

Differences between Statements of Purpose and Personal Statements

Statement of Purpose

The focus of a Statement of Purpose is typically what you have accomplished academically in the past and what you plan to accomplish academically and professionally in the future.

This document focuses primarily on the purpose you have for applying to a specific program. It is less about your character and more about your previous experiences, your goals, and the connections to the program to which you are applying.

The goal of the Statement of Purpose is to demonstrate your understanding and preparation for the academic pursuits and rigors of a graduate program, including the coursework, research, and possibly teaching expectations.

Be specific about research interests. While no one will hold you accountable to pursuing the research you describe in your Statement of Purpose, a specific research focus allows the admissions committee to evaluate whether your interests are a good match for their program.

This document is more technical and academic and less biographical.

Personal Statement

The focus of the Personal Statement is typically on personal thoughts, feelings, and reflections. This document is more biographical than the Statement of Purpose.

A good way to understand the Statement of Purpose is as a document that shows your passion for the field to which you are applying. You will want to demonstrate personal characteristics that show your readiness for graduate school.

This document encourages a discussion of your background, perspectives of diversity, and how your experiences have shaped you as a person and a learner.

You can discuss overcome significant barriers, but try to stay positive, focusing on what you learned and gained from overcoming the barriers.

Both documents are used to determine if you are a good investment and match for the program to which you are applying. Sometimes schools may ask for a personal statement that does the work of a statement of purpose—Read carefully what you are being asked to do in the document.



References

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