



School of Liberal Arts

University Writing Center

*"Because writers need readers"*

Cavanaugh Hall 427      University Library 2125

(317)274-2049                      (317)278-8171

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## *Writing Documents to Accompany Applications for Graduate School, Scholarships, Fellowships, or Other Programs*

*When you complete an application, often you are required to include a written statement or letter, sometimes referred to as a "Personal Statement" or a "Letter of Intent." These documents call for specific information **and** evidence of good writing skills. Most academic programs involve much writing, and applicants are expected to be able to handle the writing required. Good writing skills are also associated with good thinking skills. School or program officials reading your document will be looking carefully at your writing to determine whether or not you are likely to succeed in the particular program.*

### **ALLOW YOURSELF ENOUGH TIME TO REVISE CAREFULLY**

Usually, you obtain a copy of the application packet in ample time to allow you to write multiple drafts of your statement or letter. Your reader will expect you to have revised it so that it is an example of "polished" writing, representing the best writing you can produce.

### **ANALYZE THE "ASSIGNMENT"**

These written documents are required in order to assist school or program officials in deciding whom to choose among many applicants. Your document can help to make you stand out as a real person for the reader, with a distinct personality and identity.

#### ***Remember***

- People who read these documents usually have piles of them to read, so anything that helps yours stand out from the others will provide a specific and favorable impression about you.
- Your document should indicate to the reader that you are a candidate who will be successful in the program, and that you will be a credit to the program you are seeking to enter.
- Be as specific as you can about your career goals. You may not have thought through them as thoroughly as you indicate in your document, but you need to project an image of someone who has clear ideas about where he or she plans to go in life.
- Through your document, you need to persuade the reader that you
  - ✓ have sincere interest in the specific program
  - ✓ possess sufficient qualifications to complete the program
  - ✓ plan productive uses for what you will gain from the program after you complete it.

## NOTE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Pay close attention to any guidelines or instructions given for format and content.

- What is the length requirement/recommendation? Is there a page/word limit? If you need to place your document on the application form itself, make sure it fits in the space provided.
- What aspects about yourself are you specifically asked to discuss? What aspects are you specifically asked **not** to discuss?
- If there are several specific aspects you are asked to include, a handy method of organizing your document is to present the required information in the order of the aspects listed in the guidelines.

**Throughout your revision process, keep checking to make sure you are fulfilling all the requirements in the document guidelines.**

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Since the writing in the document is about **you**, it is appropriate to write in the first person, using such pronouns as "I," "me," and "my."
- Throughout your drafting and revising process, consult with other people about your progress, asking them to read your drafts and respond to your specific questions.
- Provide information about your distinctive qualities, talents, successes, achievements, and life experiences.
- Vague statements about "society" and "life" in general will not be useful. Try to avoid making your document "generic," one which **any** applicant might produce. Back up general statements you make about yourself with specific examples/support. If you say you have always liked working with children, provide a concrete example of work you have done in that area, perhaps in a local daycare center or as a camp counselor. Be specific about where your experiences have taken place, the amount of time you spent in such activities, and about the duties for which you were responsible.
- Try to convey that you are a candidate who is sincere, honest, realistic, talented, and qualified for the position you are seeking.
- Avoid being too informal or conversational in tone.
- Make sure your document is organized well, with smooth transitions between paragraphs and between sentences within paragraphs to connect your ideas clearly and logically.
- Help your reader go through your document easily, with an effective introduction, logically arranged paragraphs, and a conclusion which provides adequate "closure" for your reader.
- Check to see that your sentences are varied in length and organizational pattern, to make the reading more interesting.
- Don't use too many words, or too few words.
- Don't include irrelevant information.
- Don't be too "snazzy," seeking to impress the reader with your verbal gymnastics.
- Don't be boring; use active, not passive, verbs; use varied vocabulary; avoid repetition of the same words.
- Be neither too modest nor too boastful. You want to present the best possible picture of yourself, so be complimentary, but avoid misrepresentation, falsification, and arrogance.
- In final drafts, check for errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc. Use a plain type face, preferably a 12-point font. Double space unless otherwise indicated.

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Document created by Mary Jo Pride, Summer 2000

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