



Write Your Way Into Grad School

Dr. Natasha George
STEM Writing Specialist





GOALS OF THIS WORKSHOP:

1. Understand what the Statement of Purpose (SOP) is (and is not)
2. Learn strategies to make meaning of your experiences and plan a draft
3. See examples of how writers communicate in real SOP drafts



Grad school applications have many parts



Recommendation letters

What does this statement need to accomplish?

The personal statement should give concrete evidence of your promise as a member of the academic community, giving the committee an image of you as a person.

This is also where you represent your potential to bring to your academic career a critical perspective rooted in a non-traditional educational background, or your understanding of the experiences of groups historically under-represented in higher education and your commitment to increase participation by a diverse population in higher education.

What kinds of content belongs here?

Anything that can give reviewers a sense of you as a person belongs here; you can repeat information about your experiences in your research statement, but any experiences that show your promise, initiative, and ability to persevere despite obstacles belongs here. This is also a good place to display your communication skills and discuss your ability to maximize effective collaboration with a diverse cross-section of the academic community. If you have faced any obstacles or barriers in your education, sharing those experiences serves both for the selection process, and for your nomination for fellowships. If one part of your academic record is not ideal, due to challenges you faced in that particular area, this is where you can explain that, and direct reviewers' attention to the evidence of your promise for higher education.

Personal or diversity statement

A CV or resume

Transcript

Statement of Purpose

My curiosity about the microbial world was galvanized while puzzling over gene sequences from a hypersaline pond in an Extreme Environmental Virology class at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I was struck by the extent of microbial activity taking place in the seemingly still and inhospitable water. Not satisfied simply knowing *who* lived in our pond, I pursued a double major in Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology and Earth Sciences to gain insight into *how* these microbes thrived under harsh conditions. Through experiences such as identifying fossilized denizens of ancient reefs, trapping voles to study population genetics, and isolating bacteriophage, I developed an appreciation for the tight interweaving between the chemical architecture inside cells, interactions between organisms and with their environments, and the vast stretches of geologic time over which these systems have evolved. I also realized that my questions were consistently rooted in curiosity about the mechanisms behind microbial interactions with each other and their environments.

My interest in life on a small scale led me to Rebecca DuBois' structural biology lab, where I spent two years as an undergraduate identifying the epitopes of neutralizing antibodies to the respiratory syncytial virus G protein (RSV G) conserved domain. For my project, I stubbornly pieced together expression and purification protocols for our challenging (small, hydrophobic, poorly structured) viral protein, growing hundreds of liters of *E. coli* in the process, created stably-transfected insect cell lines to express scFvs of our antibodies, and purified protein complexes for crystallography. My work on this project resulted in authorship on two papers, one published in 2018 in *Science Immunology*; and another currently under review. Beyond these achievements, I discovered a passion for the often-creative process of troubleshooting.

Statement of Purpose

Essay questions (sometimes, specific to program)



Natasha L. George STEM Writing Specialist – Hixon Writing Center – California Institute of Technology Email: nlgeorge@caltech.edu Teaching portfolio: https://george2170.wixsite.com/something-selcouth			
Education	Degree	Dates	Field of Study
Institution Michigan State University University of California, Santa Cruz	Ph.D. B.Sc. B.Sc.	2020 – 2024 2013 – 2017 2013 – 2017	Microbiology & Molecular Genetics Molecular, Cell, & Developmental Biology Earth Sciences – Environmental Geology
Research Experience			
2020 – 2024	Graduate Student – Orlando Lab, Michigan State University Determined structures of the <i>B. subtilis</i> BceABRS bacitracin resistance module through cryo-EM and explored module mechanisms for antimicrobial peptide sensing and resistance through in vitro and in vivo assay.		
2019 – 2020	Assistant Specialist – DuBois Lab, University of California, Santa Cruz Investigated chemokine mimicry by respiratory syncytial virus G protein (RSV G), chemokine CX3CL1, structural approaches with respiratory syncytial virus G protein (RSV G) through x-ray and chemokine receptor CX3CR1.		
2017 – 2019	Junior Specialist – DuBois Lab, University of California, Santa Cruz Identified epitopes of high affinity neutralizing antibodies targeting RSV G through x-ray crystallography and contributed to assay development for testing viral protein variants for vaccine development.		
2015 – 2017	Undergraduate Research Assistant – DuBois Lab, University of California, Santa Cruz Expressed and purified viral proteins and antibody fragments for x-ray crystallography.		
Fellowships and Awards			
2023	Colleges' Online Learning Academy Fellowship – MSU Enhanced Digital Learning Initiative (EDLI)		
2023	Outstanding Graduate Research Award – MSU Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology		
2022	Future Academic Scholars in Teaching (FAST) Fellowship – MSU Graduate School		
Publications			
1.	George NL, Bennett, EC, and Orlando BJ. Guarding the Walls: The Multifaceted Roles of Bce Modules in Cell Envelope Stress Sensing and Antimicrobial Resistance. <i>Journal of Bacteriology</i> (2024) Jun 13; e0012324 PMID: 38869304.		
2.	George NL and Orlando BJ. Architecture of a Complete Bce-type Antimicrobial Peptide Resistance Module. <i>Nature Communications</i> . (2023) Jul 1;14(1):3896 PMID: 37393310; PMCID: PMC10314905.		
3.	George NL, Schumacher AL, and Orlando BJ. Conformational Snapshots of the Bacitracin Sensing and Resistance Transporter BceAB. <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA</i> . (2022) Apr 5;119(14) PMID: 35349335; PMCID: PMC9169098		

Your mindset and
perspectives on the field
The “story” behind you as a
scientist

SOP

You as part of an
academic community

Research interests
& experience

You, the ideal grad student

PS

Teaching, outreach,
leadership, soft
skills, etc

CV

Personal experiences that have
shaped your path
Contributions to a healthy
academic community

Full scope of
experiences to date



**What is a
Statement of
Purpose?
And how
does it help
my
application?**



The Statement of Purpose describes YOU as a researcher + your potential for success in grad school



- **Focuses on you as a scientist, including your:**
 - Qualifications and achievements
 - Research experiences (**how you think like a scientist**)
 - Future goals and research interests
 - Potential contributions to the graduate and scientific community
- **Builds a narrative that demonstrates:**
 - What brings you to this specific academic program
 - What experiences will help you thrive and grow in grad school
 - Evidence of deliberate decision-making: have you carefully considered your decision to pursue a graduate degree in this field?



Find and familiarize yourself with SOP prompts



SOPs may also be called:

- Statement of Objectives
- Letter or Statement of Intent
- Personal Statement (for schools that don't ask for a separate personal statement)

Look for a prompt that asks about research experience, interests, or goals. When in doubt, or a program asks for one statement, write an SOP!





Caltech - BBE

Provide a brief statement of your scientific and professional interests and objectives. Include a description of your past accomplishments that are not evident from the examination of other documents submitted. Report, if applicable, on any research in progress.



UC Berkeley

Please describe your aptitude and motivation for graduate study in your area of specialization, including your preparation for this field of study, your academic plans or research interests, and your future career goals. Please be specific about why UC Berkeley would be a good intellectual fit for you.

⊕ Part 1: Introduce yourself, your interests and motivations

⊕ Part 2: Summarize your undergraduate and previous graduate career

⊕ Part 3: Discuss the relevance of your recent and current activities

⊕ Part 4: Elaborate on your academic interests



University of Washington - BPSD

Upload your Statement of Purpose. Please address the following items in your statement of purpose and include any other information that you would like to share about yourself.

