Letter of Interest – Personal Statement

Not sure if you are approaching this aspect of your graduation school application correctly? Not sure what is expected? The following guide will provide some general points with links to further resources. We encourage you to look at the program you are applying to for their guidelines and suggestions as well.

WHAT DID THEY ASK FOR?
- Don’t Assume!
- Be clear if you are writing a personal statement or a letter of interest/intent
- Follow their prompts and focus your responses

LETTER OF INTENTS/INTERESTS
- Tend to be asked by academic/research focused programs
- It represents your intellectual interest in the program
- It indicates your intention and focus of what you want to learn/study/research
- Will be focused on the relevant academics & research experiences
- Experience showing relevant skills or knowledge
- Showcases your good fit with the department and intended research supervisor

PERSONAL STATEMENTS
- Tend to be asked by programs that are preparing you for a profession or discipline (lawyer, public health, social work etc.)
- Provide personal insight into abilities, interests, motivations, experiences
- Might ask about knowledge of profession or career field
- Relevant and targeted to their program and profession
- Showcases your good fit for the program and profession

AN EFFECTIVE LETTER/STATEMENT SHOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS:

Well Researched - Know the program, school, profession and yourself…
- Have a clear understanding of the program
- Know the skills and knowledge needed for the profession or research area
- You’ll also need a strong understanding of yourself:
  - Why this program?
  - Why this profession or research field/lab/supervisor?
  - Why are you qualified?
  - What qualities, skills, and experiences can you offer?
Insightful - Description is not enough…
- Ask yourself questions to get to a level of insight expected.
- What do you want to learn and why?
- Why do I want x program or profession? ... Then ask “why” again
- What was the challenge to that task/job? Why?
- What was my unique approach or style?

Credible - Your statements are backed up with evidence…
- Provide examples, evidence, stories
- Think of the 3 R’s when considering which stories to use: Relevant, Responsibility level and Recent (as possible)

Specific - Provide details, so they can have a “picture”…
- Include enough details so the readers get a picture of the situation or experience.
- Don’t assume the reader knows

Precise - Well articulated and efficient with words…
- Review and fine tune your writing
- With word/character limits,
  - Look for sentences that give similar messages – can you combine them?
  - Look for sentences that set up the paragraph.. Can you get right to the point instead?

Well Written - It doesn’t have to be fancy, just well written…
- Should be well organized, easy to follow and engaging to read.
- Vocabulary, grammar, essay structure, etc.
- Check and double check for grammar and spelling mistakes.

Personal - It is about your experience and represents you…
- Give the committee a glimpse into the person you are and/or your interests motivations
- Avoid general statements about the profession (ex. Teachers should be… instead.. I believe teachers should be..)
- Ask yourself if this could be anyone’s statement or is it uniquely yours – based on your perspective, attitudes, viewpoint.

FINAL TIPS
- Start early. Give yourself ample time to make many revisions.
- Demonstrate your motivation & preparation.
- Target your writing to individual schools & programs.
- Be yourself. Use your own words and your own style.
Letter of Interest – Personal Statement

- Is it focused to the program and what they are asking for?

RESOURCES

Additional Guides and Tips

http://grad.unm.edu/resources/gs-forms/letter-of-intent.html

www.grad.ubc.ca/prospective-students/application-admission/statement-interest

http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/admission-letters/

https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/apessay.html

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/

Look to programs websites, for example:

http://md.utoronto.ca/news/admissions-blog-brief-personal-essays-and-how-they-are-assessed


Writing Supports

https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/tools/tips/#fyiWRITING

http://www.hemingwayapp.com/

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/

Graduate school application support is available through the Student Success Centre. You can schedule an appointment on OSCARplus.