

Writing an Effective Statement of Interest

As part of the application process for certain positions, you may be asked to write a statement of interest. Before proceeding, please take a few minutes to review this information on how to write an effective statement.

Effective statements of interest:

1. Answer the question or address the issues to which you are asked to respond. (E.g., "Of the three projects stated, identify the one which is of greatest interest to you and detail the skills that prepare you to contribute to the organization's efforts in this area.)
2. Demonstrate the skills and strengths that you would bring to the organization if you were hired.
3. Demonstrate your clear understanding of and specific interest in the organization.

Before preparing your statement of interest, ask yourself...

1. *Why am I interested in this position?? What is it about the organization's mission or the duties entailed in the job that are drawing me to the position?*
Is it (for example) the opportunity to make an impact on poverty alleviation in Eastern Europe? Or the strong reputation that the organization has within your policy area of interest?
2. *What skills, expertise and other qualities is the employer seeking?*
In many cases, this is spelled out pretty clearly in the position description. In other cases, you will need to give some thought to what skills you think would be important to the employer. What kinds of tasks would the job entail? What kinds of skills would you need in order to effectively complete those tasks?
3. *Which of the above skills, etc, do I have?*
4. *What examples can I give to support my assertion that I have those skills?*

Perhaps your presentation skills can best be portrayed by an example of a talk that you did for a student organization. Or maybe your commitment to social policy issues is most evident through the volunteer work that you did with a community organization while you were working full-time at another type of organization. E.g., "During my internship at the Urban Institute, I analyzed and evaluated..."

Before submitting your statement of interest to an organization (either directly or via eRecruiting), ask yourself...

1. *Did I answer the question and/or address the points that the employer asked me to address??*
If NO, go back to your statement and rework it. Answering the question is critical to a successful statement of interest.
2. *Does my statement read like it was written by someone who is interested in this position specifically...or by someone who is looking for a job, ANY job?*
If the latter, go back to your statement and rework it.

3. *Is the tone of my statement formal and professional?*

Remember: the employer is also using your statement of interest to get a sense of your writing style and the way you represent yourself professionally. Build a relationship with the employer first and get to know the company's culture before using informal greetings, excessive exclamation points, or other less formal communication tactics.

4. *Does the statement clearly demonstrate my skills without overstating my expertise and experience?*

This one is tricky, for indeed one of the purposes of a statement of interest is to market yourself. Be mindful of the fine line, however, between sounding confident and sounding arrogant. If you have any questions about which camp your writing falls in, ask a few friends or Ford School staff or faculty members to review it.

5. *Does my statement have spelling or grammatical errors in it?*

We have all heard stories of people who were successful in getting an interview even when their application materials had an error or two in them. Don't rely on the odds. Instead, have one of the Ford School writing instructors or a friend review your statement of interest for you. Employers see this statement of interest as evidence of your writing abilities, your attention to detail, and the amount that you care about the position. Don't let your statement of interest say something about you that you don't intend.

A statement of interest is NOT the same as a personal statement that you would use for, say, applying to graduate school. Sometimes it is appropriate in personal statements to include a detailed telling of the story of your life. In a statement of interest, this is not appropriate. Think of a statement of interest more as a *reformatted cover letter* in which you don't have to use business letter format. Use the space to identify your background, skills, and experience that are relevant to the position for which you are applying. Remember: while reading your statement of interest the employer is asking him or herself how you would fit with the organization and whether or not you'll be able to *hit the ground running* if hired.

Expanding on your resume

As you write your statement of interest, keep in mind that the statement will be supplemented by your resume which outlines your employment and educational record, providing as much factual detail as possible. The statement of interest gives you the opportunity to concentrate on a few of the details from your resume, showing how these experiences are relevant to the position to which you're applying. It's up to you to focus on the right experiences, to bring them to life in a way that your resume cannot, and to interpret their significance for your employer. So, when discussing your present or past education or employment, the key is to be specific, but also to make the specific interesting. For example, you might, in an attempt at being specific, rattle off a list of classes you've taken at the Ford School. A better way to go would be to explain what your concentration has been while at the Ford School, then go on to focus on one class in particular, or a paper you've written, research you've conducted, a group project you helped to complete. Explain—briefly—what was the nature of the problem you were attempting to solve, how you solved it, what was the solution or conclusion you came up with. You won't have time/space for too much detail—but you should be able to do this efficiently in two or three sentences. Finally, be sure you make it clear how the information you are providing demonstrates your ability to handle the job for which you're applying.

Avoid empty, vague, clichéd adjectives, such as meaningful, important, challenging, invaluable, rewarding, etc. A good concrete example is worth a bucket of such adjectives.

- Just as in resume writing, you should employ as many action verbs as possible. Resist the passive voice, as well as the various forms of “to be” verbs (is, am, are, was, were; e.g., *I am a diligent worker; Responsibility is one of my best attributes.*)
- Nouns are also important – good, concrete nouns – one of the most important being the personal pronoun: I. Consider the difference between the following statements:
 - *My involvement with X Corporation helped me come to an understanding about how one properly manages a team of motivated but disparate young professionals.*
 - *While working at X Corporation, I managed a team of ten employees, organizing and leading weekly team planning meetings, conducting frequent individual conferences with team members, and negotiating the disagreements that inevitably arise among a group of motivated but disparate young professionals.*

In the first sentence, the noun performing the action becomes “involvement,” thus deflecting the emphasis from your own accomplishment. And notice how the use of such a noun forces the verb to become weaker as well (helped me come to), which in turn leaves you no other choice but to use the word “understanding”, another ambiguous noun. In the second sentence, the focus (and also the credit) is on you and the specific work you accomplished. Accordingly, also beware of: My education, My experience, My background, My involvement, etc. Such phrases will inevitably be useful, but try to limit yourself.

- Be concise. Employers often read hundreds of letters. The more watered down your prose, the more watered down and boring a candidate you become.
- When editing, be on the particular lookout for *strings of qualifying phrases, often beginning with a preposition*. Most of these phrases can be cut, the sentence rewritten in a more direct fashion. State your meaning as clearly and as directly as possible.

A note on formatting your statement for Ford School Internship Partnerships

Your statement of interest should not be in a letter format. The recommended format for a statement of interest for a Ford School Internship Partnership is as follows:

1. Type your name and email at the top of the page
2. Type “Statement of Interest” then the name of the partnership.
3. Start your statement – most ask for 1-2 pages but check the posting

