

# GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ESSAYS

## Preparation

Before applying, understand **why** attending graduate school makes sense to you. To clarify why you want to attend graduate school at this point in your life, try answering questions such as:

- What will this degree enable you to achieve?
- What do you plan to do with your advanced degree?

Be able to express **what** about you and your experiences will help you to succeed in the program:

- Make lists of professors, courses, research projects, ideas, travel, and other experiences that have been important to you, or have influenced your decision to apply to graduate school.
- Think about any volunteer, extracurricular, or paid work experiences, as well as interests, special skills you possess, or honors and awards you have received.
- What have you learned from your experiences? How have you used this knowledge?
- Provide the admissions committee with information that supplements (not repeats) the information in the rest of your application. What important aspects are not clearly reflected in your resume, college transcripts and test scores? For example, you might want to indicate how you hope to benefit from graduate studies, and how you intend to apply and integrate your graduate studies in your career.

## Writing Tips

- Answer the question. Some applications require a general personal statement, others ask you to write on more specific topics. Be sure to tailor your essay to the school's request.
- Keep the essay clear, concise, and to the point. The essay demonstrates your writing ability and communication skills. Engage your readers with an effective introduction and clear structure. Say what you mean directly and avoid using phrases like "I think" or "In my opinion."
- Write your personal story. Set your statement apart by discussing WHAT is important to you, WHY it is important, and HOW you have used your talents and abilities in your life.
- Be specific and give examples. For instance, instead of simply stating that you would make an excellent doctor (lawyer, engineer, etc.), provide reasons and examples. What experiences have you had that encouraged you to enter this field?
- Follow any format guidelines provided by the school, such as length, font, or margin size.
- Proofread! Ask several people to read through your essay, especially faculty in your desired area of study, English professors, career counselors, parents, and friends who will give you honest feedback. Ensure that there are no typos, misspellings, or grammatical errors.

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## Tailoring

Your essay will be different for each application. Know the special features, emphases, or approaches of each program, and reflect these in your essay.

- What are the school's strengths?
- What makes the program a good choice for you?
- How might you contribute to the program?

## Cautions

- Do not include references to your experiences or accomplishments before college, unless there was an extraordinary achievement or trauma that had a significant impact on your current situation.
- Do not mention subjects that are too controversial. Avoid offending the admissions committee.
- Do not be too general. Top schools may receive thousands of applications, and you want yours to stand out. Keep your essay interesting, relevant, and tailored to the school.

## Additional Resources

Websites at many universities contain advice on writing graduate school essays.

### **The Writing Center at RPI**

[www.rpi.edu/dept/lc/writecenter/web/gradapp.html](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/lc/writecenter/web/gradapp.html)

### **UC Berkeley: Graduate School Statement**

<http://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement.stm>

### **UCSD: Application Essays**

<http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/applicationEssays.shtml>

These commercial web sites offer helpful samples and tips on writing graduate school essays. By listing these sites, USD Career Services is not endorsing the additional paid services.

### **Essay Edge**

[www.essayedge.com/](http://www.essayedge.com/)

### **Admissions Essays**

[www.admissionsessays.com](http://www.admissionsessays.com) (click on Writing Tips)

### **All About the Graduate Admissions Essay**

[http://gradschool.about.com/od/essaywriting/All\\_About\\_the\\_Graduate\\_Admissions\\_Essay.htm](http://gradschool.about.com/od/essaywriting/All_About_the_Graduate_Admissions_Essay.htm)

The following books on graduate school essays are available in the USD Career Services Library.

**Graduate Admissions Essays**, by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press)

**Peterson's Perfect Personal Statements**, by Mark Stewart (Thomson Peterson's)