Your Personal Statement (Statement of Purpose) allows you to describe yourself to your graduate programs of interest. This statement will highlight your personal background, your academic and professional goals, why you are applying to graduate school, and the details of why you are qualified and ready for graduate school.

The word/character limits for this statement will vary depending on the program you are applying to. Keep in mind that programs will typically ask for 500 – 1000 words (1 – 2) pages.

Each paragraph in your statement (sections below) should build up the story of who you are, why you want to go to graduate school, and what you have done to prepare yourself for graduate school.

**Do not:**

* use passive voice. Only use active voice.
* use language that minimizes experiences/training. Your academic journey and research training is unique and does not have to be a detriment.

**In general, as you are writing, keep in mind the following questions items:**

* How have these experiences driven you to want more in graduate school?
* How are you prepared for the realities of a PhD program?
* Define what will make you successful as you pursue research at the graduate level.

**First Paragraph/Opening Paragraphs: Introduce yourself, your interests, and your motivations.**

How/When did you become interested in your major/field of research/scholarly interests? Why are you interested in your major/field of research/scholarly interests? Was it through classes, readings, seminars, or conversations with people already in the field? What about this area of work excites you?

What makes you stand out from other applicants? Being first-generation? Belonging to an underrepresented population in higher education? How have cultural, familial, or personal factors influenced your educational journey? Why do you want to get your PhD in the field of \_\_\_\_\_\_? How does a PhD relate to your professional plans/goals? Why is graduate school the next logical step for you?

Include a **defining statement** before the end of your first paragraph/opening paragraphs:

*“I am highly motivated to pursue higher education and obtain my PhD in order to uplift and support communities who encounter similar arduous situations.”*

*“I am eager to continue growing as a critical thinker and collaborative scientist, and a PhD program would ensure that I get the training to provide reliable data and technologies in my efforts to work with the scientific community.”*

*“I aim to pursue a PhD in Clinical Psychology, become a principal investigator, and provide therapy to Spanish speaking individuals and minority groups. I am also committed to mentor the next generation of psychologists, like my future self, who come from underrepresented groups.”*

**Next 1 - 2 Paragraphs: Summarize your undergraduate research and your research training.**

How did you get involved in undergraduate research? Who is your research mentor? In general, what is the focus of the work done by your research mentor? What is your project? What are you responsible for? What technical things have you learned from your research? What non-technical things have you learned (Patience? Time Management? Organizational Skills?)? Has your work (project or projects) always gone smoothly or easily - What keeps you going back to your project(s)? What do you enjoy about your research and your project(s)? What have you learned about the field and about yourself that has further stimulated your interests? How has your research prepared you for the realities of graduate school?

Have you participated in a summer research program? What did you learn from the summer training? How did the training help prepare you for graduate school?

If you’ve had multiple research experiences (e.g. multiple research mentors or projects; multiple summer research trainings), try to describe all of them in chronological order or categorically.

Conclude these paragraphs by answering the question: How have your research experiences and training prepared you for graduate school?

**Next Paragraph: Discuss the relevance of other activities you are involved in.**

Are you involved in other activities that have helped prepare you for the rigors of graduate school? What are these activities? How do they relate to you being successful in graduate school? As a OTRES/CTREE student, this is where you can highlight your experiences/training as a LSAMP/McNair/U-RISE Scholar.

*“During summer 2019, I led a workshop for a STEM awareness program at CSUSM called Super STEM Saturday. I collaborated with a small team to introduce microbiology to an audience school-aged children…”*

**Next Paragraph (Optional): Addressing issues in your undergraduate record.**

Are there any issues with your undergraduate academic record that need to be addressed? A semester or two where your grades were not great? Was there a time where you could not make your education your priority? What challenges have you faced? How have you overcome your challenges? What lessons have you learned that will help you to be successful in graduate school? How have these experiences shaped your professional growth?

**Final Paragraph: Discuss how you are a “fit” for (NAME OF UNIVERSITY) and their graduate program - THIS PARAGRAPH SHOULD BE SOMEWHAT UNIQUE TO EACH PROGRAM YOU WILL BE APPLYING TO!**

Why are you applying to this program/school? What is attracting you? Is it the type of program? Is it that there are numerous faculty that you could see yourself working with? **Are there faculty you have already identified that are doing research that parallels your interests – THE ANSWER SHOULD BE YES!** Have you contacted these individuals? Why is their research relevant to you? Is it because they are working in an area you currently passionate about or that you are excited to get into? Why is this program/school the best choice for you? Why is (NAME OF UNIVERSITY) the ideal place for you to earn your PhD?

*“My experiences altogether have motivated me to pursue my Ph.D. in biological sciences with a specialty in either immunology, neuroscience, or ophthalmology. My overall goal is to be a researcher, innovator, and teacher in academia in hopes of inspiring my students and mentees to be passionate about the scientific processes.”*

*“I am particularly interested in working with Dr. Charles Xavier and Dr. Cosima Neihaus as they both share similar interests in understanding the underlying neural mechanisms associated with neuropsychiatric disorders to better treat impacted individuals.”*

“*I am interested in the ecology and evolutionary biology graduate program at the University of California Santa Cruz because of the numerous faculty that share research interests similar to my own. Dr. Alpha’s research is relevant to me because of her focus on climate change and how it is affecting certain interactions as well as animal behavior. I am interested in Dr. Beta’s research and its relevance to climate change and plant adaptations. I believe your program and its faculty will facilitate my continued growth as a researcher and academic in the BLANK field.”*

*“I am specifically interested in the research of Dr. Omega, whose work is centered on obtaining data and presenting it to the public for the purposes of education and informed decision-making. This work is an extension to my undergraduate research and I would be excited to grow further in this area.”*

**After you are done with your statement, make sure you’ve completed the following checklist items:**

* You’ve addressed all items on the prompt clearly.
* You set yourself apart from other applicants with your unique background and origin story.
* You detailed clear example(s) of your work to describe what you did (Show. Don’t tell.).
* You described how you have grown from your work/research.
* You demonstrated evidence of relevant experience and preparation for graduate school; you’ve conveyed your conviction/passion/resilience/grit
* You made a convincing argument for your fit and suitability to the specific program you are applying to.