1. Earning a Ph.D. can be rewarding, personally and professionally. Explain why you want to pursue a Ph.D. and which elements of the UW BPSD program interest you. Which BPSD-affiliated faculty members' research interests you and why?
2. Describe your previous research experience. From that experience, what were the most successful and interesting aspects?
3. Graduate school is inherently challenging. Describe a time when you overcame a significant challenge, scientific or otherwise.
4. Diversity is important to us. Are there aspects of your background, experiences, or interests that would contribute to the diversity of the BPSD program and the UW community?

How many statements do I have to write????

The goal of every SOP is similar: to **demonstrate your potential as a grad student and your interest and understanding of the subject area you plan to study** in about 1-2 pages.

Core components – paragraphs about key experiences and your general interests – may be reused from draft to draft

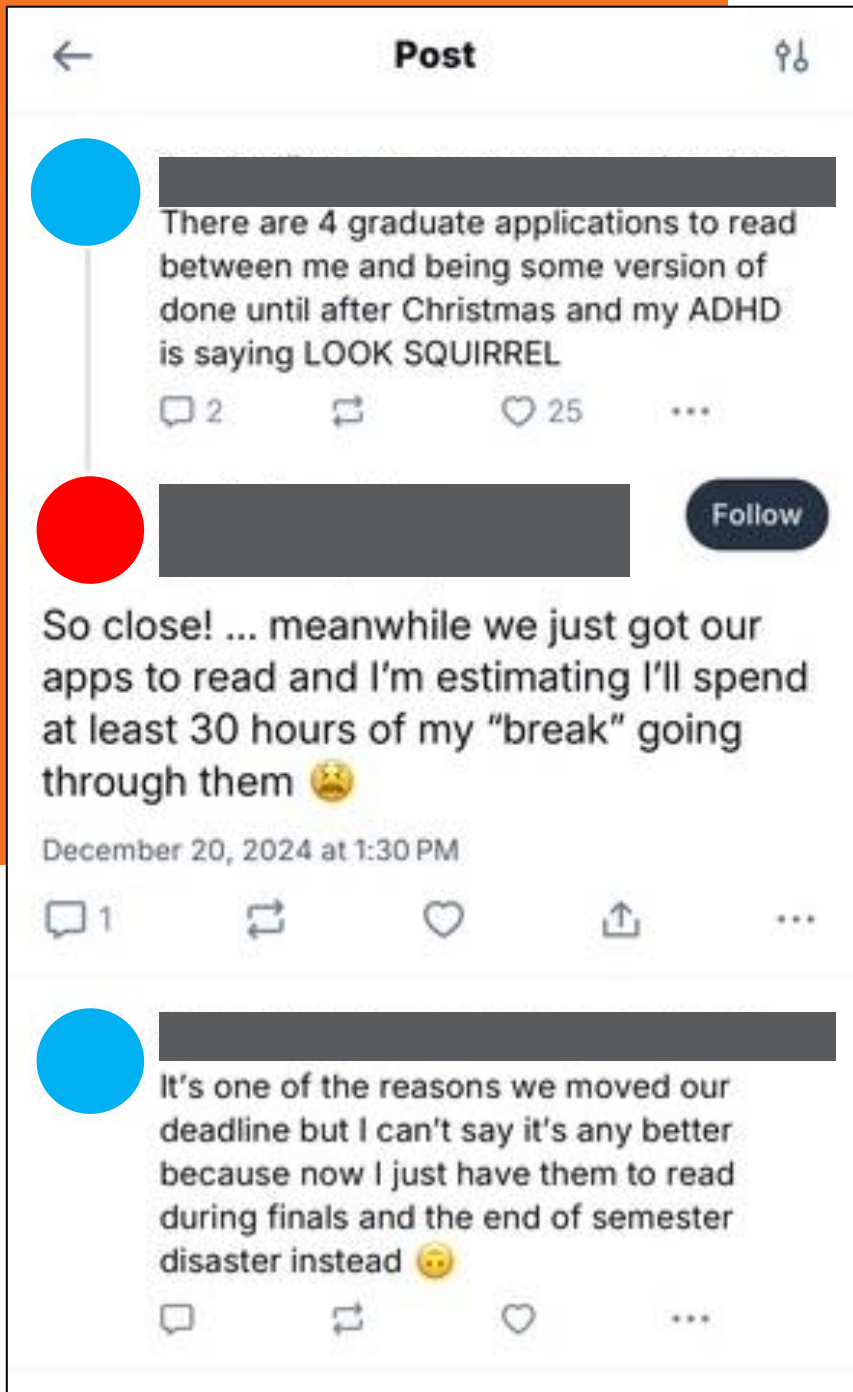
Be sure to tailor each SOP to the program to which you are applying – usually through changing the intro/conclusion and by explicitly addressing specific questions or phrasing in the prompt



Your application will be read by faculty in the department

AKA your future teachers, mentors,
committee members, collaborators,
and co-developers of projects.





Your readers might be tired, busy, stressed, distracted, and juggling work at the end of the term, just like you.

Be clear, concise, and engaging.

Remember - more than just picking students, they are choosing their future colleagues – they want to know you as a person, not just entries on a CV!





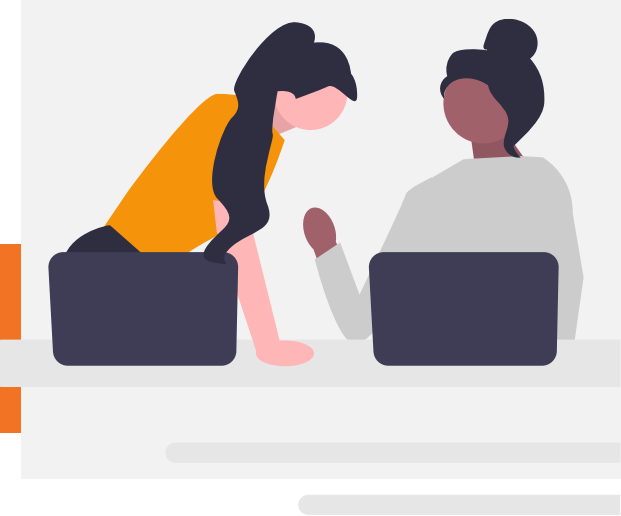
Faculty want to know how you will contribute to THEIR academic community



Are you **passionate** about research? Have interests that align with the expertise of the department? Do you understand the field is, and its approach to solving problems?



