

## Graduate School: Writing an Admissions Essay

### Self-Assessment Questions

Before you start writing, organize your thoughts, goals and experiences by answering the following questions.

1. What is the most unusual thing about you? What makes you unique?
2. Who and what are intellectual influences to you?
  - Which writers, articles or books in your field of study have affected you?
  - Who are your favorite college professors and why?
  - What is the best paper, exam or lab you wrote in your major and why?
  - What is the most important concept you have learned in college?
3. Define career goals as specifically as possible.
  - What are your plans?
  - How will graduate education facilitate those plans?
  - What is your five-year goal? Ten-year goal?
4. What is the background to choosing said goal?
  - When and why did your interest in the field begin?
  - What work/volunteer experiences influenced your choice?
  - How has family affected your choice?
5. How have you prepared yourself to succeed in graduate school?
6. What personal attributes make you likely to succeed in the profession you have chosen?
7. Discuss research you've been involved in.
  - What were the outcomes?
  - What are the ramifications of the research?
8. Is there any other information relevant to your career goals, educational plans, interest in field of study, etc.?

Adapted from: *Graduate Admission Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice*, Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press, 2000.

### Tips on Writing Your Essay

#### Basic Tips

- Essay should be typed, not handwritten, and error free.
- Read the questions! Make sure you respond to the questions asked. Follow instructions regarding length of essay. If there is no limit, two pages double-spaced is a good guideline.
- Essays range from a very general, comprehensive personal statement to very specific questions.
- Use a strong opening sentence or paragraph. Try to grab the reader's attention.

- Be clear and concise. Organize your essay effectively.

#### Content Tips

- Include a combination of personal and academic information.
- Discuss the history of your interest and your goals for obtaining the graduate degree.
- When talking about yourself, use examples rather than just stating facts.
- Do not simply repeat information, such as extracurricular activities, found elsewhere in your application. Go beyond the obvious and indicate how these activities have affected you or your choice of career.
- Substantiate your preparation and ability to perform. Be as specific about your career goals as possible. Emphasize your passion for the field!
- Indicate some knowledge of the program to which you are applying. The more specific the better.
- Be yourself! Don't say what you THINK the admissions committee wants to hear.
- Be positive and enthusiastic. Help the admission committee learn who you are beyond the "numbers."
- Avoid controversial topics such as politics and religion. Don't criticize the profession that you plan to join. Avoid clichés, like "I want to be a doctor because I'm good at science and I like to help people."
- The statement can include some explanation of poor grades or test scores.

#### Before you mail it in

- Ask yourself and others if your essay is relevant, interesting and memorable.
- Always have someone proofread your essay – particularly a professor or someone familiar with admission essays.
- Don't send the same essay to multiple schools. Never send an essay to one school with the name of ANOTHER school in the text!

#### Resources

There are several books and numerous websites that offer general information about writing a personal statement as well as examples of graduate admission essays. A few include:

- Application Essay Writing 101 at <http://info.gradschools.com/>
- Graduate Admission Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice, Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press, 2000.
- How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School, Richard Stelzer, Petersons, 1997.