

Statement of Intent for MA Japan Studies University Placement Guidelines

By Dr. Moore and Dr. Black

You are applying to study for one year at a Japanese University. How can you make your statement of intent as strong as possible in order to secure your placement? What is the MA selection committee looking for in an applicant and how can you convince them that you have got it?

This set of guidelines is designed to help you to answer these questions and write a winning statement of intent to the MA selection committee.

A number of points that stand out in a statement of intent are:

- Demonstrating that you have conducted research into what you can do during and expect from your year abroad and how this relates to your MA studies and thesis.
- Demonstrating that you are an independent and highly motivated student who can think on your feet.
- Demonstrating that you love studying and want to learn from others and share your knowledge.

Remember to use your imagination – what might your experience in Japan be like? What do you want to study in Japan (beyond improving your Japanese language skills)? How can you demonstrate that you are independent and motivated?

Don'ts!

There are a number of things to avoid, because they will make your statement of intent look poor and/or sloppy, and you will not get placed at the University of your choice.

For your statement of intent, avoid:

- Stressing importance of language acquisition (except very briefly and always in relation to your study/research in Japan). Of course, developing your Japanese language skills will be important in Japan, but saying this will not help your application stand out from all the others.
- Saying that Keio University is the best university in the world, unless you can truly justify this (you probably cannot). Instead, research the University you will attend. Is there a University Professor you wish to interview or who could act as your supervisor? A course you wish to take? A club you want to join?
- Orientalism, e.g. “Japanese characters... a sort of coded language that you learn to decipher” – remember you are interested in expanding your knowledge and interacting with people.
- Writing more than 400 words in your statement of intent. Word limits help reviewers ascertain which students are precise and focused.
- Writing a letter – a ‘statement of intent’ is usually anonymous, so no “Dear Mr. X” and certainly no “To Whom it May Concern”.
- Formatting, spelling and grammar mistakes – edit your work (See Student Study Guide for advice).

Dos!

Below are some ideas and examples to help you keep your statement of intent focused. The best ways to strengthen your statement of intent is to specify potential supervisors and courses at the university of your choice by searching the university's website, together with detailing how being at a certain university will help your research for your MA thesis.

Structure

Here are some ideas to help you structure your statement of intent:

Introduction – Paragraph One:

- Demonstrate that you should be placed at the University of your choice.
- Start with a punchy opening paragraph that captures your readers interest, emphasizes your ability, and highlights your goals (i.e. demonstrates that this experience will add to your studies/life/subject...)

Body – Paragraphs Two and Three:

- Demonstrate that you should be placed at the University of your choice.
- State clearly and specifically how this experience will add to your studies/life/subject...
- Show that you have made the effort to find out how to achieve your goals.
- Focus on one point per paragraph only.
- Justify your first and second choice of institution.

Conclusion:

- Demonstrate that you should be placed at the University of your choice.
- State how you will engage with Japanese society and people.
- Refocus on your goals.

Be specific

Examples for actual applications:

...For example, I am looking for opportunities to visit museums.

OK, but why? What will this contribute to you, your future, your understanding of Japan; what will it contribute to Japan and/or the NL?

Are you interested in museums culturally (e.g. for their contents), financially, institutionally, as a tourist, as an anthropologist, as an archaeologist, art historian, what?

...want to explore the city and meet interesting people

What parts of the city?

Which people?

Why? Why?

This story has inspired me...

In what way has it inspired you? What does it inspire you to do? Write an article? Write an essay? Do a translation of a poem/novella/report? Interview someone? Collect

materials for something bigger later on (e.g. scriptie). All of these? Do you want to test the story - do you believe it is true?

Talking about your qualities – make these Japan-related

Are these qualities relevant to your application

[Student A] That you are reliable (because you coach football) or punctual (because you work in a store) are **generic** qualities.

[Student B] You play the piano, basketball; you row; you edit the Tanuki newspaper. WHY are these useful for a year in Japan?

Will you join an orchestra? Play basketball? Edit a newspaper?

[Student C] you took part in an archaeological society...

Will you join an archeological society in Japan?

What will you find out about archaeology in Japan?

Will you visit archaeology sites?

What are the archaeology sites near Tokyo?

What was once where the busy intersection at Shibuya now is?

Who are the teaching staff at Tokyo University's Archaeology Department? What do they do?

Which has the most interesting history of doing archaeology? Tokyo or Kyoto University?

SAMPLE STATEMENT OF INTENT

A sample statement of intent follows on the next page. Though it should give you an idea of what to write, the statement can definitely be improved. Consider the following questions as you read the statement of intent and think about how the answers to these questions would help you to improve it.

Questions to consider:

- What does the first paragraph attempt to do? Is it successful? Why? Why not?
- In your opinion what works and does not work in the second paragraph? Why? Also, how could the student justify his/her second choice of institution in this paragraph?
- Why is the third paragraph more effective than the second? How would you now go about revising the second paragraph?
- What is the purpose of the final paragraph? How might you improve this paragraph? What could go in the previous paragraph? What is missing at the very end?
- Would you select this student for a place at Osaka University? Why? Why not?

SAMPLE: Statement of Intent for MA University Placement

Name: Joe Smith	Student Number: 05023902
First choice of institution: Osaka University	
Second choice of institution: Kyoto University	
Third choice of institution: Nagasaki University	
<p>Aside from achieving colloquial fluency in Japanese and ensuring that I can read the language with near-native lexical familiarity, I want to spend a year at Osaka University in order to pursue my main academic interests with a view to pursuing a career in documentary-making.</p> <p>My primary academic interest is in the cultural history of Japan, and my MA thesis will focus on the cultural history of swords in Japanese medieval history. Because Osaka is close to the historical heartland of Western Japan I want to use the opportunity to gain a greater acquaintance with the objects of my future studies. My study of history is constantly enthused by visiting the real sites of battlefields, famous meetings, past residences, and so on. For example, as I wish to follow courses in Heian literature in Leiden (in 2011-12), I want to visit, gather basic materials and take photographs at some of the premier cultural sites of Heian and pre-Heian life and culture. These include the palace precincts of Kyoto, several temples and gardens, such as Ryōanji, Ritsurin, and Kōrakuen. In addition, I have contacted Ms. Hata Junko, the Director of Outreach and Education at the National Museum of Kyoto, which holds periodic exhibitions of rare objects. I will also enroll in a course on the history of Japanese metalwork at Osaka University. I believe that Professor Morioka, who runs this course, would also make an excellent supervisor for my MA thesis whilst I am in Japan.</p> <p>I am also fascinated by Japanese cinema, and I have made successful enquiries about visiting film and TV studios in and around Osaka. In addition, I have planned a long weekend excursion to Eastern Japan with a Japanese friend where we intend to photograph sites used by the late director Kurosawa in his three last films. This excursion will provide resources for an ongoing project that focuses on the use of present-day topography and tourist-destination landscapes to create visual epics from Japan's past.</p> <p>I will also enjoy the opportunity of living on a Japanese college campus and experiencing what it feels like to be part of Japanese student life. I wish to build up a serviceable library of dictionaries and basic reference materials for my MA degree. In addition, I enjoy watching movies, and playing football, and so will join both a film club and a football club to make friends.</p>	
Word count:	396/400