

English Academic Skills Workshop by Prof. Singh Faye

7F Ad.3

Feb. 4 – 7, 2013

14:00 – 16:00 / 16:10 – 18:10

GraSPP

THE UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO

Workshop 5

Statements of Purpose
&
Letters of Recommendation

Professor Singh Faye

Unit 1

Part A (20 Minutes)

List important events and experiences in your past, up to the time you began university. Make two simple, direct, fairly short sentences for each item. In the First Sentence, say What it was: “I experienced / lived / attended / participated in...” In the Second Sentence, say Why it was important: “This taught me to / helped me to understand / allowed me to experience / realize....”

Part B (60 Minutes)

Share what you listed with your classmates and teacher.

Discuss each person's list by turns. Consider these questions for each item:

- Is the significance clear?
- Does it belong in your SOP? That is, would it impress a university admissions committee as positive and relevant to your suitability for admission?
- What more should you say or write about it?

Take notes on the comments made about your list so you can incorporate the points you agree with in your essay.

Part C (180 Minutes)

Write an essay on the most important events and experiences of your past, up to the time you began university. Try to limit the length to one page (one side of A-4 paper). Be as direct and concise as you can. Most SOP requests impose limits on how long your essay may be. The things you are being asked to write about in this exercise will only be a part (one-fourth or less) of any SOP you write. In other parts, you will have to discuss your university experience, present life as a GraSPP student at The University of Tokyo, expectations and hopes for the future, and why you wish to attend the particular university to which you are applying, or take part in its exchange program.

Now and later, strive for clarity and economy. Out of control long and complex sentences will not impress any admissions committee. Add complexity only if and where you need it to show precise relationship of ideas.

Hand in your essay at the end of class.

Unit 2

Part A (20 Minutes)

Your teacher will hand back the essay you wrote last time. Take this time to go over the corrections and changes she or he has suggested. For homework, rewrite it for the next class.

Part B (30 Minutes)

List important experiences during the time you attended university. As before, make two simple, direct, fairly short sentences for each item. In the First sentence, say What it was: *“I took a class / seminar in..../ I gave a report / did a paper on..../ I was a member of the debating club/ football team...”* In the Second Sentence, say Why it was important: *“I learned about; came to a better understanding of / learned the importance of / improved my ability to...”* Be specific.

Part C (30 Minutes)

Share what you listed with your classmates and teacher.

As before, discuss each person's list by turns. Consider the same questions you did last time for each item:

- Is the significance clear?
- Does it belong in your Personal Statement? Will it strengthen your application?
- What more should you say about it?

Take notes on the comments made about your list so you can incorporate the points you agree with in your essay.

Part D (80 Minutes)

Write an essay on your most important experiences at university. Again, try to limit the length to one A-4-sized page. Avoid unnecessarily long and complex sentences. Be direct and to the point.

Hand in your essay at the end of class.

Unit 3

Part A (20 Minutes)

Your teacher will hand back the essay you wrote last time (on your university experiencing; Take this time to go over the corrections and changes she or he has suggested.

Rewrite it for homework and hand it in the next class.

Part B (30 Minutes)

List important aspects of your present life. This will entail writing mostly or entirely about your work experience as a Teacher Assistant (TA), or part-time (practicum experience should be included here if you have any). Again, make two uncomplicated sentences for each item. In the first Sentence, say What it is / was: *“I am working part-time as.../ One of my regular duties is to...”* In the Second Sentence, say Why it is important: *“I am learning about the decision-making process; the current status and complexities of...; psychological and interpersonal considerations involved in working with others...”* Be specific. You may have been given one or more specific assignments. Write about what it/they taught you, challenges met, etc.)

Part C (30 Minutes)

Share what you listed with your classmates and teacher.

Discuss each person's list by turns by considering these questions for each entry:

- Is the significance clear?
- Should it be used in your Personal Statement? Will it usefully impress the admissions committee?
- How might you develop it?

Take notes on the comments made about your items for possible inclusion in your essay.

Part D (80 Minutes)

Write an essay on what you are learning/have learned from your life as a Foreign Service official. Try to keep the size of your composition close to one A-4 page.

Hand in your essay at the end of class

Unit 4

Part A (20 Minutes)

Go over the changes and corrections on the essay your teacher hands back (on your work experience and/or practicum). Rewrite it for homework and hand it in next class

Part B (30 Minutes)

List your goals and expectations for your future work as a leader. What difficulties and challenges will Japan and the world face that you would like to help with? What area or areas interest you: Trade? Environmental protection? Regional or International Security? Human rights? One or more aspects of bilateral relations with the U.S./Canada/Australia?

