

Graduate School Essay Tips

Admissions committees deal with countless stacks of applications: faceless GRE scores and GPAs. The only way for them to differentiate among applicants with similar scores and academic backgrounds is to consult and read the essay/personal statement. Your personal statement reveals a great deal about your ability to write, to determine the purpose of the essay topic, to stick to a specified task, to sell yourself, and to explain why you are a good match to the school and program. Essentially, the essay is your opportunity to talk directly with the admissions committee, to call attention to important parts of your application that might otherwise be overlooked, and to explain any discrepancies or potentially negative aspects of your application. It's your chance to help the admissions committee see you as a person instead of a grade point average and standardized test scores.

The essay that each school requests may differ from school-to-school or program-to program; some may even ask for more than one essay. Before you begin to write, read and reread the essay directions on the application for the school and the specific department to which you are applying. While some programs leave the content of the essay fairly broad, others may place specific content and length restrictions on it. Make sure to have a good idea of the topic that you are being asked to write about.

Whatever the essay asks of you, remember the basic areas of interests that committees are looking for. When evaluating your application, each reader will ultimately have this question in mind: "Why should admit this student to our school?" In order to answer this question, try to do the following:

- Clearly state your short and long term goals. Explain how that particular university can help you meet those goals.
- Describe your areas of research and professional interest. You might indicate how your proposed studies are located within a broad field.
- Give specific reasons why you are interested in a particular field, as well as why you have chosen this particular school to apply to.
- Refer to past experiences, both academic and hands-on, that are relevant to graduate study.
- Articulate the value of the perspective that you will potentially bring to the field of study and the specific department that you are applying to.
- Demonstrate your ability to think and express ideas clearly and effectively.
- Show motivation and capacity to succeed in graduate education.
- Write concisely and try to keep your readers interested. You do not need to write about every award, 'A' paper, and/or pat on the back that you ever received; but rather how you plan to draw upon those experiences to further your education at the graduate level. Remember that these folks are reading many application essays and therefore, you need to be considerate of their needs.
- Offer other information that demonstrates your need and desire to be accepted by the program.

Consider taking notes on what drives you; your hopes, dreams, aspirations, and what you hope to gain from graduate study. In order to assess this, think about things like:

- Hobbies
- Projects that you've completed
- Jobs
- Responsibilities
- Accomplishments in the personal and scholastic arena
- Major life events that have changed you
- Challenges and hurdles you've overcome
- Life events that motivate your education
- People who have influenced you or motivated you
- Traits, work habits, and attitudes that will insure your success your goals

Ask others to read your essay and give you honest and detailed feedback; tell them that it is important to know what areas they find unclear or unnecessary. Don't feel shy about asking for or receiving criticism; remember, the effectiveness of your essay depends on your being able to present yourself in a manner that is attractive to admissions committees. In addition, the Student Success Coordinator is always available to offer suggestions on beginning, revising and completing your application essay.