Tips and Tricks for Grad School Applications

Do’s and Don’ts

* DO remember that a grad application- especially with PhDs programs- is basically an introduction letter to the field
  + You have to be careful about what you say, and you want to make sure to explain how you are going to further the field
  + DO NOT submit a ½ baked application… could look bad if they by chance remember you
* Start applying/looking into app way ahead of time (4 months at least)
* Create a list of schools
  + Don’t choose schools based on name
  + Do evaluate each school seriously
    - Who’s the director?
    - Funding?
    - Active fieldwork?
    - Open projects?
  + Choose a school that would be best progression for your career (advisor in your subject)
  + Be aware that US v European schools VERY different
  + Make sure it’s a list FOR YOU
    - Someone’s choice in school is always personal
* IF YOU Wouldn’t READILY ACCEPT THE OFFER… DON’T APPLY
  + Grad school apps can be around $100 a pop…. Don’t go picking schools willy nilly
  + Better to take a year off than to apply to a program that doesn’t usually lead to a job
* How do I know what I am interested in?
  + What specific theories or readings did you enjoy?
  + Check authors/scholars you enjoyed
  + Look into scholars work and see which school they work out
* What specific things do you want from a specific program?
  + Each program has edges that can give you different advantages
* Don’t pick a place without funding
* Make sure you have more than one specialist that you want to work with
  + Think… lots of scholars move schools a lot… if you pick a school off of one specialist you may get stuck there without an ideal advisor/someone in your niche
* DON’T say that you only want to go to that school to work with only one of their professors… make you look narrow
  + Don’t pigeon hole yourself into your apps with one small microscopic topic
* Make sure your app shows depth
  + The more diverse your interests, the more jobs you can get
* DO avoid websites that helps with grad applications …. You don’t want to sound like an undergrad

Should you reach out to the School beforehand?

* It can’t hurt you… but prob not going to really give you any favors in topic program
  + Unless you have a specific question for them… than no
  + Remember PROFESSORS ARE BUSY PEOPLE WITH LIVES TOO
  + It can be risky… make sure you don’t sound stuck up/wasting their time

CV

* A CV gives specifics of your experience so that people in your field will appreciate your specialness to your research, publications, etc.
* CV is much more complex than a resume… CV has to be angled to your specific field
  + more comprehensive statement of your educational background, teaching, and research experience
* include: heading, education, relevant experience, publications, presentations
* can include things canceled this summer due to covid
  + ‘accepted but program canceled due to covid 19’ or something along those lines
* need to have sort of a ‘balance’ between your masters and undergrad (if your applying to PhD’s)
  + this balance is going to differ per app… pick what’s right for the school
* provide all info that is necessary for academic
* shows how broad your experience is
  + don’t overplay your experience if it’s not there… than explain gaps in Statement… remember there is an interview, many people in the past have been caught lying… most likely you’re not going to be the one who gets away with it
* have your CV throughout checked by several people
* this is an intro/supplement to your personal statement/statement of purpose
* recommenders may refer to things on your CV that you didn’t mention…. Make sure to send them before they write the letter
* eliminate irrelevant things
* list
  + scholarships you won
  + degrees
  + [publications
  + Extra circulars
  + Something that shows commitment to the field
  + Foreign/modern languages
    - Reading and speaking
    - Can pump it up a little … but not too far they will call you out HARD
    - Boast but don’t go too far
    - Very safe if you just list the semesters of languages you took in colleges
  + Professional orgs you have joined

Personal Statement Versus Statement of Purpose

* very carefully check your specific application and see if they ask for a statement of purpose v personal statement
  + also check specific word count and if the application directly asks you to answer any questions
* in both cases, you want to convince the admin committee that you are a good fit and will be successful IN THE SPECIFIC PROGRAM