ODA..? Bear in mind that when you write a Statement of Purpose, you should show that you are aware of and have thought about international issues. One thing you should start doing is photocopying any articles you encounter in newspapers or magazines on issues which interest you so you can refer knowledgeably to the topics they cover when you write your SOP.

State your goals and expectations in complete sentences as simply and directly as you can. For each entry, say what it is and why it interests you.

Part C (30 Minutes)

Share what you listed in Part B with your classmates and teacher.

Consider:

- Is each issue/challenge clearly stated?
- Is it too general? Can it be brought into sharper focus by further explanation, including perhaps an illustrative example or two? “The recent dispute between (country) and (country) on (issue) illustrates the need to develop more effective mechanisms for dealing with such situations in the future.”...e.g.

Take notes on the comments made about your items.

Part D (80 Minutes)

Write an essay on your goals and expectations of your career.

Hand in your essay at the end of class.

Tips

- How will participating in the degree program for which you are applying contribute to your competence and success in the career you are seeking? Here are a couple of excerpts addressing this matter:
 - A knowledge of public affairs and domestic economy is important for my hoped-for future role as a negotiator on peace and security matters, since creating successful negotiations will entail being able to anticipate the domestic social and economic effects of the realization of a particular policy.
 - I wish to study international economic and trade law with a view to finding areas where different national practices might be harmonized under international rules.
 - Also, if you feel anything you studied as an undergraduate makes you more qualified to undertake the study program you are applying for, be sure to mention it here. But be specific: *“I believe the courses I took in statistical analysis would help me to take full benefit of the Public Policy Analysis program at the University of _____”* for example. Also, if work experience you have had elsewhere is relevant, mention it, but be sure to specify how it is relevant. Unsupported assertions will have no value in the admissions committee's view.

Tips

Why have you chosen this particular university? In what way(s) will it best meet your needs? Here are a couple of sample phrases:

- The school's courses on Public Management and Public Policy, as well as those on International Politics presented through an experimental, policy-oriented approach would seem quite pertinent preparation for my career's interest in policy planning.
- My research interest has to do with the relationship between media, the public and government. The communications program at the University of _____ offers courses that can be directly related to my work, such as Political Communication and International communication.

Tips

- To prepare yourself for this part of your statement, carefully read the relevant sections of the university catalog: description of the program you want, general policy of the university, composition of the faculty and student body, etc. Refer to those aspects you can assert will enhance your learning experience. Don't exhibit frivolity: *"I understand there are some great surfing locations not far away"* for example. Mentioning access to cultural or political life (in Boston, Washington D.C., New York, Ottawa, Vancouver) might be a good idea, however.
- If you know one or more persons who have attended the university to which you are applying, give their names, what (good things) they had to say about their experiences there, the degree programs they were in, and when they graduated. Best of all would be if they did the degree program you are applying for.
- If you know of any prominent professors teaching in the program you are interested in, mention how you would like the opportunity to study under their guidance. Be sure to indicate you know what they are renowned for.
- It will be particularly impressive if you can mention books and/or articles these individuals have written with which you are familiar, i.e., have read at least parts of.

Unit 5

Part A (20 Minutes)

Go over changes and corrections suggested on the essay your teacher hands back (on your goals and expectations of your diplomatic career). Rewrite it. Hand it in.

Part B (80 Minutes)

Below are some authentic Personal Statement requests from various universities. How would you respond to them?

Write a brief statement concerning both your past work in your intended field of study and allied fields, your plans for graduate study (at University) and your subsequent career plans. This is a very important part of your application, so please pay particular attention to clarity and a careful exposition of the relevance of your past work and future intentions to the program for which you are applying.

Part B Continued

For International Technology management and Policy:

Write an essay that includes:

- a) your interests and professional objectives in international affairs.
- b) the ways in which the Schooled program will help you achieve those objectives.

For Master of Science in Foreign Service Program:

Please append to this application:

a) A typewritten statement not exceeding 500 words:

- (1) assessing what you have achieved in your undergraduate career, with particular emphasis on the skills acquired and inter-national experiences you may have had that enhanced your capabilities to undertake advanced studies;
- (2) outlining your substantive international interests and principal academic goals; and
- (3) discussing your professional goals and objectives.

b) Although optional, the Admissions Committee would welcome a recently written analysis that you may have prepared for school, employer or an internship concerning a contemporary international problem or issue.