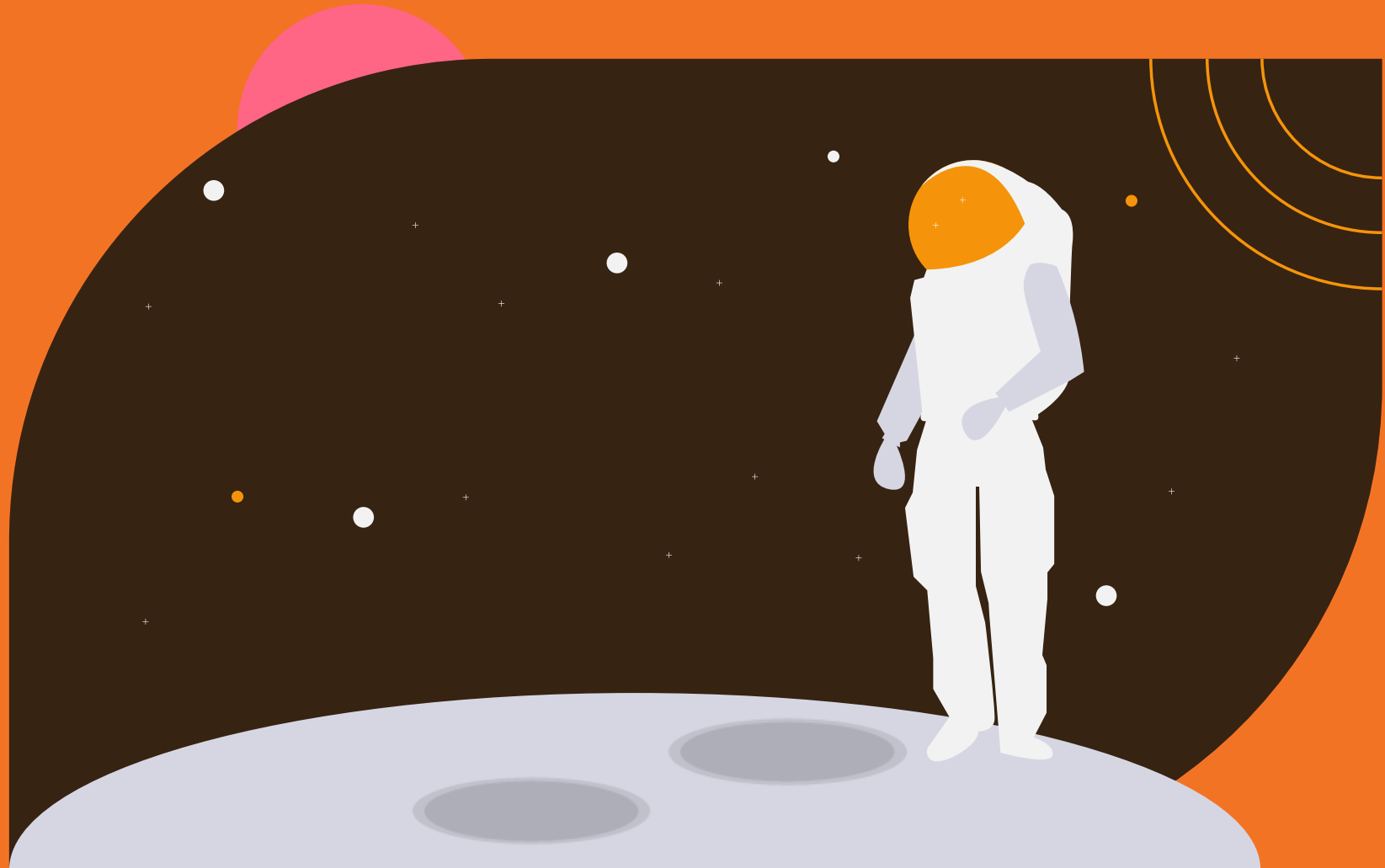
Are you **motivated to learn**, no matter the challenges? What skills and mindsets will you bring to the program? Resilience, creativity, problem-solving, etc?



Are you a **good team member**? Do you communicate well? Will you make the scientific community better for everyone?



Before you write: reflect on your journey and where you want to go next



Know thyself:



What **SPECIFIC** subject are you interested in?

What research area/niche in your field are you most interested in? Be specific as you can be about what you'd like to study

What motivates you to learn?

Do you have a favorite topic? Experimental approach or technique? Certain type of question? What inspires you to keep learning more?

What are your **VALUES** around your chosen field?

What do you think is important to do or study? What makes work in this area impactful and important to continue?



What SPECIFIC subject are you interested in?

What research area/niche in your field are you most interested in? Be specific as you can be about what you'd like to study

What kinds of departments might have this research? (note: it's not always where you'd expect!)

What motivates you to learn?

Do you have a favorite topic? Experimental approach or technique? Certain type of question? What inspires you to keep learning more?

Where can you do more of what you find motivating? Where are experts in these areas?

What are your VALUES around your chosen field?

What do you think is important to do or study? What makes work in this area impactful and important to continue?

What programs align with your values? Have resources to help you reach your career goals?





Research programs of interest

Who might I work with?

Identify 3-5 faculty you might like to work with. What projects are ongoing (producing publications in recent years) in their groups?

What training can they offer me?

Look at the program, department, and university: what unique training programs or organizations can you take part in to develop teaching, research, outreach or other skills relevant for your career?

What is the department like?

Research the department that hosts your program of interest: What are their research focuses? How do these appear in the the graduate program structure?

What is the university like?

Small private school or big public R1? What other departments might you interface with? What's the culture like? What's it like to work there? Would you be happy spending 4+ years of your life at that institution in that town?



STAY ORGANIZED

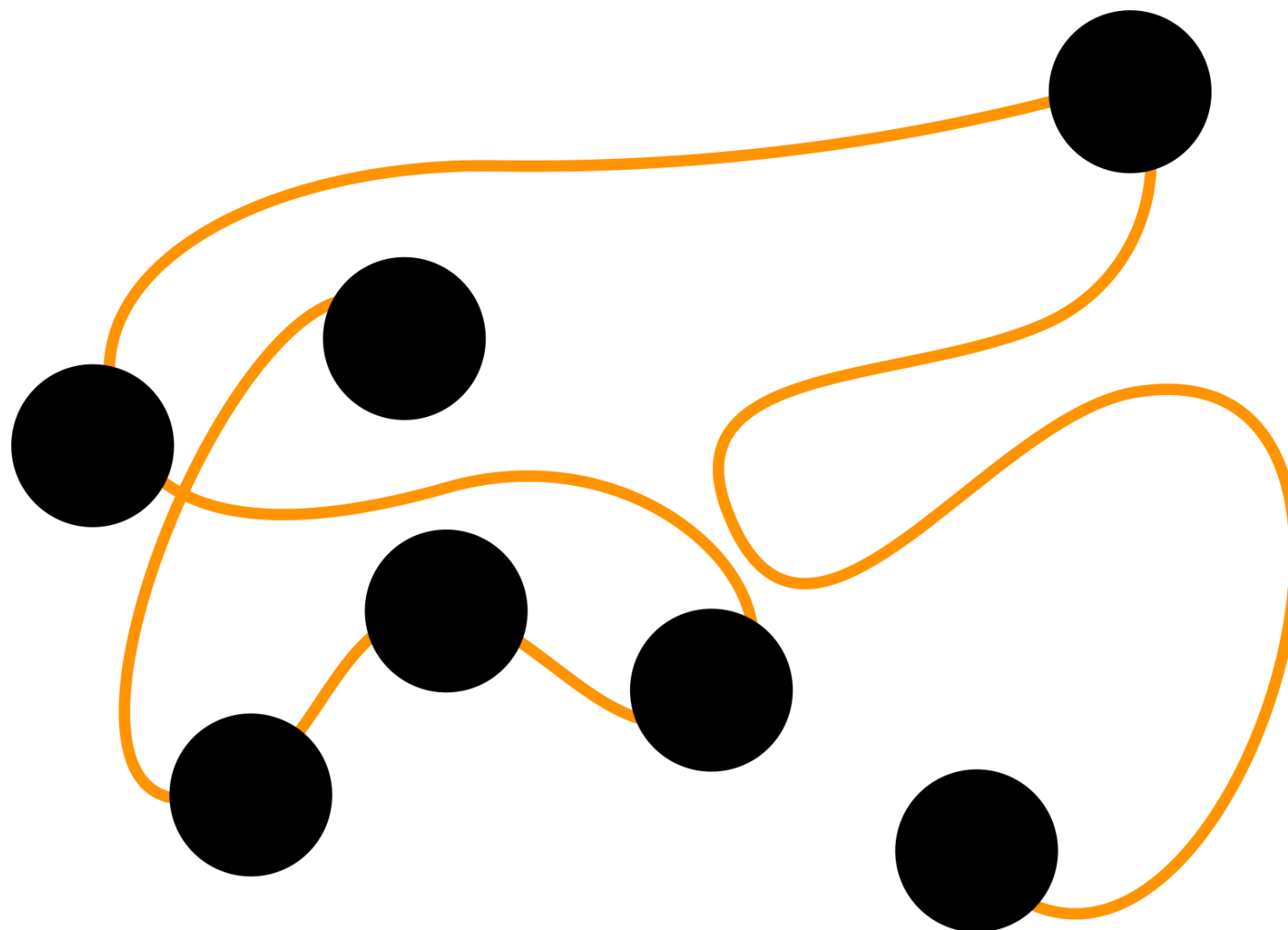
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Graduate Schools in Biology						
3							
4							
		Professors	Website Description	Website	Papers	My Interest	
5	Caltech BBE	Pamela J. Bjorkman	Our laboratory is interested in immune recognition of viral pathogens. We are particularly interested in understanding the immune response against HIV-1 and influenza in order to develop improved therapeutics. We use X-ray crystallography, electron microscopy, and biochemistry to study pathogen envelope glycoproteins and host immune response proteins. Using structural information and alternate antibody architectures, we are engineering antibody-based reagents with increased potency and breadth. We are also investigating the structural correlates of broad and potent antibody-mediated neutralization of HIV-1 to better understand what leads to naturally-occurring broad and potent antibodies. In related work, we use 3D imaging techniques such as electron tomography and fluorescent microscopy to investigate HIV/SIV infection in animal and human tissues. Examples of our research are described below.	http://www.bbe.caltech.edu/content/pamela-j-bjorkman	a. Bjorkman PJ, MA Saper, B Samraoui, WS Bennett, JL Strominger and DC Wiley. (1987) Structure of the human class I histocompatibility antigen, HLA-A2. Nature 329:506-512. b. Bjorkman PJ, MA Saper, B Samraoui, WS Bennett, JL Strominger and DC Wiley. (1987) The foreign antigen binding site and T cell recognition regions of class I histocompatibility antigens. Nature 329:512-518.	My previous research experience involved studying immune recognition of viral pathogens. I'm interested in understanding the immune response against HIV-1 in order to develop improved therapeutics.	
6		David Van Valen	Our group studies how living systems and their respective viruses encode and decode information about their internal state and their environment by combining ideas from cell biology and physics with recent advances in imaging, machine learning, and genomics to make novel measurements.	http://www.vanvalen.caltech.edu/	bioRxiv 10.1101/505032v3	I'm interested in applying my programming skills to understanding how viruses access information about their host cell's environment and internal state.	
7							
8							



