednesday 6-10, and Fridays 10 to 3 in SRB 3240.