HOW TO WRITE
YOUR GRAD
SCHOOL
PERSONAL
STATEMENT

Remember when you sat down to write your undergrad application essays? It was your chance to show colleges the real you—and the world was your oyster! You could talk about your favorite book character, a beloved hobby, or a cause near to your heart.

Now you're ready to apply to grad schools, with another application essay (or 10) to write. Like so much of the application process, grad school essays are similar to undergrad…but not quite the same. You need to take a more strategic approach. Here's how.

BY JESSICA TOMER

The grad school application essay—a letter of intent, personal statement, statement of purpose, etc.—is your chance to breathe some life and personality into your application. But unlike your undergrad essay, where you might've offered a quippy story, your grad school application essay should be more focused on your academic and professional goals, and why grad school is essential to achieving them. Oh, and it should also give the admission committee a good sense of who you are and what you value at the same time. (No big deal, right?)

All that being said, a lot of the advice that helped you write your undergrad essay still applies: tell a unique story, use vivid examples, be genuine, and, perhaps most importantly, explain why you'd be an asset to the program—and why the program would be an asset to you.

Essay requirements will vary from school to school, but you will likely be asked to write 250–750 words. Common graduate application essay prompts include the following:
• Describe a situation where you overcame adversity/exhibited leadership/learned from failure/experienced an ethical dilemma.
• Why do you need this degree at this juncture in your life?

What are your short- and long-term career goals?
What are you most proud of?
And the big one: why this school?

Regardless of the prompt you choose, the graduate admission committee should come away from your application essay knowing these three things:
• What you want to study in grad school
• Why you want to study it
• Why their institution is the best place for you

Dedicate a paragraph to each one of those ideas, add an attention-grabbing opener and a tidy conclusion, and you're almost there! The following best practices will take you the rest of the way to a winning grad school application essay.

Be specific
Stay focused on your academic field and use specific, discrete examples. Was there a clear moment when you knew you had found your calling? Did a particular class assignment, volunteer experience, or work project solidify your interest? How will grad school help you achieve your goals? (Turn the page for a helpful essay example!)

Demonstrate passion
You're trying to give the graduate
GRADUATE LETTER OF INTENT: A Real-World Example

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Danielle completed her master's in 2016. Her studies in Instructional Design were heavily influenced by one of her life's great passions: Girl Scouts. In fact, while in the midst of earning her graduate degree, she accepted an offer to join the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts full time as their Associate Director of Volunteer Support—a role that distinctly benefits from her graduate studies.

I wish to pursue graduate study to build a stronger foundation in a skill set I love. I have been using Instructional Design in my volunteer role with Girl Scouts as a Council Facilitator for nearly four years. However, I am only mimicking the best practices set forth by the organization. Working toward a graduate degree in Instructional Design will give me the background knowledge to answer the "why" of creating and delivering adult trainings. I am also interested in UMass Boston's program specifically because of the strong media and technology focus. Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts (GSEM) volunteers would benefit from greater variety and flexibility in our training offerings, and I would like to help bring that to them. One key area that I would like to work on is creating and delivering more online webinars or hybrid trainings, which would meet the growing demand for more diverse and accessible content.

Aside from my volunteer interests, I believe that an MEd in instructional Design will also help me in my current job. I work full time for a small independent financial research company. In addition to research reports, we offer daylong training sessions to our clients in our proprietary analysis methodology. My company's account management team has expressed interest in modifying some of our core training sessions into an online format. With the skills and knowledge I will acquire through this program, I will be able to help my company expand and diversify our training business line while reducing our capacity constraints.

However, my passion for adult learning truly blossomed through my work with GSEM. As a lifelong Girl Scout, I knew I wanted to stay involved after I graduated from Northeastern University. When I was the President of Campus Girl Scouts and a troop leader, I became involved as a Council Facilitator because I knew each adult I got excited about and prepared to volunteer with Girl Scouts could reach five or 10 more girls.

I remember the day I realized I truly loved this work. After a particularly long day in my office reading reports, I had to deliver a three-hour course on leadership essentials. As I took the subway across town to the training location, all I could think about was how I'd rather be doing anything else. But after I got there and the attendees filed in, I could feel my energy rising. Sharing my knowledge of Girl Scouts with them and watching their enthusiasm to help their girls recharge me. I left the training with 10 times more energy than when I started. I'm looking forward to following this passion and developing a more robust understanding of how adults learn and what makes the content "sticky" so it stays with them when they go back to their girls.

This year I was also selected for a national-level Girl Scout committee, Girl Scouts University Leadership Cadre. The Cadre is comprised of some of the most talented Girl Scout facilitators nationwide and charged with creating personal, professional, and career development learning opportunities for Girl Scouts' staff and volunteers across the United States, especially online learning assets. We recently had a weeklong conference where I was able to take some video production and storytelling for webinar sessions that whet my appetite for more learning in this field.

When I chose my undergraduate major, I picked journalism because it was practical. Now that I have more life and career experience, I am ready to go back to school for something else, something I love. I have a passion for learning and sharing that learning with others, as I've demonstrated by volunteering my time doing it. There's nothing more rewarding than helping someone have an "aha" moment or rekindle a lost spark. I know in my heart that adult training and development is my calling because nothing makes me happier than helping others get excited about learning.

make doubly sure you’ve answered it fully and accurately. Then have other people read your essay to check for these things too. Undergrad professors or mentors are great for this, but you can also ask trusted friends. And don’t forget about any career, writing, and/or tutoring centers at your undergraduate institution; they may be able to review your essay and application, and their services are often available long after you graduate.

Final tips
For a truly polished graduate essay, remember the little things too, like making sure your files have easily identifiable names. And it might go without saying, but make sure you follow the directions! If the word limit is 600, don’t send in 750. And last but never least: don’t forget that the essay is about you! Any examples or experiences you cite should relate back to you and why you want to go to grad school.

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