

Grad School Prep

**Navigating the graduate school
application process**



Why go to grad school?

1. You may need the advanced or specialized degree for your profession
2. To increase your marketability and advance your career

When considering grad school, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I determined my long-range career and lifestyle goals?
- Will the degree prepare me for a specific occupation or career field?
- Am I comfortable with living the lifestyle of a student for a few more years?
- Is graduate school worth the financial investment for my own goals?

Since the decision to attend graduate school requires careful planning, start the process early and take advantage of our many resources.

Admission Requirements

Check with the schools you are applying for in order to make sure you meet all of the pre-requisite requirements. Find opportunities to strengthen your application and be a more competitive applicant (For example- Re-take classes, improve test scores, complete volunteer experience, etc.)

Most schools will require the following items:

- Application form and fees (pay attention to application deadlines; they can be different for each school)
- Essay or writing sample (choose your best piece of work from undergrad!)
- Goal statement (also called a personal statement)
- Transcripts from all institutions attended
- Graduate admissions test scores (GRE, MCAT, LSAT etc.)
- Letters of recommendation
- Admissions interview
- Volunteer, observation hours, and related experience

Non-acceptance into grad school does not mean you will never get accepted into a program. If you are denied acceptance, follow up with programs that you did not get into; ask them why you were not accepted and how you can improve your application for the next admission cycle.

Selecting a Graduate Program

What to look for:

Programs Offered—Do they have what you want to study? Research the program you are interested in pursuing. Look at what the faculty at the institution are researching. Does any of their research align with your interests?

Support—Does the school you're interested in provide the necessary resources for your area of interest? Do they offer fellowships or assistantships for financial support?

Size and Location—Consider where you want to live for the next two to five years. In the city? Big university? Small private institution?

Accreditation and Credentials—Do your research! This is important in some professions, crucial in others like medicine and law.



GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS TESTS



GRE- GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION INCLUDES:

Seven part "general test" that tests you on verbal, quantitative, and analytical abilities as they measure your potential success on a graduate level. Fourteen part "subject test" that is designed to measure your knowledge of subject matter related to a specific field
www.ets.org/gre



GMAT - GRADUATE MANAGEMENT ADMISSION TEST ASSESSES:

The qualifications of applicants to predict your academic performance in the first year of graduate management school. There are 9 timed sections and two 3 minute essays to write.
www.gmat.org



LSAT - LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST MEASURES:

Critical reading, analytical reasoning, logical reasoning, and persuasive writing skills – key skills needed for success in law school. Many law schools require that the LSAT be taken by December, nine months before law school begins. The Law School Admissions Council recommends taking the test earlier - 15 months to a year before law school begins.
www.lsac.org



MCAT - MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST TESTS:

A wide range of skills, including problem solving, critical thinking, and writing. The aspiring student's knowledge of science concepts and principles that are prerequisites to the study of medicine. Scores are given in verbal reasoning, physical sciences, a writing sample, and biological sciences. Almost all U.S. medical schools require an MCAT before admission.
www.aamc.org

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT



The personal statement provides an opportunity to describe your experiences and goals to make you stand out to an admissions committee.

The basics:

- 1 – 2 pages
- Well organized and concisely written essay with a thesis statement.
- Demonstrates your strong writing skills.
- Uses strong, concrete examples from your various life experiences.
- Showcases your passion and interests.
- Draws the reader in from the very start—get their attention!

Work on answering some of the following questions in your personal statement:

1. What makes you unique? How can you play up your experiences and/or character traits to set you apart from your peers?
2. Why are you interested in this field? What skills or personal characteristics do you possess that will enable you to be successful in the field?
3. What types of experiences led to your interest (classes? personal experience? work? a particularly compelling professor?), and how has your desire to follow this career path changed and grown over time?
4. Why are you drawn to each particular school? What do you know about the program to which you're applying? Describe your excitement for the opportunities that the school provides and the faculty with whom you will be working. Do your research on the school in which you are applying!
5. What are your long-term career goals? How can graduate education help you meet these goals?
6. What have you achieved, academically, personally, and professionally, that demonstrates that you will be a good candidate for the program to which you're applying?
7. Have you overcome any particular obstacles (physical, social, economic, or familial) to get where you are today?

