

AAAS S-STEM Scholars Session: Crafting Your Resume Objective, Cover Letter and Personal Statement for Graduate School



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October 1, 2022

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Effective writing for graduate school applications

- **Communication is key** to a successful career in science
- Provide **critical information**
- **Storytelling** to establish legitimacy and trust
- Concise **summaries**
- Relevant to **audience's needs**

Communication tips

- Synthesize, frame and **tailor information to their needs**
- Evidence isn't everything - appeal to their **emotional side**
- Align **engagement timing** with the landscape of the field
- Submit **sooner rather than later**
- Engage with **current issues**

Key communication questions

- Who is my **audience**?
 - Relates to current topics
 - Actionable solutions to (their) problems
 - Frame solutions for the audience
- What is my **message** for my audience?
 - Information accessible, relatable and meaningful
 - How will you stand out?
- What **medium** will to use to communicate my message to my audience?
 - Speaking vs. writing (also interviews)

Principles of writing

- Use active verbs, analogies and **personal examples**
- Only include **details critical** to your story
- Keep your story **true to the facts**
- Create an **outline** and prepared to edit
- Revise, rewrite, and **cite your sources**

Questions for graduate school documents

- What are **key points** you want to communicate?
- What **personal characteristics/skills** make you a strong candidate?
- What are your **career goals**, how does graduate school fit in?
- What have you **learned** about this field? What do you **enjoy** about it?
- What is **important for the admissions board** to know about you?
- Are there **discrepancies or causes for concern** in your application you need to address?
- Have you dealt with **unusual obstacles or difficulties** in your life?
- What **sets you apart/makes you unique** from other applicants?
- What **factors in your life** have brought you to where you are today?

Crafting Your Resume Objective



Washington, DC

**S-STEM
SYMPOSIUM**
9/29/22 - 10/1/22



NSI AAAS

Graduate school resume objective

- Focus on how experience could contribute to your success in a selective graduate program
- Introduce your application and persuade the admissions board that you can contribute to their program
- **Objective:**
 - A couple of sentences that **identify the graduate program** you want to apply to and list your most relevant skills and experiences
 - Features strong adjectives that **explain the qualities you would use** to complete the program and drive academic success
 - Language should specifically target the **skills and experience** related to the grad school program

Graduate school resume objective examples

- **Curious and dedicated recent graduate with three years'** experience as a **laboratory assistant** and ongoing seeking admission into the Brighton College School of Life Science to gain the essential knowledge and skills to pursue scientific research on microbes in sub-zero temperature. Equipped with **astute observational capabilities** and the **ability to challenge unique hypotheses** with structured data through the scientific process.
- **Diligent and focused** philosophy student with a **background** in ancient literature **hoping to achieve the goal of** becoming an undergraduate philosophy professor by entering the UCLA philosophy department on the doctorate track. Bringing experience as a philosophy teaching assistant, a **voracious desire to learn** and commitment to contributing to academic literature connecting modern and ancient philosophical ideals.

Crafting Your Cover Letter



Washington, DC

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NSF AAAS

Graduate school cover letter

- **First impression** the admissions committee gets of you as an applicant. Many graduate school programs require a cover letter as one of the application documents
- Can help you stand out as a **stronger and more serious candidate** than applicants who don't include a cover letter

Address your cover letter

Personal salutation

Introduce yourself

State purpose for applying to this grad school

Close cover letter

Enclose requested application documents

Cover letter: address, salutation, introduction

Sarah Johnson

2341 E. Main Street

Chattanooga, TN 37341

December 7, 2020

Dr. Timothy Greer

Department of Psychology

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

800 University Lane

Chattanooga, TN 37341

Dear Dr. Greer:

It is my pleasure to submit my application for the Masters of Family Psychology program at the Psychology department at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. As a recent graduate of Belhaven University with a bachelor's degree in Psychology, **this graduate program is the perfect next step toward achieving my goal of** becoming a Licensed Family and Marriage Counselor and opening my own practice.

Cover letter: purpose, close, materials

During my time in the undergraduate program at Belhaven University, I was able to develop several **skills** that make me a strong candidate for your program including time-management skills, analytical skills and strong research and writing skills. A few of my greatest **accomplishments** achieved while in my undergraduate program include interning for the esteemed counseling program at The University of Tennessee and graduating with high honors. I have chosen the Masters of Family Psychology program at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga because of the **university's core focus on** family counseling within the master's program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if there is any additional information or **documents** I can provide. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sarah Johnson

Enclosed:

Application

Curriculum Vitae

Statement of purpose

Letters of recommendation

Official transcripts

Crafting Your Personal Statement



Washington, DC

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Goals for a personal statement

- Provide **understanding of who you are** (not only education, work)
- Explain **why you are the right fit** and a worthwhile applicant
- Highlight **other important factors** in your application

Questions for a personal statement

- Pick a few **points to emphasize** about yourself
- Be very **specific** - tell them what distinguishes you
- Do your **research** on the school, program, faculty members
- Address any **gaps or discrepancies** in your academic career
- Maintain a **professional writing tone**
- Have a **strong starting and ending** paragraph
- **Proofread** your work

Successful personal statement example (P1)

- Columbia's Master's program in Public Health (words: 500)

