

Graduate School

How to write a graduate admission essay (also known as a personal statement)



Recommended reading: *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher

WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

- ▶ Communication style/writing ability
- ▶ Future plans after grad school
- ▶ Research area(s) of interest
- ▶ Ability to organize an essay
- ▶ Ability to follow directions (essay length, answering the question)

THE 4-5 PARAGRAPH ESSAY

- ▶ Length may be decided by number of words, 4-5 paragraphs, or 2-3 pages.
- ▶ It is usually recommended that you write your letter in the 1st person. (Using “I” and “my.”)

1 Introduction

- a Attention-getting first 1-2 sentences
- b Explain what you will talk about in essay
 - i Past
 - ii Present
 - iii Future

2 The Past

- a What got you interested in physics (or, your topic area)
- b Background/why graduate school/why this program

3 The Present

- a Experiences in college
- b Grades, research, clubs, jobs... (things that expanded your interest)
- c Your academic record
- d Personal characteristics you have that will help you succeed in graduate school

4 Future

- a Why this graduate school (you will likely apply to more than one graduate school—explain why you chose to apply to this school—what are the positive attributes the school has that caused you to apply)?
- b What you want to research/do in the future? How will this graduate program prepare you?

5 Conclusion

- a Summarize your essay
- b Restate interest in specific school

APPLICATION TIPS

- ▶ Visit the graduate school’s website to make sure you meet the minimum qualifications for the program
- ▶ Contact the university to talk with a current student in the program to answer your specific questions
- ▶ Make yourself familiar with the school and the work of their faculty
- ▶ Give your references 6 weeks notice to prepare your recommendation letters
- ▶ Have a trusted faculty member and Career Development Center staff review your letter of application
- ▶ Submit your application 30 days before the deadline