

# Worksheet for a Statement of Purpose (when instructions are not provided)

**Before you write, talk with your mentor(s).** Even if you have targeted a particular graduate degree program and research mentor, it's still a good idea to consult with your current mentor. Why? Faculty mentors have disciplinary networks and may suggest institutions/programs you may have not considered. They stay informed about research trends and emerging issues and can point out programs at the forefront of advancing knowledge. They can point you to gaps in the literature, the need for follow up study, and new topics to investigate if you are required to write about a grad research topic. They can also offer insight into what other faculty might look for in a statement of purpose.

**Part I. Introduction (aka “the hook”).** In 3-5 sentences, make an interesting point about your unique background, your research interests, point of view, career aspirations or your vision for benefitting society. These first few sentences must quickly convince the reviewers that you are intelligent, innovative and articulate. Compel them into learning more about you. Your writing must be original, sincere and engaging. Avoid clichés and the mundane.

**Part II. Motivation for pursuing advanced studies.** Describe specific personal, professional or educational experiences that motivated you to pursue advanced studies. Reflect on different experiences: teaching; outreach; leadership; mentoring; research; internships; jobs; scholarship; campus engagement; service learning; volunteer work; service with underrepresented groups; study or travel abroad; or inspiring role models. Identify what you learned, or how your thinking changed. Why did those experiences motivate or prepare you to undertake a research-based graduate degree?

**Part III. Research abilities.** Describe your previous research experiences. Include the research aim and your role (independent or as part of a team) then summarize methods and findings. To conclude this section, make a clear connection how the knowledge, skills and abilities you acquired will help you successfully complete a graduate research project. Depending on your discipline, mention training or knowledge of responsible research conduct (e.g., protection of human subjects, animal welfare, research ethics, classified work). What if you have deficit skill areas? Include a sentence on your professional development plans to gain new knowledge skills and abilities through advanced courses, conferences, seminars, mentoring, job shadow, etc.

**Part IV. Research interests.** Describe how you became interested in research or a specific research topic. Some options for discussion:

- If your research interest stems from work that you and/or your mentor(s) have accomplished previously, summarize the findings - even if preliminary or inconclusive.
- Identify 2-4 key findings from the literature that point to a specific, researchable problem that interests you or you would like to study. If the topic is interdisciplinary, include references from other disciplines. If possible, build upon the work of researchers where you wish to study or use nationally known researchers in the area(s) of study. Cite accurately and record the complete citations at the end of the statement.

**Part V. Plans to share knowledge.**

- Graduate students are expected to engage in **scholarly activities**. Tell how you will *actively* communicate findings to the scientific community within and across disciplines and industries - in the US and possibly beyond. This may include journal articles, paper presentations, poster sessions, technology-enhanced delivery methods, etc.
- Increasingly students are expected to engage in **outreach activities** to help advocate for research, research funding and help to improve the public's scientific literacy. This may include teaching lay audiences, public presentations, or explaining research results to state legislators.

**Part VI. Career aspirations.** After you earn a master's (or doctoral) degree, what next? Might you pursue your same research topic or as part of your long range career goals? Could you move into interdisciplinary study? If you can articulate your goals, you will sound ambitious – with a purpose and direction. How might contribute to your future profession or become a disciplinary leader?

**Part VII. Write a strong conclusion.** Finish strong! State why you are interested in their program. Don't use excessive flattery, but do acknowledge the quality of their faculty, curriculum, facilities and/or graduates. They will want to know why you chose *their* program. How will their program help you achieve your goals? As a graduate student, how will you “fit” with their program and/or faculty research areas? What type of a mentee will you be? What assurances can you give them that you will persist *and* excel toward degree completion?