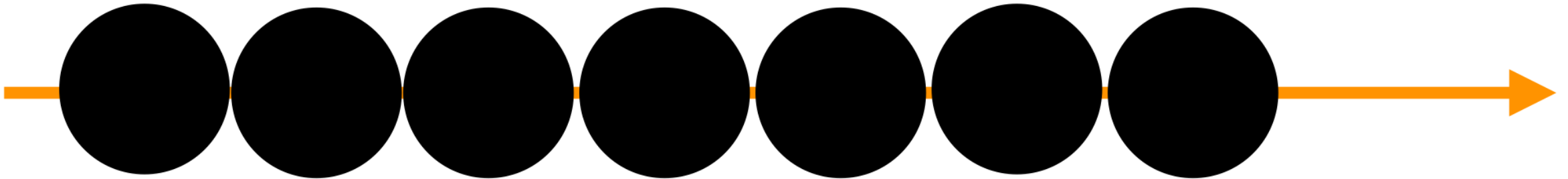
Notes into narratives: telling your research story



YOUR JOURNEY TO GRAD SCHOOL



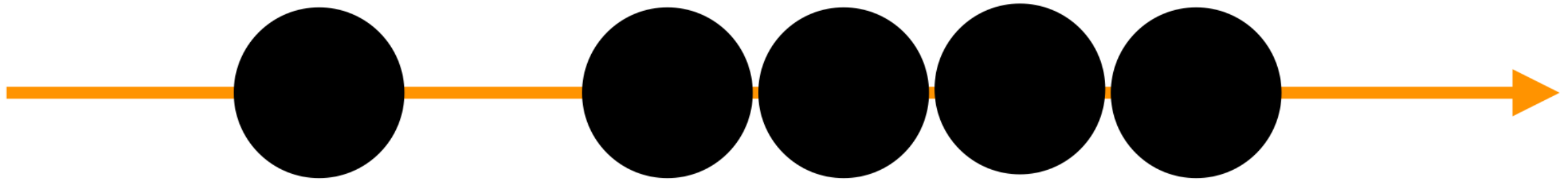
YOUR JOURNEY MAY BE COMPLICATED, BUT YOUR SOP SHOULD NOT BE COMPLICATED



Choose the stories that best demonstrate the development of your identity as
a researcher and potential for future success



FOCUS ON THE DETAILS THAT MATTER



“I would rather take a student who had only had four weeks of research experience where they had developed a great understanding of what it meant to think like a scientist than a student who had dozens of opportunities but couldn’t explain what the projects were about.”

(a graduate program director)



Which experiences demonstrate how you “think like a scientist?”



When have you had to solve problems?

When did you let your curiosity guide your research decisions?

When did you have to design, analyze, collaborate, etc to get a project done?

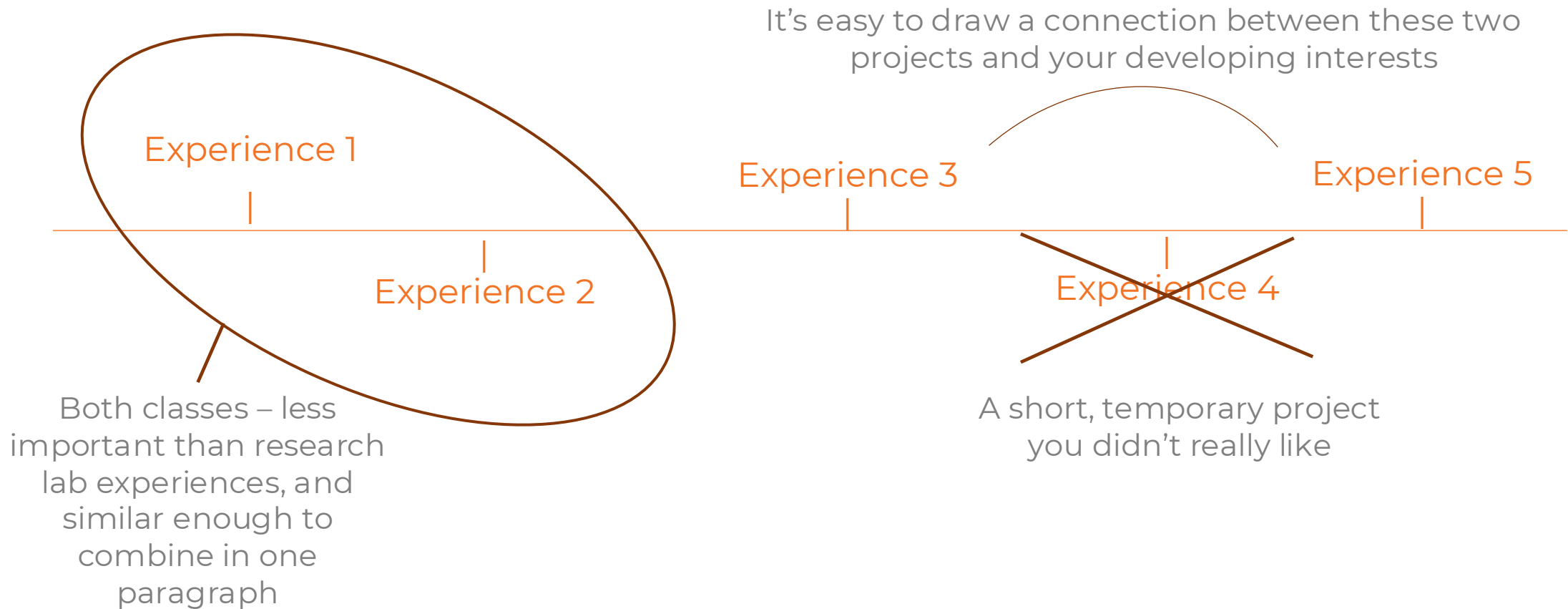
When did you discover something you're passionate about? What inspired you to pursue this field?



