

## The Graduate / Professional School Essay

The Graduate / Professional School Essay is called Graduate School Admission Essay, Personal Statement, Statement of Purpose, Statement of Interest, Statement of Goals, Autobiographical Statement, Letter of Intent, Letter of Interest, or Personal Narrative. Do not become confused by different terminology. The purpose of the writing is for the school to see you as a unique-individual person who should be admitted to their program, not just a statistic of GPA or test score. Use the personal statement as a time to emphasize who you are, what and why you want to study and what experience you have to make you a successful candidate and asset to their program. The essay should be clear, concise, professional and founded in personal detail. It should show the intellect and the character of you, the author. Try to make reading your statement interesting.

Schools may request you to answer specific questions or the request may be open ended with no guidelines. Some programs may request more than one essay. If topics or prompts are given, be sure you address fully all of the areas requested. Be careful not to repeat, but do expand your answers if there are several different prompts or questions. Having no prompts can be difficult, but remember to focus on who you are and what you have to offer. The committee will be evaluating these points. Above all, be sincere and be yourself.

Your opening paragraph should be specifically targeted to each program. Be sure it reflects your understanding of their program. One generic essay will not usually work for each school. Write your first choice school essay and then tailor it for other programs. You must research each program and faculty to help tailor your essay to the program and convince the admissions committee that you will fit well there. Allow plenty of time to write several essays and have them critiqued.

Be concise and interesting. Remember the committee may be reading hundreds of essays. Do not ramble. Stick to the point and make the essay flow. It is better to have a few points than too many. Back-up your statements of skills and characteristics with examples. Self confidence is good, but delusions of grandeur will turn off a committee. Always be positive. Some areas of graduate study may require an interview. The statement is great preparation for pre-select interviews or a meeting or phone interview with the committee or graduate supervisor. If not, consider the essay a brief personal interview with the admissions committee. Thoroughly know what you have written!

Common points can be:

- Accomplishments
- Significant activities or experiences or people – academic and real world
- Your unique history
- How you learned about this field
- First interest in a field and what you have done since then
- Relevant volunteer and employment experience
- Experiences as a volunteer or traveler influencing your career direction
- Skills, attributes, characteristics and evidence of
- Turning points

Goals

Obstacles

Hobbies

Research and professional interests – the faculty will probably read your statement

Department curriculum structure or general approach to the field that makes you interested in being a student

Avoid lecturing the reader about the profession or career. Although some programs do ask for a clear understanding of the field.

Consider the future as well as the past—tell about what is planned before starting the program

Be specific as you identify events and experiences that exemplify your motivation. Avoid lists of accomplishments or experiences that read like a resume. Steer away from high school accomplishments for graduate school essays. The purpose is to show who you are, not what you have done. Keep in mind that the points about your life that you highlight should be relevant to both your interest in the field of study as well as the concerns of the admissions committee. Try to balance academic, work-related, and personal information in a manner appropriate to your situation, goals, and the application requirements. If you have no experience, make plans to get some experience and state what plans are projected and the time frame.

If you feel compelled to include shortcomings like poor test scores or grades, be sure it does not sound like an excuse. Provide explanations that are reasonably excusable and comprehensive to the academic committee. Incorporate the “change” that has occurred in this area, if applicable.

The essays length may be dictated by the school or not mentioned at all. 500 to a 1000 words are usually standard: one to two pages.

Always allow time to proofread and revise your writing. Do not wait until the night before it is due! Several months’ preparation is best. Have several people to honestly review your essay for structure and flow, grammar and spelling. Errors look unprofessional and careless. Do you get your point across? Does the person reading your essay know why you want to study the subject at the school you are applying to? Do you use concrete experiences as supporting details? Is every sentence crucial to the essay? Do not ramble. Avoid controversial subjects or being cute or funny. What does the essay reveal about your personality? Push the people proofing your essay for criticism---you want to improve your essay. Read the essay as though you are the admissions committee.

Be sure to type in the format suggested. If there are no guidelines, have your name and possible essay title visible on each page. Numbering the pages will be helpful too.

If no essay is required, check to see if one could be included. An essay is such a powerful part of the application; try to include one even if not required.