



Where leaders are made

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## Graduate and Professional School Resource Guide

The Career Center offers this guide for the beginning of your graduate and professional school discovery process. It highlights a portion of the services and resources that are offered in the Career Center. The discussions and suggestions below are drawn from a variety of sources including: Donald Asher's *Graduate Admissions Essays*, [www.gradschool.com](http://www.gradschool.com), [www.kent.edu/career](http://www.kent.edu/career), [www.gradschool.about.com](http://www.gradschool.about.com) and [www.samford.edu](http://www.samford.edu)

### Is Graduate School Right For You?

#### Good Reasons to Go to Graduate School

1. You have a passionate interest in a narrow topic or unusual combination of topics.
2. You have a vocational interest that carries a graduate degree credential as an entrance requirement.
3. You want to earn more money than you otherwise would have.
4. You want to ensure continued career advancement.
5. You seek a richer more satisfying life.
6. You like to do research.

#### Reasons *Not* to Go to Graduate School Right Now

Warning signs concerning your graduate school plans.

1. You're going to grad school to please somebody else.
2. You're clueless about what subject to study or what professions to pursue.
3. You're secretly trying to avoid the job market.

#### Choosing a Graduate School

There are several issues you may want to consider when selecting a particular graduate school or program. At the graduate level, the reputation of the faculty and the particular department matters most. Advisers recommend asking professors at your college to make a list of the colleagues and departments they admire. Ask junior as well as senior faculty members. Also, don't underestimate the information you can glean from students in grad programs. The home pages of faculty members often list their teaching and research assistants. Try to meet them in person. Graduate students who attended your alma mater can help contrast your experience there with what you will encounter at a school you are considering.

You will also want to consider the services the college or university provides. For example, inquire about the school's career services center and find out how technologically advanced it is. Career centers also compile fact sheets that can tell you what percentage of students find work after they graduate, who hires them, and how much they are paid. You may also want to consider the school's library. Many students find that the number of volumes a school holds in their particular field is insufficient.

## Research Resources

### General Graduate School

- [www.ulinks.com](http://www.ulinks.com)
- [www.allaboutgradschool.com](http://www.allaboutgradschool.com)
- [www.gradschool.com](http://www.gradschool.com)
- [www.gradadmissions.about.com](http://www.gradadmissions.about.com)
- <http://www.justcolleges.com>

### Career Center Print Resources

- Game Plan for Getting into Graduate School
- Graduate Admissions Essays
- Free Money for Graduate School
- Getting Money for Graduate School
- Perfect Personal Statements
- Graduate School: Winning Strategies For Getting In With or Without Excellent Grades

### Other Available Print Resources

- Graduate School and You: A Guide for Prospective Graduate Students. Kidwell, Clara Sue, and Lapidus, Jules B. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 1989.
- The Ultimate Grad School Survival Guide: Getting In, Getting Money, Exams and Classes, the Profs, the Thesis/Dissertation. Mitchell, Lesli. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides, 1996.
- The Perfect Cover Letter. Beatty, Richard H. (ISBN 0474-50203-0) New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1989.
- Campus Pursuit: How to Make the Most of the College Visit and Interview. Ripple, G. Gray. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Alexandria, VA: Octameron Associates, 1991.
- Graduate Admissions Essays – Write Your Way Into the Graduate School of Your Choice. Asher, Donald. Berkley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2000.
- Write for Success: Preparing a Successful Professional School Application. Jackson, Evelyn W., and Bardo, Harold R. Rev. ed. Champaign, IL: National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions, 1989.

### Professional and General Graduate Studies Entrance Exams

- GRE: Graduate Record Examination  
[www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)
- MAT: Miller Analogies Test  
[www.hbtpc.com/mat/index.html](http://www.hbtpc.com/mat/index.html)
- GMAT: Graduate Management Admissions Test  
[www.gmat.org](http://www.gmat.org)
- LSAT: Law School Admission Test  
[www.lsac.org/lSAT.htm](http://www.lsac.org/lSAT.htm)
- MCAT: Medical College Admission Test  
[www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm](http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm)
- DAT: Dental Admission Test  
[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)
- VCAT: Veterinary College Admission Test  
[www.aavmc.org](http://www.aavmc.org)
- PCAT: Pharmacy College Admission Test  
<http://marketplace.psychcorp.com/PsychCorp.com/Cultures/en-US/dotCom/PCATWEB.INFO.htm>

## Other Test-Related Websites

- [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)
- [www.peterson.com](http://www.peterson.com)
- [www.review.com](http://www.review.com)
- [www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com)
- [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)
- [www.test.com](http://www.test.com)
- [www.vocabulary.com](http://www.vocabulary.com)

## Graduate School Planning and Preparation

### Undergraduate Preparation

#### Junior Year

- Strengthen relationships with faculty in your major. Discuss plans for graduate school, seek faculty insights and identify faculty as potential letter of recommendation writers.