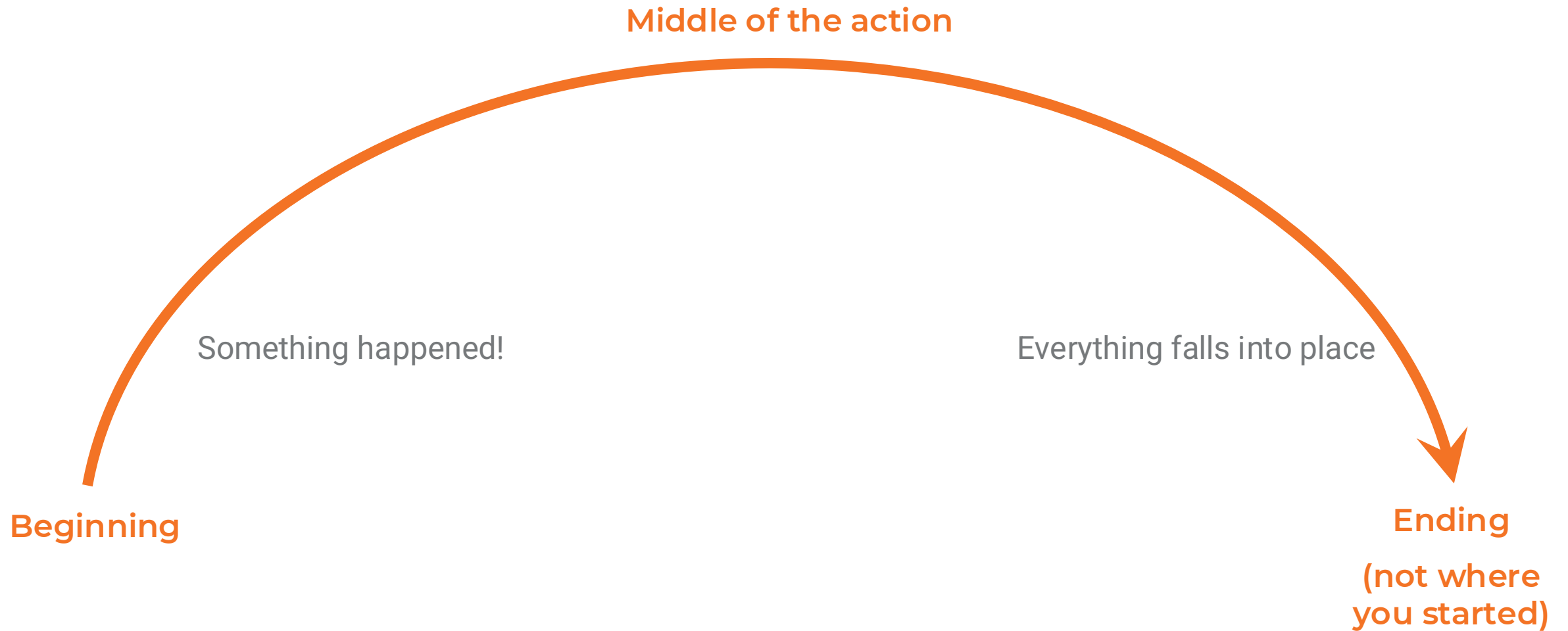
Reflect and refine your meaning-making list:



Your SOP doesn't need to describe EVERYTHING you've done – just the highlights

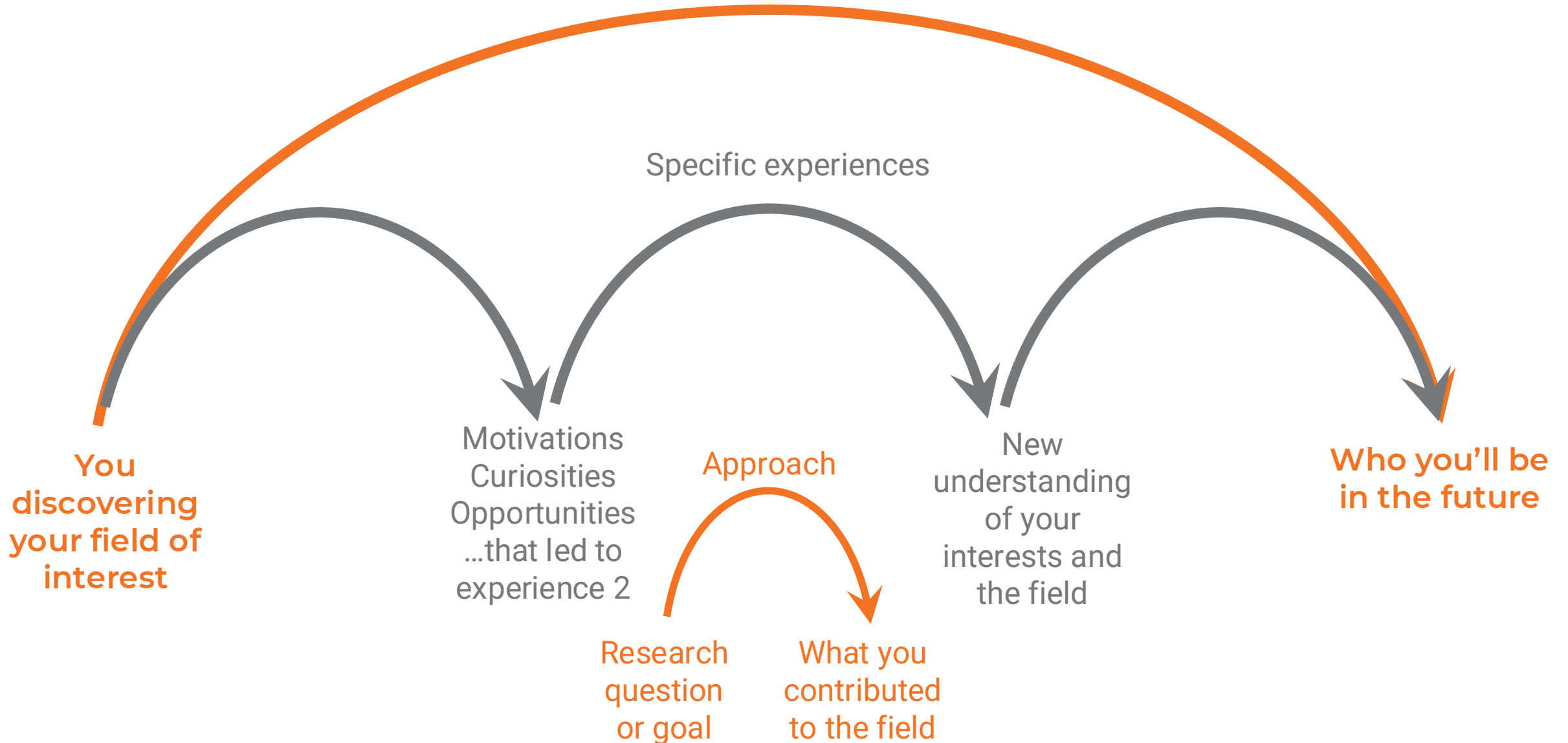


A Good Statement Has Story Arcs:



A Good Statement Has Story Arcs:

You as an early-stage scientist discovering what you want to do for your career



Putting the plan into action: building a draft





MOST SOPs Can Be Divided Into Three Parts

1. Introductory Paragraph

Provide a story, background information, or direct statement of interest to put your experiences in context.

