

Application Essay Or Personal statement



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The Application Essay Or Personal statement

The application essay or personal statement is a standard component of graduate school applications. The requirements for these essays vary from program to program, however some general principles are important to note.

Application essays give you an opportunity to explain aspects of your personal, educational, and professional history that may have led you to pursue an advanced degree at a particular institution. Admissions committees rely heavily on these essays to put a face on impersonal test scores and grade point averages. Therefore, it is important for you to present yourself thoughtfully. Whether you are applying to a top research program in biochemistry, or a policy focused environmental program, your essay should demonstrate your ability to make connections between your education, experience, and the program you have chosen. A challenging aspect of the application essay is making those connections in a relatively small amount of space.

Purpose and Audience

Your aim should be a clear, succinct statement showing that you have a definite sense of what you want to do and enthusiasm for the field of study you have chosen. Before writing anything, consider what your reader might be seeking; the application directions will likely provide some hints. Additionally, you should research the school and department to which you are applying. Your audience for this essay will consist of faculty and staff members of the department to which you are applying, and perhaps, members of the university's graduate school. These readers will often have varying levels of knowledge in your field. Therefore, keep your readers in mind when explaining technical work or research you have completed.

Admissions committees may be trying to evaluate a number of things from your statement, including the following:

- Motivation and commitment to a field of study
- Expectations regarding the program and career opportunities
- Writing ability
- Research and/or work experience
- Educational preparation
- Immediate and long-term goals
- Maturity
- Personal uniqueness – what you would add to the diversity of the entering class

Content And Format

An admission essay or personal statement should be essentially a description of your interest in a discipline, your interest in a school, and your goals. There is no set formula to follow. The following areas are typically addressed in a graduate school essay, but pay attention to the specific content requested by the schools to which you are applying.

Background & Abilities

- Align your personal information with the degree program you wish to enter.
- Highlight your unique skills, abilities, and character traits, focusing on those that correlate with success in graduate school.
- Show a logical transition from your experience in school / work to graduate school. How has that experience cultivated your interest in a particular degree program?
- Feature your relevant experience. Balance content between academic and work-related experience.

Goals & Motivation

- Discuss your motivation for pursuing graduate education. Demonstrate how the degree program can help you achieve the goals you have set for yourself.
- Relate your qualifications, experiences, and skills to your goals and to the school's resources.
- Ensure that your goals are a logical extension of your qualifications, experiences, and abilities.
- State your short- and long-term goals, including proposed areas of research and professional interests.
- Answer the question, "Why this school / program and why now?"

Miscellaneous Tips

- Convey that you know what you want to do and why. Sound enthusiastic about it.
- Be concise. Choose what is most important rather than trying to mention everything.
- Do not ramble on or be self-indulgent in your presentation. Avoid redundancies.
- Avoid unnecessarily large words, trite expressions and clichés.

Quick Tips

- *Less is more.* That is, you have a lot you could say, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you should try to say everything. Be selective. Organize your essay around a unifying theme rather than merely listing your accomplishments.
- *Give good examples and explanations.* Try to avoid making statements that could be cut and pasted out of your essay and into someone else's with little difficulty. One detail is worth a thousand clichés. For example, "I have always wanted to be a genetic counselor because I enjoy helping people," is a sentiment with which almost anyone applying to a genetic counseling program might agree. Make this idea meaningful by giving an example of something that inspired your interest. Explain how and why it had an effect on you. These details show your enthusiasm and dedication far more effectively than just saying that you care about people.
- *Help your reader.* Be sure that you are helping your reader understand how the information you are providing demonstrates your potential for this kind of advanced study.
- *Follow instructions.* Make sure that your essay is responding to the question(s).
- *Cover your bases.* Make sure that you have called attention to your successes and relevant experience and that you have explained discrepancies in your record.
- *Proofread your essay!* Spelling, typographical, and grammatical errors are the written equivalent of having wrinkled clothes and bad breath on a job interview. They immediately suggest a lack of professionalism to a reader who has to make quick judgements about potentially hundreds of candidates. Leave yourself time to proofread and enlist the help of others to make sure that your essay is immaculate.