

Tips for Writing Graduate Admissions Essays

Whether it is a statement of interest, letter of intent, or personal statement, many graduate schools will require some form of written supplement to your application. Below are some tips to help start you off with your Graduate Admissions Essays!

Read the Question Carefully

All graduate schools are looking for certain content in their admissions essays. For the most part they want to know:

- Where did you come from (education and other relevant background information),
- Why do you want to come here (particular research emphasis, reputation of program, unique courses offered)
- What are you going to do after this program (work in a particular field, continue on to PhD)

How they ask the question as well as the specific type of content they are looking for may vary slightly. Some, such as a letter of intent may be looking more for a research focus, while others, such as a personal statement, may want a more personal look at why you are a good fit for the program. Because of this, it is important to read the question carefully and make sure you address all the required information in your essay.

Keep it interesting

Admissions officers read hundreds of essays. Capturing their attention from the very beginning of your essay can help ensure that they read your essay thoroughly, and don't end up skimming over important information. Interesting essays contain relevant, concrete information about the writer. A good tip to help keep it interesting is to write your first draft without "censoring" for a particular reader. Just answer the question as honestly as possible. After your first draft, you can begin to edit for style and content, but writing without censoring yourself for the first draft can help you to create interesting content that best reflects who you are.

Stay focused

Sometimes it can be tempting to provide more information than is necessary, or to provide information that is not directly relevant to the application, particularly when you are writing about personal information. Try to keep your writing focused on answering the questions asked, and only on answering those questions. Make sure every statement you have is helping to build your case or answer one of those questions. If it is not directly related to the topic or does not enhance your reason for attending the program, you should remove it from your essay.

Keep the language appropriate and easy to read

This is not an email to a close friend. Avoid language that is too personal and familiar, as well as language that is too casual (i.e. slang, short forms, "text speak"). Remember that this is a reflection of

your writing ability. On the same note, keep your essays concise. You will have very little space to convey a lot of information. Keeping it concise will also help keep it easy to read and interesting to your reader.

Be specific

Admissions officers know that students generally apply for more than one program. They can tell if you have written a generic essay to send to all the programs you applied for. Put in details which are specific to that program such as specific courses or specific research being done by the faculty.

Also, if you are writing about a personal event that influenced you, being specific can have a much stronger impact than vague statements. For example: “I have had many struggles which have shaped my life” is not as effective as “I was sixteen years old when my father died. While coming to terms with this loss, I had to take on additional responsibilities at home to help my family during this difficult time.” (Just make sure the information is relevant to why you are applying or will help you in some way!)

Allow lots of time

You will want to do multiple revisions of your essay (see below). Once the fall semester of your fourth year starts, application deadlines for graduate schools can sneak up on you! Because of this, allow yourself lots of time to complete the essay. If you have an idea of the programs you would like to apply to, it may even be nice to create your first draft in the summer, so that some of the pressure is off during the fall semester and you can focus more on the fine tuning during your semester.

Also, many professors who agree to be references often request to see a copy of your admissions essay, so they can personalize your reference letter more. Having it completed early can help ensure that your references can get all the information they need to write you a good reference letter before the deadline.

Revise, revise, revise!

You will not write a perfect essay in your first draft. Make sure you give yourself enough time to do at least two revisions after your original draft is written. Do an initial revision on your own to make sure you have answered all the questions asked, and fine tune any language and content at that time. Then have others read it over, and ask them for their feedback. Get feedback on:

- How engaging it is
- What information stands out the most
- What overall impression it leaves on the reader
- Spelling and grammar

Make any edits based on their feedback, and if there is time, seek additional feedback. Getting opinions from different sources such as friends, family, professors and Career Services can help make sure you have an essay that is easy to read and conveys the message you hope for.