2. Body Paragraphs: Your experiences, qualifications, interests, etc

Address the prompt and build up a vivid picture of you as a researcher

3. Program Paragraph: why this program, and why you?

Show why your skills/experience are a good fit with the program, highlight things that excite you about the program/department/school, and mention specific professors you might like to work with.



What writing style should I use?



- Expert to near-expert – your readers are faculty members in related areas; use appropriate technical language, *as long as the research story is clear to readers who weren't there with you!*
- *Show don't tell* – rather than “I am a good problem-solver,” give us a story that shows you in action!
- Be authentic – there is no magical formula for success and reviewers want to get to know YOU not what you think their idea of a “perfect” grad student is



A QUICK NOTE ON GEN AI:

We find that GenAI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc are NOT effective for application writing. Students who use these tools often end up with vague, cliché, or impersonal writing that can be extremely time-consuming to improve.

YOU are the one getting the degree. Grad committees want to know who you are as a person, what you're like to work with, and how you communicate *in your own words*. After all, you'll be working together for years!

We STRONGLY encourage writers to avoid GenAI in preparing their applications. If you're struggling with your writing, seek support from mentors, friends, and campus resources (like the writing center!) for more authentic feedback that preserves your voice.





Introductions orient readers: Who are you? Where are we? What is the “thesis statement” for your application?

Career goals

Interests

Reason for applying to
this department

Your research
interests in a
nutshell
(who are you as a
scientist?)

Unique background

Undergrad degree

Personal motivation

Introductions don't need to be long or great works of creative writing: your readers are busy, so make every word count



INTRODUCTION STYLES: THE EFFICIENT



I wish to pursue a PhD in computer science with the goal of becoming an academic researcher. I am primarily interested in theoretical machine learning and its applications in solving interdisciplinary problems. Using tools from theory, I aspire to improve current algorithms, motivate new algorithms, and establish provable guarantees on running time and solution quality.

Career goal: academic computer science researcher

Interests: theoretical machine learning for interdisciplinary problems

Department “hook”: maybe their interest in guarantees on running time and solution quality aligns with faculty in the department?

Personal: none, and not needed



INTRODUCTION STYLES: THE MIX-AND-MATCH



My curiosity about the molecular world was galvanized while puzzling over gene sequences from a hypersaline pond as part of an Extreme Environmental Virology class at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I was struck by the extent of microbial activity taking place in the seemingly still and inhospitable water. Not satisfied simply knowing *who* lived in our pond, I pursued a double major in Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology and Earth Sciences to gain insight into *how* these microbes thrived under harsh conditions. Through experiences such as identifying the fossilized denizens of ancient reefs, trapping voles to study population genetics, and isolating bacteriophage, I developed an appreciation for the tight interweaving between the chemical architecture inside cells, interactions between organisms and with their environments, and the vast stretches of geologic time over which these systems have evolved. I also realized that whichever aspect of the biological world I was studying, my questions were consistently rooted in curiosity about form and function, how organisms' underlying structures facilitate the processes that allow them to thrive.

Long-term research interests, past research, inspiring personal experiences, and undergraduate degree info are briefly mentioned, ending with a unifying theme.



INTRODUCTION STYLES: THE PHILOSOPHER



Modern cosmology is entering a new era with upcoming missions like the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope, Euclid and the Square Kilometer Array. These missions will present us with unparalleled amounts of data, and thus the ability to make inferences about fundamental aspects of our universe. Yet, these data sets will be large and complex, necessitating the development of refined statistical methods to analyze them. Since beginning my undergraduate astrophysics studies at [REDACTED], I have undertaken multiple research projects in cosmology, studying dark energy, inflation, and modified gravity. While each of these projects was in a different sub-field, they all focused on optimal mathematical and statistical methods which we can apply to cosmological data sets. The development of these methods will be essential for optimally extracting information from upcoming astronomical surveys. By pursuing a PhD in Astrophysics at [REDACTED], I hope to study the applications of these methods to a range of astronomical measurements, thereby honing my understanding and skills in the field of astrostatistics.

The writer's understanding of the field and its current challenges is immediately apparent, as well as how the writer hopes to contribute.



INTRODUCTION STYLES: THE STORYTELLER



I enrolled in the physics class excited for the intellectual adventure. My mind yearned for a challenge: an experience I rarely encountered by day as a financial advisor. My role at the investment firm was extremely rigid and presented little opportunity for mental stimulation. I craved a creative environment where critical thinking was valued. To fill this cerebral void, I read voraciously spanning all genres. But the popular science books were always the most captivating. While reading, I learned that the atoms inside our bodies were forged within an exploding star eons ago and have coalesced into intelligent beings capable of understanding the universal laws that govern that event. And that a single galaxy contains more stars than all the human beings who have ever lived. Galvanized by these books, I matriculated into that physics night course to engage with science from an academic perspective. This course provided many avenues for problem solving and each night I felt my cognitive abilities returning. The class was demanding, yet this was just the challenge I was seeking. I finished the class invigorated by a sense of accomplishment I had scarcely experienced before. That was five years ago.

By telling a personal story, the writer provides context for their unusual background and conveys their passion for their new career direction.

