THE PERSONAL ESSAY FOR ADMISSION TO GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

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:


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


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](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/admiss.html)

Includes a bibliography.

ON GRADUATE SCHOOL:


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