Overall, how can you persuade the admissions committee to choose you? What makes you a stronger applicant than the others?

What should you avoid?

- Grammatical and spelling errors (you must proofread!)
- Writing an autobiography/life story
- Distasteful or potentially offensive humor
- Weak statements or examples while describing your experiences
- Information that is not true
- Attempts to impress the reader with vocabulary
- Excuses for poor GPA or test scores
- Avoid controversial issues, such as religion or politics
- Don't add references to activities, awards, or experiences in high school or earlier- keep it current!
- Avoid clichés and focus on the qualities and characteristics that make you a unique applicant

EXAMPLE PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Statement #1 Electrical Engineering

My interest in science dates back to my years in high school, where I excelled in physics, chemistry, and math. When I was a senior, I took a first-year calculus course at a local college (such an advanced-level class was not available in high school) and earned an A. It seemed only logical that I pursue a career in electrical engineering.

When I began my undergraduate career, I had the opportunity to be exposed to the full range of engineering courses, all of which tended to reinforce and solidify my intense interest in engineering. I've also had the opportunity to study a number of subjects in the humanities and they have been both enjoyable and enlightening, providing me with a new and different perspective on the world in which we live.

In the realm of engineering, I have developed a special interest in the field of laser technology and have even been taking a graduate course in quantum electronics. Among the 25 or so students in the course, I am the sole undergraduate. Another particular interest of mine is electromagnetics, and last summer, when I was a technical assistant at a world-famous local lab, I learned about its many practical applications, especially in relation to microstrip and antenna design. Management at this lab was sufficiently impressed with my work to ask that I return when I graduate. Of course, my plans following completion of my current studies are to move directly into graduate work toward my master's in science. After I earn my master's degree, I intend to start work on my Ph.D. in electrical engineering. Later I would like to work in the area of research and development for private industry. It is in R & D that I believe I can make the greatest contribution, utilizing my theoretical background and creativity as a scientist.

I am highly aware of the superb reputation of your school, and my conversations with several of your alumni have served to deepen my interest in attending. I know that, in addition to your excellent faculty, your computer facilities are among the best in the state. I hope you will give me the privilege of continuing my studies at your fine institution. (Stelzer pp. 38-39)

EXAMPLE PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Statement #2 English and American Literature

Having majored in literary studies (world literature) as an undergraduate, I would now like to concentrate on English and American literature.

I am especially interested in nineteenth-century literature, women's literature, Anglo-Saxon poetry, and folklore and folk literature. My personal literary projects have involved some combination of these subjects. For the oral section of my comprehensive exams, I specialized in nineteenth century novels by and about women. The relationship between "high" and folk literature became the subject for my honors essay, which examined Toni Morrison's use of classical, biblical, African, and Afro-American folk tradition in her novel. I plan to work further on this essay, treating Morrison's other novels and perhaps preparing a paper suitable for publication.

In my studies toward a doctoral degree, I hope to examine more closely the relationship between high and folk literature. My junior year and private studies of Anglo-Saxon language and literature have caused me to consider the question of where the divisions between folklore, folk literature, and high literature lie. Should I attend your school, I would like to resume my studies of Anglo-Saxon poetry, with special attention to its folk elements.

Writing poetry also figures prominently in my academic and professional goals. I have just begun submitting to the smaller journals with some success and am gradually building a working manuscript for a collection. The dominant theme of this collection relies on poems that draw from classical, biblical, and folk traditions, as well as everyday experience, in order to celebrate the process of giving and taking life, whether literal or figurative. My poetry draws from and influences my academic studies. Much of what I read and study finds a place in my creative work as subject. At the same time, I study the art of literature by taking part in the creative process, experimenting with the tools used by other authors in the past.

In terms of a career, I see myself teaching literature, writing criticism, and going into editing or publishing poetry. Doctoral studies would be valuable to me in several ways. First, your teaching assistantship program would provide me with the practical teaching experience I am eager to acquire. Further, earning a Ph.D. in English and American literature would advance my other two career goals by adding to my skills, both critical and creative, in working with language. Ultimately, however, I see the Ph.D. as an end in itself, as well as a professional stepping-stone; I enjoy studying literature for its own sake and would like to continue my studies on the level demanded by the Ph.D. program. (Stelzer pp. 40-41)