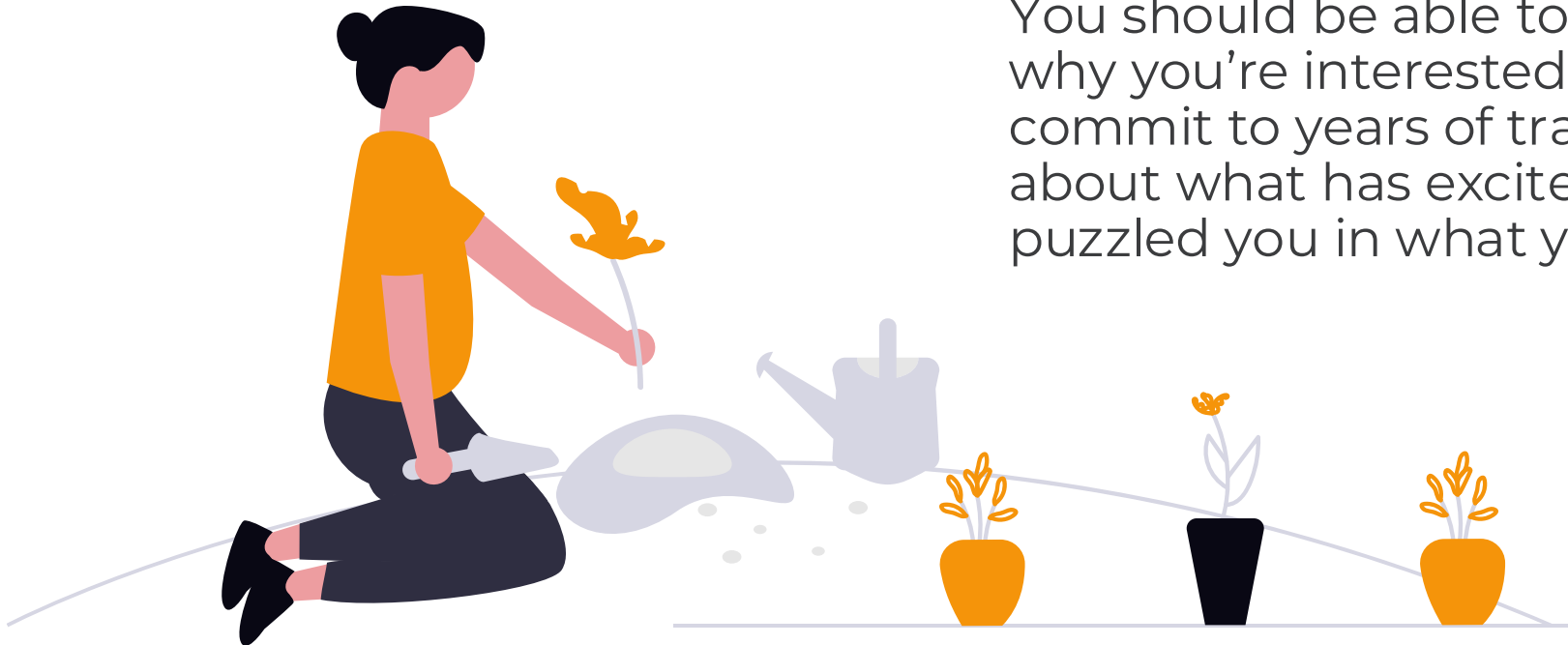


What if I don't know exactly what I want to study? Do I need a specific research problem before I apply?

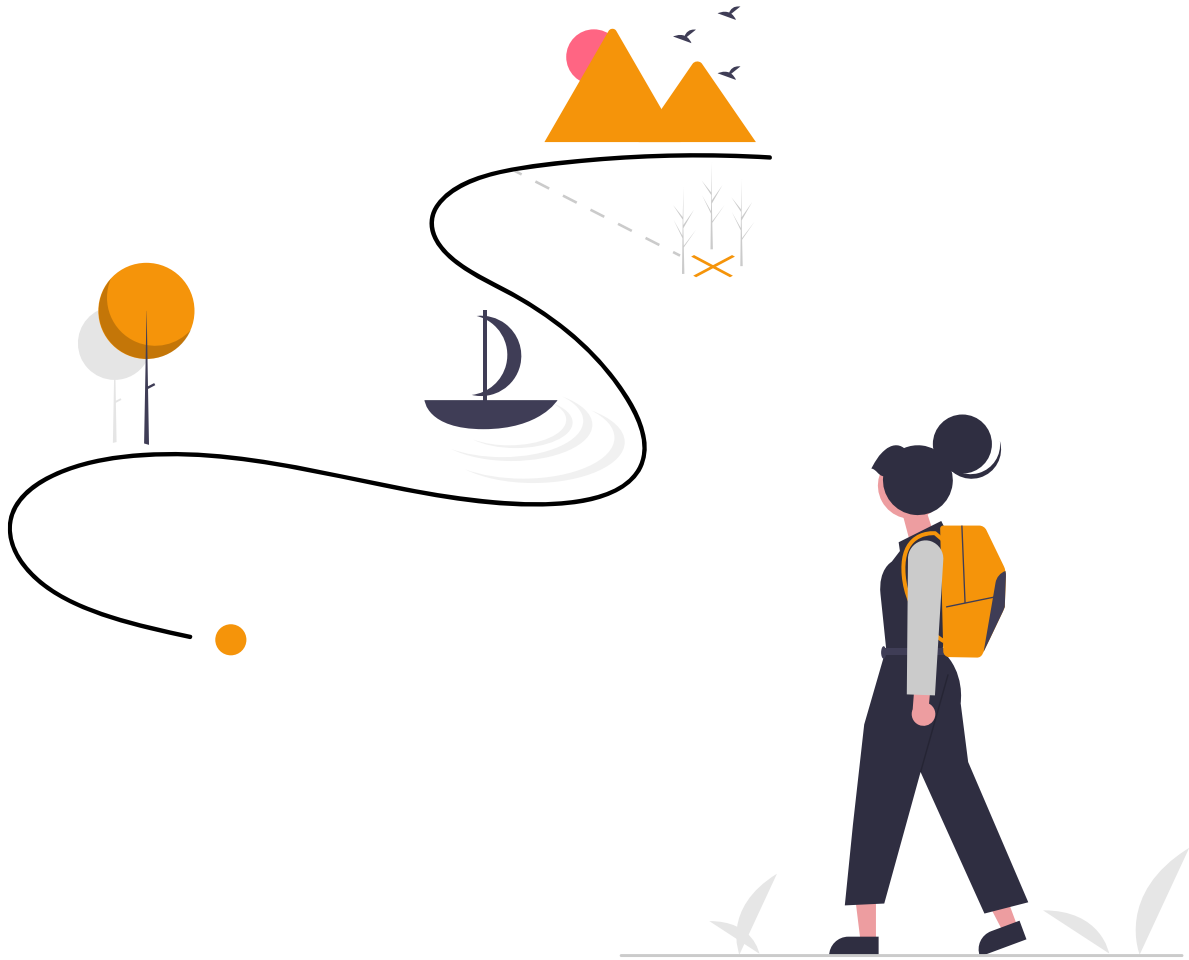


Readers know you're still developing your knowledge and interests in the field. What they need to know is that you are truly motivated to keep exploring and that you are likely to find a relevant, supportive mentor in their department.

You should be able to articulate a reason why you're interested enough in the field to commit to years of training in it – think about what has excited, intrigued, or puzzled you in what you've learned so far



Body paragraphs describe your research journey



How have you prepared for grad school, and what will you do while you're there?

Make connections between experiences

Show that you understand what your research means

“design” suggests
autonomy on project



Project goal
or question

Potential
relevance of
work on the
field

How did the
writer approach
the research
question?

Outcomes or
future work

The next summer, I designed a project with Dr. [REDACTED], to study inflation using galaxy clustering on ultra-large scales. Galaxy catalogs from future missions, including Euclid, will allow us to measure the parameter $f_{\text{NL}}^{\text{loc}}$, which gives us information about various inflationary models. I am studying new, optimal methods to construct the galaxy power spectrum from these catalogs, and thereby measure $f_{\text{NL}}^{\text{loc}}$. I have built a data analysis pipeline in C and Python, which first creates mock galaxy catalogs based on input values of $f_{\text{NL}}^{\text{loc}}$. I then use different methods to estimate the galaxy power spectrum from these catalogs and finally estimate the value of $f_{\text{NL}}^{\text{loc}}$ that best fits this spectrum using an MCMC. Through this pipeline, we can compare the constraints on $f_{\text{NL}}^{\text{loc}}$ obtained by different data analysis methods, including the traditional Feldman Kaiser Peacock estimator and an optimal quadratic estimator. This project has also developed into my senior thesis, and I plan to extend it to study pixel-based likelihood functions, and include general relativistic effects in my analysis. I will be giving a poster presentation on this work at the American Astronomical Society Winter Meeting in January 2018. My senior thesis work will also be an essential component of the proposal for SPHEREx, a NASA Medium Explorer mission which aims to measure $f_{\text{NL}}^{\text{loc}}$.

In the course of my cosmology research, my interests have gravitated towards the mathematical methods which we employ in the field. One of the primary challenges in cosmology today lies in extracting the maximum amount of information from individual measurements with large uncertainties. I have found this to be a common theme in all my past research experiences,

What if I have nothing to show for my work? What if all my experiments failed?



“That’s why they call it RE-search!”

Your readers know that science doesn’t always go as planned. Don’t obsess over failed projects or assume you aren’t qualified for grad school.