Part B Continued

Please give your reasons for wishing to do graduate work in the field you have chosen. Prepare your statement of objectives and goals in whatever form clearly presents your views. Include, as far as you can, your particular interests be they experimental, theoretical, or issue-oriented, and show how your background and (University's) programs) support these interests. The statement could be much like a proposal for graduate studies, in the more specific context of your professional objectives.

You should set forth the issues and problems you wish to address.

Explain your longer term professional goals.

Part B Continued

The *Admissions Committee* will welcome any factors you wish to bring its attention to concerning your academic and work experience to date.

For admission to a school of public policy:

- What are your specific career goals and how will the school help you achieve your personal and professional plans? (No more than two pages, typewritten and double-spaced) Answer two of the three following questions. (to more than one page per response) Describe a particular event in your life that has challenged you. How did you respond and what was the outcome?
- In what ways would your background and experiences contribute to the diversity at _____ School?

For an undergraduate program:

- Discuss briefly why you wish to transfer to (college). Limit your response to about one-third of a page.
- What particular book, play, poem, film, dance performance, musical composition or piece of visual art has affected you deeply in the past three years? Describe your reaction. Limit your response to about two-thirds of a page.
- How has your view of yourself and your abilities changed since leaving high school?

Limit your response to about one page.

Unit 6

Letters of Recommendation

All graduate school applications (as well as some undergraduate school ones) require two or three letters of recommendation. Recommendations from former professors are usually the most important. If three letters are requested, two should be from former professors and the third from your present or former supervisor (work or practicum).

In most cases, you will have to compose these letters (in English) yourself, then, send them to the recommenders for their approval and signature. In rare cases, the recommender will prefer to write the letter himself (this is the standard practice). So, start thinking way before the application deadline of the university (ies) about people you think would be willing to give you a good recommendation for university admission. Then contact them to get their ok. Some universities will send forms specifying the contents of these letters of recommendation, others will not.

You will, then, have to write each of these letters as if you were the recommender, from his or her point of view if she or he asks you to write it.

Part A (30 Minutes)

Choose a former university professor who knows you and your work rather well and who you think would be willing to give you a good recommendation.

Think about the best work you did in his or her class or seminar. This could be one or more papers or oral reports.

It could also be your graduation thesis if this professor was your supervisor on it. For each item, in the First Sentence, say What it was:
“S/he wrote a paper on...”

In the Second Sentence, say What you liked about it: *“The paper was carefully researched/original/thorough/ balanced/showed a capacity for original thought....”*

Also write One Sentence about the high quality of your class participation.

Part B (30 Minutes)

Share what you wrote with the class and teacher.
Take notes on their comments.

Part C (50 Minutes)

- Write a letter of former university recommendation for yourself from a professor. Be sure to
- describe specifically how and to what extent the recommender knows you: “s/he was in my seminar on (subject) from (date) to (date) *“I advised her/him on her graduation thesis.”...*
- Only write about what the recommender knows about you through direct experience of you. Statements like, *“I am told s/he is an excellent clarinet player,”* or *“I hear s/he was captain of the soccer club,”* do not belong in a letter of recommendation.

Part C Continued

- Give specific examples of the good work you did (paper, presentation...) and what he/she liked about it.
- Also mention the high quality of your class participation.
- Finish the letter with a sentence about how **“YOU”** are confident this person (YOU) is ready to profitably undertake the course work in the program to which s/he is applying, that s/he would make positive contributions to class discussions, and that s/he has a promising future.

Part D (30 Minutes)

Read the letter aloud to the others. Take notes on their comments for later use.

Tips

FOR YOUR INFORMATION: When you have to write a letter of recommendation from a supervisor at an inter/practicum program, the same principles apply as for a letter from a former professor:

1. State his/her specific acquaintance with you: *“S/he was under my supervision in the organization/institution, from (date) to (date).”*
2. Write about his/her direct experience of you. (Reports from a subordinate may perhaps be used, if s/he has had little contact with you.)
3. Give specific examples of projects you completed to his/her satisfaction.
4. Mention also your general work competence: intelligent, diligent, reliable, enthusiastic, works well with others...
5. End with a prediction that you will provide valuable service to (career field) in the future, and that you would profit from and contribute to the program for which you are applying.