

How to write a strong EDGE application

modified from [@RomanFeiman](#)

Most grad school applications make the same major mistake: they tell the reader very little about what the applicant actually wants to research. They write autobiographically, "I started here, then I did A then B then C really well, and now I'm applying to work with you". This is a mistake.

You need to tell us what you want to work on.

The main thing we want is to understand how your interests would gel and to imagine where we might be able to advise you. The best SOPs (statement of purpose) are written in three acts:

- Act I: **Research Interests**
- Act II: **Supporting Evidence**
- Act III: **Fit to the Faculty/Department**

Act I: What are your research interests? What are the intellectual issues you want to better understand? This should be specific enough to make it clear that you know the major open questions in your research area, but not so specific that you're proposing one study.

Act II: What is the experience and background you have that enables you to carry out graduate work on these issues? Your thesis/RA experience shouldn't be autobiography, it should be evidence -- look, I really have the skills, ability, perseverance, etc. to do this work! Tell us exactly what you know in the lab, not what you have only seen, but which instruments or protocols you master, including software.

Act III: How do your interests match specific faculty members at EDGE? This is the part that changes the most between applications. Your core interests (Act I) shouldn't change much -- they're what you generally want to work on, regardless of where!

This leads to an important point: Act I should really be the actual reason you're applying. It takes a long time and lots of trial-and-error to figure out your intellectual interests. If you haven't figured them out yet, that's not a knock on you!

If you find yourself feeling like you're making stuff up or only trying to appeal to a PI just to get accepted, take a step back and ask yourself why you're applying.

A PhD takes too long and pays too little to do something you're not genuinely excited about.