Focus on what you **LEARNED** from the opportunity and think about how your experience could demonstrate tenacity, creativity, analytical thinking, problem-solving, etc...



Solving structures of the viral and chemokine protein bound to their shared receptor should provide a blueprint for blocking RSV G interaction with CX3CR1, but the seven transmembrane region receptor and its flexible ligands are challenging to study with techniques typically used in the lab. I initially designed soluble mimics and fusion proteins to focus on the extracellular regions of the receptor, in hopes of solving structures of RSV G and CX3CL1 complexes with these proteins. When half a dozen different complexes failed to crystallize despite efforts at optimization, I took this as an opportunity to learn something new. Now I am employing several strategies in parallel to increase my odds of finding success, including NMR of ligand-receptor peptide complexes, solubilizing full length receptor from cell membranes or producing receptor in lipid nanodiscs, and using biolayer interferometry to probe the role of different fragments of the receptor in ligand binding. Through this combination of techniques, relentless searching for backup plans and improvements to methods, and a lot of patience, I am slowly piecing together an understanding of how my two structurally dissimilar proteins use one receptor to produce unique immune responses.

SHOW don't TELL: describe the problem-solving process rather than simply telling us “I faced many challenges” or “I am a good problem-solver.” Here the writer shares the diverse skillset they developed while trying to solve a research problem.



Customizing your statement for each program



- **Why am I interested in working with the faculty I've listed?** How does their research align with my interests and goals?
- **How could I contribute meaningfully to these labs and to the broader research fields?** How do my experiences make me a good fit for the research being done by these faculty members?
- What are the strengths of the graduate program? **What sets this program apart from the other ones on my list?**
- **What resources are available to me as a graduate student that will help me succeed and help me contribute meaningfully to the academic community?**



EXAMPLE: A TAILORED LAST PARAGRAPH



In the course of my cosmology research, my interests have gravitated towards the mathematical methods which we employ in the field. One of the primary challenges in cosmology today lies in extracting the maximum amount of information from individual measurements with large uncertainties. I have found this to be a common theme in all my past research experiences, and a PhD in [redacted] University would be the logical continuation of this trend. The [redacted] department would offer me the opportunity to work with both theoretical and observational cosmology research groups. This will allow me to become familiar with both the theories which we are trying to test, as well as the measurement techniques we use to test them. I would like to work between these two steps, by attempting to understand how we can efficiently and optimally make inferences about physical theories from raw data. I would like to work with Prof. [redacted] on data analysis methods for CMB S-4 experiments, particularly those that would allow us to search for primordial gravitational waves, such as CMB delensing. I am also interested in forecasting cosmological parameter constraints from WFIRST with Prof. [redacted]. I would enjoy working with Prof. [redacted] on constraining cosmological parameters using the large-scale distribution of galaxies. Pursuing a PhD at [redacted] University would give me the chance to study a number of applications of astrostatistics, due to [redacted] involvement in surveys like WFIRST, LSST and ACT. [redacted] will offer me an extremely well-rounded research experience, which will uniquely position me as a scientist in the advent of surveys which will present us with larger and more complex data sets. My work at [redacted] will prepare me to use these data sets to extract fundamental information about the workings of our universe.



EXAMPLE: ADDING PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

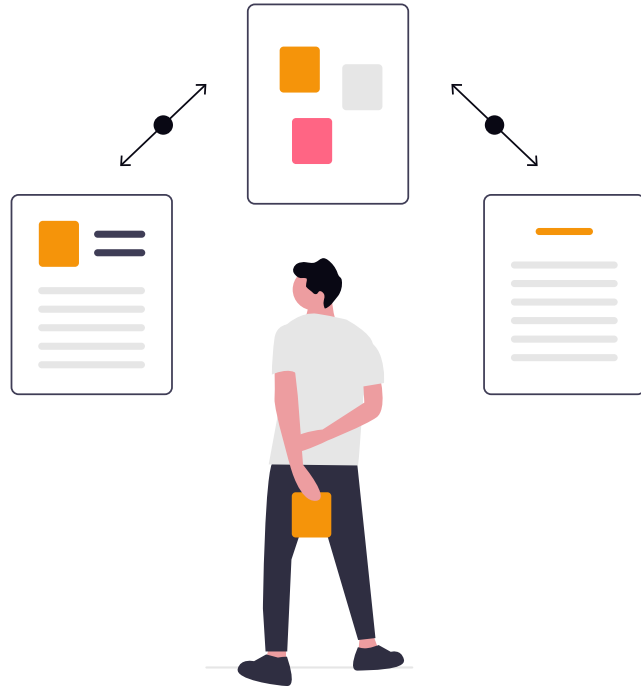


In addition to research, I believe that the role of a scientist involves increasing diversity in their field by reducing the barriers facing underrepresented groups. At [REDACTED] I helped found the Women in [REDACTED] group. We organize workshops and discussions about the barriers that women often face and aim to create a safe space where we can work together to tackle these issues. I am also [REDACTED] I helped start the [REDACTED], under which students go through a short training about how to support [REDACTED] Communication and collaboration are necessary skills for effective outreach and promotion of diversity, and I have built these skills by working as a [REDACTED]. I was also the chair of the [REDACTED] committee at [REDACTED], for which I worked with professors and students to critically evaluate the astrophysics curriculum and make changes to better prepare students to address current research problems. At [REDACTED] I would like to continue these efforts by helping create a community to support underrepresented groups in my field. I also plan to be actively engaged in outreach and would love to get involved with the Center for Education Outreach and the Women in Science and Engineering Program.



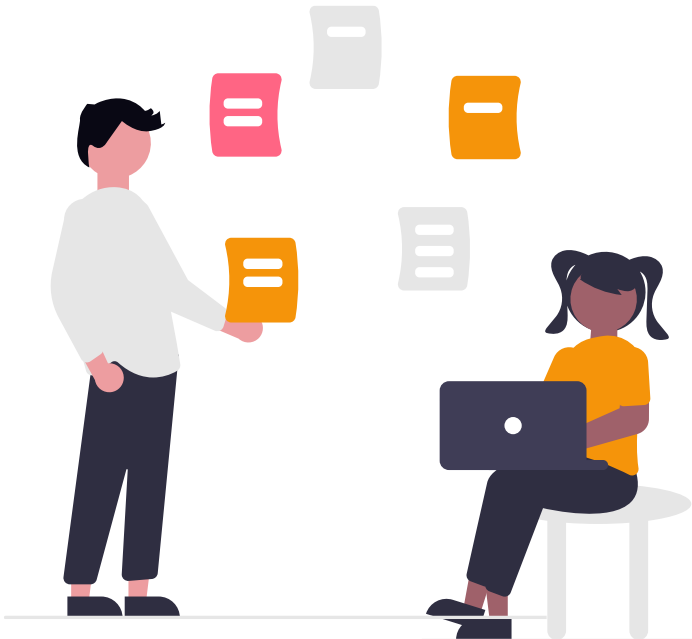
- Why you are **compelled** to pursue a graduate degree in your field
- What **skills/experiences** qualify you to pursue a graduate degree
- What you **hope to learn** in grad school
- What **contributions** do you hope to make to advance your field
- Why you think this **choice in grad school** is a good fit
- What you plan to do with a graduate degree; **career goals**
- That you have the **discipline/drive** to pursue a graduate degree

Finally: revision



Take a step back and consider the whole application package: what does your SOP add? Are there redundancies?

Get feedback from trusted mentors (take advice from the internet and peers with a grain of salt)



Refine the wording: make sure everything is as polished and precise as you can make it. Avoid cliches, and check for incorrect terminology.



QUESTIONS?



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