

Writing Tips

REU Personal Statements

January 24, 2018

Respond to the instructions & requirements

- Any instructions on font, margin size, line spacing & word count?
 - If none, use 11- or 12-point Times/Times New Roman or Arial
 - If none, target one-page
 - If none, skip a line between paragraphs
- Use any instructions on suggested content as (temporary) headers
 - Example from AAMU REU: “Brief narrative that discusses your **interest in this program**, and your **long-term career goals** (your **background** and your **interest in research** -- what **projects** have you been involved with in the past, if any; and do you **prefer** experimental or theoretical work.)”
 - Probably remove temporary headers before submission
- Make sure you address any review criteria (if stated)

Know your audience – write for the reviewers

- Do your homework on the REU site – describe why the specific REU is a fit & connect to the program
- Reviewers typically read lots of statements – be clear, concise & complete
- Opening paragraph is key (ruin the story!) – stand out in a crowded field & make life easy for the reviewers
- Be cautious of jargon and abbreviations (define abbreviations)
- Start early and expect to have multiple drafts
- Have trusted friends/colleagues/mentors/faculty be “reviewers” and provide constructive feedback
- Are the reviewers experts or generalists?

Style

- Use a **positive, active** voice and **first** person
 - “I changed the water bottle...” vs. “The water bottle was changed...”
- Avoid hyperbole – use real personal instances/examples
- Be specific about **outcomes**
- Use **spellcheck** for grammar and spelling, vary word use, check for hyphenation
- Pay attention to how your statement flows and use **one** voice
- Break up really (really) long sentences & paragraphs
- Again, ask someone with experience to read for clarity and impact
- Avoid lots of sentences starting with “However”

Electronic forms

- If you have to cut and paste to an electronic form then check:
 - Has the formatting changed?
 - Special characters not recognized?
 - White space between paragraphs removed?
- Proofread the electronic form version before submitting!