Statement of Purpose

What is the difference between a Statement of Purpose and a Personal Statement?

• The Statement of Purpose is about what you want to accomplish by means of the professional training a graduate program provides.
• This is the place to talk about specific research interests (not yet accomplished), and to talk about the kinds of research you've done in the past, as well as about how you are prepared or plan to prepare yourself to do that research.
• This is also the place, to a lesser extent, to talk about your pedagogical interests and again how you are already prepared, or plan to prepare yourself, to teach.
• So then what's a Personal Statement? This is the place to talk about other kinds of motivation and self-discipline (evidence that you WILL complete their program, if they assign you one of their precious admission slots / funding packages) AND about diversity factors.
• As a general rule, you will be writing a Personal Statement for some programs and a statement of purpose for others. Some might ask for both, but others, particularly some graduate programs, will ask for your Statement of Purpose only.

1. Figure Out What Your Purpose Is
   It may sound a little silly, but it’s important to determine exactly what the purpose of your statement of purpose is. Generally, it will be an attempt to persuade an applications committee that they should choose you for whatever it is you are applying to. What do you have to contribute to this field? Why are you the best fit for this program, and vice versa? How have you already been performing professionally in the field to this point? You will want to show the committee that you have the capabilities to succeed in your field and that your experience qualifies you for the position. Regardless of what your purpose is, it should be clear in order to give your statement of purpose coherence. A couple of things you’ll want to make sure you do are:
   1. Pay attention to the purpose throughout the statement so that extraneous material is left out.
   2. Pay attention to the audience (committee) throughout the statement. Remember, your audience is made up of faculty members who are experts in their field. They want to know that you can think as much as what you think.

2. Things to Remember When Writing the Statement of Purpose:
   1. Avoid writing that you want to do something because you “love it” or writing about what you “did with your life.” It isn’t that no one cares (although maybe they don’t)… but rather, in showing your commitment to the field, you want to show why this work is so fulfilling (and thus why you will complete your degree and the program should invest in you). So…
   2. Avoid unqualified statements like the plague. See list of phrases to avoid below.
   3. Avoid using personal experiences that are unrelated to the field you want to enter or your research interests/experience in it.
   4. Be objective yet self-revelatory. Write directly and in a straightforward manner that tells about your experience and what it means to you. Do not use "academese" or jargon, and don’t fill up with fluff. Remember the committee has a lot of these to read, and fluff and jargon won’t exactly distinguish you from the piles of applications on their desks.
   5. Be specific. Document your conclusions with specific instances or draw your conclusions as the result of individual experience.
   6. Stick to the page limit. It is likely the committee that reviews your statement of purpose is reading hundreds if not thousands of them, so don’t give them any more than they want to read.
   7. Do your research. Towards the end of your statement, you will need a section that explains why you want to go to the school you are applying to in particular. This will require you to show that you have researched the school enough to know which professors you would like to work with and how the program can benefit you. Use this section to show how you and the program are a good fit.
   8. If you are using the shotgun method of application, then make sure this paragraph fits neatly into
the template you are using for all the schools. Furthermore, make note of differences in requirements (aka, don’t use the same 300 word statement for a school that allows 1500), and be sure you have met them all for each school before copy and pasting. This may mean revising some of your statements and just swapping out your paragraph about the school in others.

8. Always proofread carefully and have others check your work. Being sloppy and careless in proofreading can cost your statement of purpose dearly. It’s a good idea not only to have friends and writing center consultants look at it, but your trusted advisors as well. They may have served on a committee, and should help you to put your best foot forward.

WORDS TO AVOID USING WITHOUT EXPLANATION

| Significant | Invaluable | appealing to me |
| interesting | exciting, excited | appealing aspect |
| challenging | enjoyable, enjoy | I like it |
| satisfying, satisfaction | I can contribute | it’s important |
| rewarding | valuable | fascinating |
| gratifying | helpful | appreciate |
| meaningful | useful | helping people |
| meant a lot to me | feel good | I like to help people |
| stimulating | remarkable | people |
| incredible | | |

References, and for more information:

http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/gradapp/stmtpurpose.htm
http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/gcallaghan/graduate/winningstatement.htm
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/

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