#### Senior Year:

##### Summer Prior

- Write a draft goal statement. Begin researching programs of interest at the graduate level. Focus on your personal, career, and research interests. You may want to begin setting aside some money from your summer job to pay for application fees.

##### September

- Meet with faculty advisors and career center staff to discuss possible programs that would be right for you and work on strengthening your goal statement.
- Create a top ten list of graduate schools.
- Begin asking for letters of recommendation.

##### October

- Take appropriate standardized tests (GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT etc.). Request application materials from programs.

##### November

- Order your college transcripts.

##### December

- Complete application forms. Give the letter of recommendation forms to the letter writers along with the addresses and postage needed. Along with these materials be sure to include your statement of purpose or your responses to the specific questions asked by the program. This will help them to be more accurate in their letter.

##### January

- Mail applications - get them in early!

##### February

- Contact programs about the opportunity to visit. Make trips.

##### April

- If applying for need-based financial aid, begin completing appropriate forms.

Most importantly don't stress! Applying for graduate school can be a very hectic process. Focus on staying organized and keeping your goals in mind and you will be successful.

# Writing a Graduate Application Resume

## What do you include in a resume intended to showcase your preparation for graduate school?

- Bear in mind your readers' needs for information. Readers will want to see that you have knowledge of the appropriate subject areas as well as skills which will ensure your success in a graduate school environment.
- Resumes for graduate school have much in common with those for jobs or internships. The purpose of each is to begin to persuade the reader that your education and experience have helped you to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in the position you seek. There is no significantly different organization and content for a graduate school resume, but it is useful to consider how the standard organization and content of a resume can be used most effectively when applying for graduate school.

## Objective

An objective isn't just for the reader, it can also help the writer to achieve a clear focus as s/he works to collect and organize appropriate evidence. If your objective is "Admission to graduate school with a research oriented graduate assistantship," your evidence might stress your ability to do research, to write and summarize your findings, to work collaboratively as part of a team, etc. If your objective is "Admission to graduate school and a teaching assistantship," your tutoring experience, your ability to make presentations, define a learning objective and achieve it, etc. would be strategic means of convincing the reader of your suitability. And of course, your objective could suggest interest in both teaching and research.

## Summary of Qualifications

Many people are unaware of this segment of a resume, which can be used to capture the reader's attention. For students whose academic training rather than "work" experiences has contributed heavily to their abilities, this can be a very useful resume component. The summary of qualifications can be used to stress transferable skills such as research, writing, computer, presentation and language skills. Ability to work as part of team, to provide leadership, to manage priorities – all could be stressed in a skills summary.

## Education

Stress your education at the start of the resume – not the close. Your undergraduate training is of paramount interest. Stress your excellent QPA, Dean's list or other honors. If you have completed an honors thesis or other compelling research projects, this is the place on a resume to showcase this. You might also include professional development activities.

## Experience

Many people think of the experience segment of their resume as limited to PAID experience but from the point of view of making your reader understand your practical experience, training and skills, paid positions are not the only experiences to include in this segment of a resume. So, for example, someone apply to a graduate school program in psychology who wishes to work with children might include in the experience section of a resume a volunteer position working with children in a children's developmental setting. Your activities as part of a Psychology club, including identifying and sponsoring speakers, would show evidence of commitment to professional development and administrative skills. If you tutored others in various psychology courses this too would be an excellent entry under experience.

## Work or Employment History

If you have had a number of summer and/or part time positions with no relevance to work in the field of psychology, consider whether you developed transferable skills which could be briefly stressed in a description of your job responsibilities. If there really is no way for you to establish a clear connection between your on-the-job efforts and your ability to function in graduate school, keep your descriptions very simple. In some instance, you may simply supply a work history. A work history supplies the place of you employ, dates of employ, and job title. It doesn't offer any further information. This type of history simply demonstrates that you have been a responsible and reliable person who can be counted on

to meet job responsibilities, whatever they might be – whether as a member of a restaurant staff or as a responsible graduate assistant.

## Additional Categories

There are many other possible categories of use in developing a resume and you will need to look at samples to jog your understanding and imagination of the possibilities. Additional possibilities might include **Conferences, Professional Affiliations, Community Involvement, and Campus Activities.**

## Writing a Letter of Intent

In addition to the quantitative data (tests scores and academic transcripts) and other materials that you will be asked to submit to a school's admissions committee, a piece of writing -- variously called a "statement of purpose," "personal essay," or "statement of background and goals" -- will probably be required as well.

The overall application package will represent who "you" are to people whom you will most likely not know personally. The written expression of your qualities as an applicant will often be a very important way for committee members to get to know why you are an acceptable candidate for their program. Thus, it is essential to take great care in preparing this part of your application. Because graduate schools make important selection decisions that are partly based on what you say in this essay, the writing of it can be an intimidating prospect.