Paragraph One: For twenty-three years, my **grandmother** (a Veterinarian and an Epidemiologist) ran the Communicable Disease Department of a mid-sized urban public health department. **The stories of Grandma Betty** doggedly tracking down the named sexual partners of the infected are part of our family lore. Grandma Betty would persuade people to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases, encourage safer sexual practices, document the spread of infection and strive to contain and prevent it. Indeed, due to the large gay population in the city where she worked, **Grandma Betty was at the forefront of the AIDS crises**, and her analysis contributed greatly towards understanding how the disease was contracted and spread. **My grandmother has always been a huge inspiration to me, and the reason why a career in public health was always on my radar.**

Positive:

- **Attention-grabbing opening anecdote**
- Shows a sense of public health history, given the significance of the AIDS crisis for public health as a field

Improvements:

- **Cut down on some of the detail** because isn't really about the author
- Even (sparingly used) anecdotes about other people reveal something about the author in a personal statement

Successful personal statement continued (P2)

Paragraph Two: Recent years have cemented that interest. In January 2012, my parents adopted my **little brother Fred** from China. Doctors in America subsequently **diagnosed Fred** with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (**DMD**). My parents were told that if Fred's condition had been discovered in China, the (very poor) **orphanage** in which he spent the first 8+ years of his life would have recognized his DMD as a **death sentence** and denied him sustenance to hasten his demise.

Positive:

- **Compelling anecdote** to help explain their interest in public health - an appropriately personal detail for a personal statement - a serious thing about the immediate family, but it doesn't disclose anything that the admissions committee might find concerning or inappropriate

Improvements:

- **Change is the last phrase.** "Denied him sustenance to hasten his demise" is a little flowery. "Denied him food to hasten his death" is more powerful because it's clearer and more direct

Successful personal statement continued (P3)

Paragraph Three: It is not right that some people have access to the best doctors and treatment while others have no medical care. **I want to pursue an MPH** in Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia **because** studying social factors in health, with a particular **focus** on socio-health inequities, will prepare me to **address these inequities**. The interdisciplinary approach of the program appeals to me greatly as **I believe interdisciplinary approaches are the most effective way to develop meaningful solutions to complex problems**.

Positive:

- **Neat and clear transition** from discussing what sparked their interest in public health and health equity to what they are interested in about Columbia specifically: the interdisciplinary focus of the program, and how that focus will prepare them to solve complex health problems.
- This paragraph also serves as **a good pivot point** to start discussing their academic and professional background.

Successful personal statement continued (P4)

Paragraph Four: My undergraduate education has prepared me well for my chosen career. Understanding the underlying structure of a group's culture is essential to successfully communicating with the group. In studying folklore and mythology, **I've learned how to parse** the unspoken structures of folk groups, and how those structures can be used to build bridges of understanding. For example, in a culture where most illnesses are believed to be caused by witchcraft, as is the case for the Zande people of central Africa, **any successful health intervention or education program would of necessity take into account** their very real belief in witchcraft.

Positives:

- Link undergraduate education and the skills they learned there to public health.
- The (very brief) analysis of tailoring health interventions to the Zande is **a good way to show insight** and show off the competencies they would bring to the program.

Successful personal statement continued (P5)

Paragraph Five: I now work in the healthcare industry for one of the largest providers of health benefits in the world. In addition to reigniting my passion for data and quantitative analytics, **working for this company has immersed me in the business side of healthcare, a critical component of public health.**

Positives:

- **Highlights relevant work experience** in the healthcare industry.
- Mentions work with data and quantitative analytics, which isn't necessarily obvious from their academic background, which was primarily based in the social sciences.

Successful personal statement continued (P6)

Paragraph Six: I intend to pursue a PhD in order to become an expert in how social factors affect health, particularly as related to gender and sexuality. I intend to pursue a certificate in Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproduction. Working together with other experts to create effective interventions across cultures and societies, I want to help transform health landscapes both in America and abroad.

Improvements:

- This final paragraph is about future plans and intentions. **A little disjointed**, discussing goals of pursuing a PhD before talking about what certificate they want to pursue within the MPH program.
- Switch two sentences - discuss certificate goals within the MPH and then mentioning PhD plans would make a lot more sense.
- "I intend" is repetitive.
- Final sentence is generic; may tailor to specifically discuss a gender and sexual health issue (primary area of interest identified).

Assessment of a good personal statement

- **Clearly organized:** paragraphs have a distinct focus and message. Each new idea goes on to a new paragraph with logical transitions.
- **Covers a lot of ground in a pretty short space:** family history, goals, educational background, professional background.
- Includes analysis about tailoring health interventions with my example of the Zande. Show off **what kinds of insights they might bring to the program** based on academic background.
- **Strong examples, clear organization, and outlines what interests them about the program** (interdisciplinary focus) **and competencies** they would bring (background in cultural analysis and experience with the business side of healthcare). Slight tweaks would elevate it.

Questions for graduate school documents

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Graduate school documents writing resources

Resume resources

- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/resume-objective-for-graduate-school>

Cover letter resources

- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/cover-letter-for-graduate-school>

Personal statement resources

- <https://online.usc.edu/news/how-to-write-personal-statement-graduate-school-tips/>
- <https://www.prepscholar.com/gre/blog/graduate-school-personal-statement-examples/>