Tips for writing an outstanding research statement

At NYU, we normally receive 200-300 applications to our Social Psychology program from prospective students—many of whom have outstanding "objective" credentials (e.g., GRE, GPA, etc). Therefore, we use the research statement to get a sense of each applicant's writing ability, intellectual potential, passion, and fit with the program. The most important thing you can do to increase your chances of admission is to forcefully articulate why you would be a great fit for our social psychology program. Many students make the mistake of writing a biography when we are really looking for is a description of your fit in terms of research experience and interests. A generic or superficial statement is almost never sufficient for admission at NYU.

We are especially interested in applicants who have actually read some of our research, have thought critically about it, and have specific ideas for extending it in a novel direction. I am looking for applicants who outline their research interests, propose interesting questions, and communicate their passion for these issues. It is very easy for us to get excited about students who demonstrate an understanding of our research because it demonstrates a serious of purpose and clarity of thought. A PhD is a major commitment, and we want to see evidence that you know what you are getting into and that you will flourish at NYU.

As you write you statement, you should address the following questions: Why are you pursuing a PhD? What are your core research interests? Why are these issues scientifically or practically important? How have your previous experiences informed these interests and prepared you for your PhD at NYU? Why is NYU (and my lab) well suited for pursuing these interests? Are you particularly keen on working with certain faculty members (we highly favor students who are likely to collaborate with two or more faculty)? Why or why not? What skills do you bring to NYU and which skills do you hope to acquire? Why is NYU a good place to develop these skills? How will these skills help you address your specific research questions?

Statements that answer these questions are truly informative. They tell our faculty why you want to complete you PhD at NYU, the issues you hope to address, the skills you bring, and the skills you hope to acquire. Address these questions clearly and in a compelling fashion will make your application more informative and increase your chances of admission.