

CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Graduate School Application Personal Essay

ADVANTAGES OF SUBMITTING A PERSONAL ESSAY:

If your qualifications make you a borderline student, then your personal essay could make a difference between acceptance and rejection.

Personal statements/essays can reveal your character more clearly than other application materials.

They may provide evidence that you bring something distinctive to the field (i.e. unusual ability, background traits, experience, or a unique way of looking at the world).

You will not be admitted to the field unless you distinguish yourself!

DECIDING WHAT TO WRITE:

Stop and consider what a reader might be looking for; the general directions or other parts of the application may give you some indication. A number of things may be evaluated, including:

- Expectations with regard to the program and career opportunities
- Writing ability
- Major area of interest
- Educational background
- Immediate and long-term goals
- Reasons for pursuing a graduate degree in a particular field and at a particular institution
- Maturity
- Personal uniqueness - what you would add to the diversity of the entering class

Some schools require specific essays, while others provide no direction at all. If faced with having to choose your own topic, here are a few things to keep in mind:

Write about Yourself. Schools want to know about you, your talents and evidence that you will succeed academically and professionally.

Be Specific. Write about events and activities. Often the best essay topic is a description of some incident or activity which led you to your field of study.

Tell a Story. Stories can keep the attention of a tired reader

Emphasize Your Uniqueness. An essay about a problem you solved or an obstacle you overcame is always appropriate. You could also find an interesting way to write about a feature of your personality or what you have learned about yourself and/or your field.

Don't Choose a Topic that Makes You Seem Immature or of Questionable Character.

Avoid Talking about in the Abstract. This can sound like a personal ad or make you seem distant.

Avoid Negatives. A positive, attractive personality is hard to exhibit while dwelling on negatives. Focus on positives. Talk about what you learned, not why your grades were low.

Avoid Clichés. “I want to help people.” “The human body fascinates me.” “This career would be rewarding and challenging.”

HOW TO WRITE:

- Organize and write several drafts
- Have the essay read and critiqued by others
- Polish the grammar and rhetoric
- In the first stages of writing, set down all information as fully as possible
- Outline the points you want to cover and expand on them (this will lead to an organized essay), or write down ideas as they come to you (this may yield a more inspired piece of writing)
- Do not panic if the initial drafts are too long, the information will be pared down and refined during the editing process
- Keep in mind that you want to catch the attention of a bored and exhausted admissions official by writing a forceful first sentence