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Personal Statement | Statement of Purpose |
| -who you are  -highlights:  🡪 personal motivations for applying  🡪 major accomplishments and faced challenges   1. personal motivations for applying 2. how you developed your research 3. relevant experiences or challenges | -about what you want to do  -showcases:  🡪 your academic strengths  🡪 background  🡪 career goals  🡪 research interests  🡪 how your git with the program   1. academic and professional background 2. skills 3. accomplishments 4. research interests 5. academic career/goals 6. what about this program is right for you |
| Length: varies 1-3 pages | Length: varies 1-3 pages |

Writing A Personal Statement

* EVERY- yes, EVERY- WORD COUNTS… you have min 500 max usually 1,000 words to impress them… make sure you have 5-9 people proof read… many times this is the determining factor in your app for schools
  + 1-2 pages they ask for generally
  + If they ask for 2… always write more than q
* This goes beyond your CV, it’s a convicting argument that the program is the best fit for you
* Pretty expected way is discussing yourself… not just a character letter
* Focus on your professional past and future
* Show about your progression
  + Why are you applying to that program?
  + What are you excite to learn?
* let’s an academic instituting know more about you and your career and academic goals
* highlights why you are the right fit for your program
* start with picking the purpose of your personal statement
  + emphasize the specifics of your field
  + specific course/project/studies you want to peruse at that school
  + how does X school help you contribute to the field in the future?
    - Remember, they are investing in YOU just as much as your investing in them…. They want to make sure you have what it takes to contribute to the field
  + Discuss relevant academic accomplishments… like your CV… no high school BS
* Research your target institutions
  + Do this BEFORE you start writing your statement
  + Look up professors in the program you want to work with/whose research interests align with yours
    - Current research projects, past research projects, read some of their publications
    - This takes A LOT of time so be prepared
  + Answer questions in your notes like:
    - 1. How will this program directly impact my future?
    - What us my ultimate career goal>
    - Where do I see myself in 5 years?
    - What ate the steps I need to take in order to reach my ultimate goal?
    - What are other goals I hope to accomplish along the way?
* Goals are ultimately the focus of any personal statement
  + questions above help to prompt you on how to think about them
* THINK: why should you be chosen?
  + What sets you apart?
  + Ask yourself questions like:
    - What personal qualities make you a vulnerable asset?
    - What experiences have shaped your present character?
    - What are your proudest accomplishments?
    - Was there any turning point?
    - Why would you choose YOURSELF over any other candidate?
* List your formal achievements include things like:
  + Academic certifications/ certificates
  + Scholarships, fellowships, grants
  + Awards and honors
  + Workplace promotion
  + Speaking @ conference
  + Published works
* Outline how you got to this decision/point in your career:
  + What left you to develop your current career or academic interests
  + Ask yourself:
    - When did you become interested in \_\_\_?
    - What do you love most?
    - Why Is your field important?
    - What are crucial experiences in the field?
    - Have you given up any other dreams or expectations to chase this?
* Describe your challenges
* Emphasize what you’ve done and what you’re going to do
  + Each app is different for each person
  + Shows instead of tells
    - Be as explicit as possible
    - Tell them about what you’re doing
* Talk about the scholar you ended up being (if interdisplinary program…. Make sure you want that)
* Be upfront and honest about what type of learner you are
  + Never pretend that there are no holes in your CV
  + Be upfront, gives you more credit… ‘I started in the field late that’s why I am missing X’….
* REMEMBER you're trying to appeal to a committee: make sure to NOT leave only one faculty member out
  + Working with all of them in the future
* be open about what you want to learn about
  + you don’t know the politics among the faculty members, so be careful (don’t just show interest in one specific track… say things you like about the whole program)
* communicate that you understand what grad school is and that you can handle it
  + basically, your applying to a professional program to be a junior college
  + the faculty is going to think if they want to work with you
  + do you have the tools to handle?
    - Demonstrate your no longer just an undergrad
    - Statements like ‘when I was 5 my mom read me mythology, and that’s why I want to be an archeologist’… not good, sounds like an undergrad app
* Talk about how you matured through your seminars/classes… focus on the classes that really make a difference
  + Remember, they have your transcript
  + Choose classes that when they interview you, you can talk about and sound excited about
  + Not just quoting your CV
* Outline
  + Generally, you only have 500 words
  + Prioritize the purpose of your statement
  + Make sure to answer any questions if the uni has asked specific questions
  + 1. About the degree … why you chose this degree
  + 2. Work experiences, career plans, achievements
  + 3. Extra curriculars
  + Intro
    - Which field? Which program?
  + Paragraph 2+3
    - Trying to infinity yourself, talk about yourself and your goals
  + Conclusion
    - Explain who this program
    - Which faculty members

