

What is a Statement of Academic Interest?

A statement of academic interest, sometimes called a research proposal, is a preliminary statement of your research programme. It lays out, clearly and succinctly, your principal research question and how you will approach it.

The statement is not a generalised biographical statement of your interest in the discipline of History. Instead, a statement of interest is the place where you highlight your clear qualifications and abilities for graduate study to the admissions committee. These qualities should include that you are a thoughtful, well-prepared applicant with a clear idea of your research field and your reasons for applying to this specific program. The statement should be specific to your program of study and not include personal information and generalized statements about your interest in history – the admissions committee assumes these things as a matter of course since you are applying to a programme of advanced studies. Rather, focus on the specific reasons for your application to study history (see below).

How Does the Statement of Academic Interest Help Me and Admissions Committees?

The statement is a critical document in your consideration of, and preparation for, graduate study. It helps you to:

- Fashion a research question around which you will craft your research programme during MA/PhD study
- Consider the key relevant secondary sources that you will be engaged with in your programme, which should, in its final form, constitute an original contribution to research
- Identify an appropriate primary source base to use in approaching your question
- Identify an appropriate advisor, with expertise that matches your interests, who can collaborate with you in realising your proposed programme of study
- Identify an appropriate institution, where you can find support for your proposed programme of study
- Prepare you to apply for scholarship competitions, in which the quality and precision of your proposal are crucial factors in assessment and decision-making

The statement is also critical for committees considering your admission to a graduate programme at their institution. It helps them to:

- Contextualise other material they consider (letters of recommendation, transcripts) in assessing your strengths as a potential scholar
- Evaluate the appropriateness of their institution for your programme of study, in terms of the resources and expertise that is available to assist you in realising it
- Rank proposals for additional funding

What Should a Statement of Academic Interest Include?

The statement should be precise, structured and detailed. It should be written with clarity, and proofread carefully. The level of detail that you provide should be significantly more advanced for a PhD application, where admissions committees expect you to already have a very clear topic in mind. For MA applications, it is understood that you might not have as detailed a project in mind yet, but you should still have a clear focus, and provide as many of the following details as possible.

A good statement of academic interest should:

1. Articulate a clear and concise research question that emerges from scholarship in the relevant field of history: what question are you answering in your research? Here, you should state a research question rather than a 'topic'.

At the MA level, it's understood that your research question likely will evolve after you begin the program, but the admissions committee is looking to see if your interests match the expertise we offer.

2. Situate your question within that scholarship: how will your research constitute an original contribution to the literature?

This is your chance to organise your research question around the key texts that address it in the field: you can cite them in this section (author-date format is fine).

3. Identify the primary sources you are going to use in your research programme.

Here, if there is an appropriate source-set that you wish to work with (an archival collection, or printed material held in a library, wherever it may be), it helps to identify it and give as many details of location and reference numbers as possible. While you may not have developed a research programme with this level of detail at the point of application to MA studies, the more detailed your proposal, the more likely you will be able to secure competitive internal and external funding.

4. Propose a methodology: how do you propose to analyse the sources, in order to answer the research question?

5. Offer an explanation of the reason you are applying to this particular program: have you made contact with a faculty member who has agreed to serve as your advisor should you be admitted? If not, have you consulted the directory and identified faculty members who work on topics related to your field of interest? Do you have direct skills and experience with the sources and methods you are proposing to employ in your inquiry?

Please feel free to contact any member of the History Department, particularly any prospective advisor and the Graduate Committee chair, should you have any questions about your application.

Or visit www.uoguelph.ca/history/graduate-programs and our “How to Apply” page: <https://www.uoguelph.ca/history/how-to-apply> .