

Graduate School Application Essays

1. Prepare for writing by reflecting deeply and thoroughly on all aspects of your life. You want your essay to differentiate you from all other candidates.
2. Carefully study the question asked and answer it precisely. Stay within the length requirement.
3. Aim both to tell a good story and to explain it. You want your audience to know you as both unique (an individual) and thoughtful.
4. Support any claim with specific evidence. Professional writers use the phrase, “Show, don’t tell,” meaning, “*Show an example* of being intellectually curious; don’t simply say that you *are*.”
5. Don’t second guess the selection committee and try to give them what you think they want to hear. They can sniff out insincerity.
6. Be honest so you come across as uniquely you.
7. At the same time, carefully select what goes into your essay. Select what aspects of your Self to reveal and highlight. Select a balance of the personal and the analytical. Select the words you use for both accuracy and appropriate tone.
8. Avoid controversial topics, clichés, and the distant past. Avoid giving offense.
9. Be positive and future oriented. Show them you know their program and their school and that you’re the kind of person they want to have as an alum.
10. Put information in the statement that is not available in other parts of your application.
11. Be clear, concise, and grammatically correct. Your readers are looking at hundreds of these essays and would relish the opportunity to toss one out because it is incoherent, illogical, or in any way insulting.
12. Give yourself weeks and weeks to work on this. Compose it and then revise it a dozen times. Ask other people to read it; show them this list and ask them to judge how effectively you have met these criteria. Finally, proofread and edit the essay scrupulously.