## What to Include

- Clearly state your short and long-term goals; tell how university "X" can help you meet them.
- Describe your areas of research and professional interest. You might indicate how your proposed studies are located within a broad field.
- Give specific reasons why you are interested in a particular field, as well as why you have chosen this particular school to apply to.
- Refer to past experiences, both academic and "real world," that are relevant to graduate study.
- Articulate what is particularly valuable about the perspective that you will bring to the prospective field of study and the specific department.
- Show motivation and capacity to succeed in graduate education.
- Write concisely and try to keep your readers interested. Remember that they are reading many application essays and therefore, you need to be considerate of their needs.
- Offer other information that demonstrates your need and desire to be accepted by the program.

## Why *this* School?

Once you have developed a sense of the faculty's interests and the department's special features, you can make it clear in your application exactly *why* you want to attend that particular school. What is it about the department's curriculum structure or general approach to the field that makes you interested in being a student *there*? Don't waste your valuable essay space, or your reader's valuable time, telling the reader how wonderful or prestigious their institution is; people on the admissions committee already know this. They want to know *about you*.

If, during your research on the department's faculty, a faculty member strikes you as someone whom you might be interested in working with, indicate this in your essay; be concise and specific about *why* you want to work with this person in particular. A word of caution here: Do not try to use this as a way to "butter up" the admissions committee, because if there is any reason to believe that you are not sincere, your application may be adversely affected. Again, mention the person and how their work relates to your interest, but don't load this statement with what might be interpreted as false or superfluous praise.

## Personal Information

Some applications may ask you to give a personal history, telling about experiences that you have undergone which have led you to decide to pursue graduate education in a certain field of study. (If personal information of this sort is not required, then you are under no obligation to provide it.) The information that could be included in a personal-type statement is limited only by your own imagination and life history, but you should be highly selective about what you include. There are two things to watch out for: (1) saying too much and/or (2) not saying enough.

## **(Re)Writing**

Although some people may be able to write an essay from start to finish in one sitting, most would probably not be particularly satisfied with the results of such an effort. Outlines, including a list of possible components to include in the essay, are often a good way to get started on your essay. Some writers prefer to start writing one paragraph at a time, re-arranging their ideas for orderly flow later on. Whatever method you use (only a few out of many have been mentioned here), make sure to allow time for revision -- don't *start* your essay the night before you have to send it out!

## **Graduate School Interviews**

### **Before the interview**

- Do your homework. Research the program and faculty. Read recent publications to learn more about their labs.
- Prepare intelligent questions to ask. Remember that you're judged by your application but also by your presentation and your interest in the program and faculty.

### **During the Interview** ([www.gradadmissions.about.com](http://www.gradadmissions.about.com))

- Dress professionally and comfortably.
- Find out what graduate students really think about their advisors and the program
- Don't underestimate the potential influence of current graduate students. Although they might sound like they're speaking off-the-cuff, remember that you're on an interview, regardless of with whom you're speaking. Present your best side because current graduate students may be in a position to help or hurt your application.
- Follow standard rules of interviewing (i.e., eye contact, self-confident presentation, conservative dress, etc.)

### **Types of Questions You Can Expect (Graduate Admissions Essays, Donald Asher)**

- So, have you read any good books lately?
- What can you tell me that's not in your formal application materials?
- So, why do you want to be a \_\_\_\_\_?
- What do you know about our research topic and methodologies?
- Can you tell me about your undergraduate advisor?
- What do you do with your leisure time?
- Could you describe how you study? What is your routine?
- Could you tell me about a major failure in your life and how you dealt with it?
- What are your career plans and how does our particular program fit in with them?
- What other programs are you applying to now?
- What will you do if you don't get in?
- Why should we admit you over other fine and highly qualified candidates we have this year?
- What makes you different?

### **What to Ask During a Graduate Admissions Interview:** ([www.gradschools.about.com](http://www.gradschools.about.com))

- What characteristics distinguish this program from others in the same field?
- Where are recent alumni employed? What do most students do after graduation?
- What types of financial aid are offered? What criteria are used for choosing recipients?
- Are there any scholarships or fellowships available? How do I apply?
- Are there teaching opportunities, such as teaching assistantships and adjunct positions, for current students?
- Do most students publish an article or present a paper before graduation?
- What planned practical experiences are included in the program (e.g., internships)? Ask for examples of internship placements.

- What is the relative importance of admissions test scores, undergraduate grades, recommendations, statements on applications, experience, and other requirements?
- Does the department prefer applicants immediately out of undergraduate programs or do they prefer applicants with work experience? If they prefer or require experience, what kind of experience are they looking for?

### Organizational checklist worksheet

**Institution** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Application Due Date** \_\_\_\_\_

___ Goal statement	___ Application	___ Financial aid forms
___ Recommendations	___ Transcripts	___ Any other requested
___ Standardized tests	___ Interview	

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