

# THE PERSONAL ESSAY FOR ADMISSION TO GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

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## GENERAL TIPS

- **Begin early** and leave a generous amount of time (a month) for editing.
- **Read any instructions or guidelines very carefully.** Note the required length and content requirements or suggestions. Remember that there are different kinds of essays that you might write. Sometimes you are asked to answer specific questions; sometimes you are given guidelines about the content. If not, ask yourself: what would the committee want to know about you?
- Target your essay to the program or academic institution to which you are applying. This means you must **research the program, department or school.** Begin by checking the university or department website.
- **Consider your audience** – audience differs depending on department or program. Professional degrees have a different audience than master's or doctoral programs.
- Enlist the help of your friends, family, colleagues, professors – get as **much feedback** as possible on your essay from a variety of people.
- Your grammar, spelling, writing style and typing must be absolutely **perfect.** Consult a good writing/grammar handbook such as *Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White.

## CONTENT OF THE ESSAY

### INCLUDE:

- Your academic **achievements.** Match your achievements with the application requirements and relate them to the program to which you are applying.
- Personal **characteristics** or attributes *as they are related to the program or field or career.* For each attribute, make sure that you prove or demonstrate that you have it – use examples.
- Your **skills** as they relate to the program. Demonstrate skills you have that would be useful to the field of study or to the profession with specific, pertinent examples.
- Explanations for poor grades, poor scores, or dramatic changes in your grades.

### EXCLUDE:

- Unrelated hobbies.
- Personal information or details about your personal life that are not requested.
- Vague or ill-defined reasons for wanting to undertake graduate studies (“I want to help people.”)
- What you did in high school.

## RESOURCES

### ON WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

Asher, Donald. *Graduate Admissions Essays: What Works, What Doesn't and Why*. 2000.

Mentioned on writing Centre websites. Offers special sections on medical, law and business schools, as well as master's, doctoral and postdoctoral programs.

Stelzer, Richard. *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School*. 1997.

Includes tips from admissions officers at business schools, law schools and medical schools in the United States.

Purdue University Online Writing Lab. “Writing the Personal Statement.” Online Writing Lab. [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p\\_perstate.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html)

Provides examples of successful statements as well as some good tips.

Procter, Margaret. “Effective Admissions Letters.” Writing at the University of Toronto. <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/admiss.html>

Includes a bibliography.

### ON GRADUATE SCHOOL:

Mumby, David Gerald. *Graduate School: Winning Strategies for Getting In With or Without Excellent Grades*. Huston, P.Q.: Proto Press, c. 1997.

Goldsmith, John A. *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career: A Portable Mentor for Scholars from Graduate School Through Tenure*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, c. 2001.

Rossmann, Mark H. *Negotiating Graduate School: A Guide for Graduate Students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, c. 2002.