

### **Q: What is a Statement of Intent?**

A statement of intent is required with your applications to graduate school in an academic subject, e.g., an M.A. in Economics, or a PhD in Chemistry. Most graduate schools applications will prompt you with topics to discuss, but if they don't, here's a guide to what the schools are looking for.

### **A: It is a 2-page, 1-1/2 or double spaced statement that addresses the following:**

1. Why are you applying to this program?
2. How has your experience (academic, work, etc.) prepared you to enter this program?
3. What do you plan to do—professionally—with this degree?

The statement of intent should focus almost solely on the academic subject being pursued. Admissions committees are not interested in whether you enjoy the subject (that would be assumed) or think graduate school would be interesting, challenging, fulfilling, etc. They want to know how committed a candidate you are and if you are prepared—and motivated—to pursue more rigorous study. This should be a professional statement and it is your opportunity to present yourself as a serious applicant.

### **A statement for an application should be essentially a statement of your ideas and goals.**

Your aim should be a clear, succinct statements showing that you have a definite sense of what you want to do and enthusiasm for the field of study you have chosen. Your essay should reflect your writing abilities; more important, it should reveal the clarity, the focus, and the depth of your thinking.

### **BUT FIRST ...**

**Before writing anything, stop and consider what your reader might be looking for; the general directions or other part of the application may give you an indication of this.**

**ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES MAY BE TRYING TO EVALUATE A NUMBER OF THINGS FROM YOUR STATEMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING THINGS ABOUT YOU:**

- Motivation and commitment to a field of study
- Expectations with regard to the program and career opportunities
- Writing ability
- Major areas of interest
- Research or work experience
- Educational background
- Immediate and long-term goals
- Reasons for deciding to pursue graduate education in a particular field and at a particular institution
- Maturity
- Personal uniqueness—what you would add to the diversity of the entering class.

### **THERE ARE TWO MAIN APPROACHES TO ORGANIZING AN ESSAY.**

You can outline the points you want to cover and then expand on them, or you can put your ideas down on paper as they come to you and editing until you achieve a logical sequence.

Making an outline will probably lead to a well-organized essay,

whereas writing spontaneously may yield a more inspired piece of writing. Use the approach you feel most comfortable with. Whichever approach you use, you will want someone to critique your essay. Your adviser and those who write your letters of recommendation may be very helpful to you in this

regard. If they are in the field you plan to pursue, they will be able to tell you what things to stress and what things to keep brief. Do not be surprised, however, if you get differing opinions on the content of your essay. In the end, only you can decide on the best way of presenting yourself.

## PREP QUESTIONS **You Might Ask Yourself:**

- When did you first become interested in this field and what have you since learned about it?
- What details of your life have shaped you or influenced your goals (family members, professionals, education, work, research)? Consider others, family, education, work, volunteerism, etc.
- Is there anything that has reinforced your goal?
- Have you had to overcome unusual obstacles in your life?
- What skills (leadership, communication, analytical) do you possess?
- What makes you different from all other qualified applicants?

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## DICKINSON -INSIGHT-

The decision to attend graduate school should not be taken lightly, nor should it be a “fallback” position because you don’t yet know what you want to do. Graduate school is fast-paced and focused, therefore it’s not a time to find yourself; it’s a time to jump in and master skills and content. **Your first step should be to discuss your plan with faculty in your department, academic advising and a career counselor.**

### DEFINITELY DO:

- Have a strong introductory paragraph.** Catch the reader’s attention.
- Keep it within a reasonable length.** Unless prescribed, plan on no more than two pages.
- Use spell check, but do not depend on it completely.**
- Space text 1.5 or double space, use wide margins, and legible font and size.**
- Include your name on each page.**
- Be specific, accurate and truthful.**
- Make certain that your statement supports and is supported by the rest of your application.**
- Turn negatives into positives.**
- Ask several people to review your statement before submitting it.**

### BE SURE YOU DON'T:

- Use the statement to explain a low exam score or GPA.** These issues should be addressed in an addendum, which can be attached to your application.
- Overuse the thesaurus.**
- Use clichés or quote others extensively.**
- Use the third person.**
- Send multimedia presentations, copies of papers or theses.**
- Philosophize.**
- Pat yourself on the back too much.**
- Be cynical or overly humorous.**
- List activities that are already on the application.**
- Repeat what is on your resume.**

## Special Considerations

If there is information in your application that might reflect badly on you, such as poor grades or a low admission test score, it is better not to deal with it in your essay unless you are asked to. Keep your essay positive. You will however need to explain anything that could be construed as negative in your application as failure to do so may eliminate you from consideration. You can do this on a separate sheet entitled “Addendum,” which you attach to the application, or in a cover letter that you enclose. In either form, your explanation should be short and to the point, avoiding long, tedious excuses. In addition to supplying your own explanation, you may find it appropriate to ask one or more of your recommenders to address the issue in their recommendation letter. Ask them to do this only if they are already familiar with your problem and could talk about it from a positive perspective.

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