Writing a Statement of Purpose

* consider your future goals
  + Clearly lay out the ambitions you have and explain how these relate to the field you want to enter and the program your applying to
    - What will this grad program do for you professionally/academically?
  + Make sure you explain this program IN PARTICULAR will help you
    - What does this program emphasize?
    - How will this emphasis help you onto your professional world?
* Explain why you’re a match
  + Uni’s want their stud4nts to fit/match up with professors’ prospective fields and the whole program
  + Things that make you ‘fit’
    - Prof whose research area and expertise align with your research interest, skills, and or background
    - Academic focus of the program/how this matches your future goals
    - Ex: if a Dr there could advice your dissertation
* Emphasize your accomplishments
  + Talk about your relevant academic accomplishments
  + Don’t just repeat your CV…. Be extremely specific
    - What have you done
      * How this achievment has influenced your decision to get a grad degree in the field
    - What are you going to do?
* How to structure
  + ‘hook’- attention grabbing, explains why you are motivated to peruse that particular field
  + Your experience in the riled (relevant)
    - Thesis or research work
    - Internships
    - Publications
    - Presentations
  + Section that specifically discusses what you want to study
    - Be super specific
    - Make sure the program has it avalible
    - This is the section that explains why the school your applying to is the right place to go/study in the field
  + Discussion on your future. Where will you be after you graduate?
  + Pay attention make sure to answer any specific questions asked
* Drafting your statement
  + Wow them with your knowledge on the field
    - Can include questions
    - ‘the question I keep turning to in my research is….’
    - Describe contempt theories/books that inspire your research
  + Focus on showing, not telling
  + Name who you want to work with
  + Explain any haps or academic issues
    - Gap in languages, gap year, etc.
  + Toot your own horn
    - No time to be modest
  + Be concise

Editing either Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose

* Have as many people read as possible
  + Don’t be afraid to ask your current professors to check
    - But before have several fam members check so you’re not wasting their time with spelling errors
* Have around 5-9 people rechecked

Writing Samples

* Always send your best stuff
* Sometimes you don’t need to submit a paper specifically from your field
* Make sure to check the word limit
* Make sure to recheck your bib and paper
* If you don’t have a paper that fits, you can always rewrite an old paper and readjust it so that it includes more methodology than showing data
  + How to write a methodology (link)
    - <https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/methodology/>

Choice in Recommenders

* Usually applications take 2-3
* 1 main one: your mentor
  + Other two don’t have to know you as well
* The idea:
  + They have known you for a while
  + Took classes with them
  + People that can talk about what your work as a scholar can look like
* Have to be strategic
* The other 2:
  + May come from different fields
  + Sometimes its ok 4 the 3rd person to not know you well enough if they have a prominent name in the field
  + Remember, the more niche your subject area is… the more likely it is that someone will know who your recommender is (personally and or professionally)
* In American grad schools, the rec letters are expected to be 100% positive
* The letters matter
  + If a prof seems hesitant when you ask them for a letter of rec, then find a diff person
    - That Dr may be too busy to write you a good one/commit him or herself to fully devote themselves to the letter
  + Not all your letters will have the same clout
  + An assistant prof may not have as much pull
  + BUT make sure to balance… need at least one person who knows you really well
* If your letter writer is well known… program most likely knows them
* In the letters, they are looking to see if your teachers will describe you as someone who will be a good teacher down the line
  + Qualities and commitment