

Foster Care to Academic Success

Tips on the Graduate School Application Process

Writing the Personal Statement

Personal statements can be really awkward things to write. The central challenge is how to shape your accomplishments to fit a specific program. Admission committees reading applications want to know you will be a success in their program. The first step in showing a committee that is doing your research. Know what kind of students are admitted into the program, know the strengths of particular professors, and of the subjects taught within that area and university.

One concern that many applicants have with the personal statement is how to separate their accomplishments from the other people that are applying. It's important to remember that you can't worry about other applicants. What you can control is your own accomplishments and the quality of the writing that you use to talk about them. A standard technique for starting a personal statement is a first paragraph that describes a particular scene. The scene can describe you in an internship doing work or accomplishing something that is relevant to the chosen field of your graduate program. In addition, the scene can operate as a way of shifting to paragraphs that discuss your accomplishments.

The middle paragraphs in a personal statement discuss carefully chosen accomplishments that address why you are a good fit for the program. An important thing to remember is not to put everything into the statement. Selection is essential. In the conclusion of the personal statement, you leave your readers with a clear sense of what your narrative revealed about you. Now you've answered without a doubt the question of how you will be a success in this program.

Four Easy Steps

1. Research the program
2. Decide what particular parts of your experience should be described
3. Just write. Get a first draft down. It won't be perfect, but you can revise it later.
4. Focus your revisions on a beginning that pulls the reader in and a conclusion that ties your themes together.

Letters of Recommendation

When asking professors, supervisors, or leaders in the community for letters of recommendation it is essential to not wait until the last minute. The people you ask will be

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annoyed if you do this and the quality of your letter may deteriorate as a result. Plan ahead! Two to four weeks gives someone enough time to write a letter, while also not forgetting about it. It's also okay to send a reminder to your writers a week or so before the deadline you've given.

Another important factor is to really know your recommenders. This will result in better letters. In addition, your knowledge of particular people writing for you can influence the time frame you give. For example, your favorite professor will write a great letter for you, but you know they do everything at the last possible minute. It's okay to give them a deadline that will still allow you to get the application in on time without any last minute anxiety.

In some cases, recommenders may give you a copy of the letter and allow you to make changes to it. This shows a level of trust within a relationship. It's also a good idea to always let the person who wrote the original letter know what changes you made. Don't worry if you don't get to see the letter before it is submitted. You can trust that your writer produced an excellent letter.

Submitting the Application

Application fees vary. On average, they are about \$70. If you are planning on applying to multiple schools, please plan ahead and put this expense into your budget.

The format for submitting the letters of recommendation and personal statement will always vary. Read the instructions carefully and follow them closely.

Important Things to Remember

1. Keep track of the deadlines. Each school may have different dates when applications are due.
2. Organization is key. Embrace the Excel spreadsheet! They can provide a nice visual way of monitoring when the different components of an application are received, as well as deadlines.
3. Grad school is one possible option. Never put all of your hopes and expectations on one program or working with a particular professor. There are many, many routes to choose.