



Graduate School Personal Statements

1. Getting Started

- Select top 5-6 schools
- Research top 5-6 schools
 - Faculty
 - Articles—who are your favorite academic articles written by and where do they teach?
 - Referrals—NAU faculty may refer you to colleagues at other institutions
 - Student Services/“Centers”/ Programs—what do the schools offer you?
 - Size—are you more comfortable at a school of 45,000 students or 400 students?
 - Location: Demographics, Local Resources—are there local resources that will be helpful to your education? For example: an immigration studies student might benefit from living in Los Angeles where there are many immigrant populations.
 - Admissions Requirements/Format Details/Deadlines/Addresses/Fees—find out all the particulars about applying to that school

2. Essentials for Inclusion

- Awards, scholarships & recognitions
- Funding criteria: first-generation, low-income, rural, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, transgender, single parent status, disability status, international status, etc. If you are concerned about discrimination, you may want to call the school’s admissions office and ask if it’s relevant to include such information for funding purposes. If you feel very uncomfortable about including this information, don’t include it.
- Aspects of *school* that match *your interests/goals* (Faculty, Student Services, “Centers,” Programs, Mission/Philosophy, Size, Clubs/Organizations, etc)
- Knowledge of what graduate school entails & motivation to succeed
 - Why do you need this degree?
 - Example of motivation/illustration of passion/commitment/dedication/work ethic
- Obstacle successfully overcome—if you have an example in your life, turn it into 3-4 sentences to show that you are not a quitter
- Aspects of *you* that match *school mission/philosophy/needs/requirements*
 - Faculty praise/recognition of grad school potential
 - Relevant employment/volunteer/activities/leadership
 - Relevant life experience/“cultural” knowledge/International experience
 - Career goals/academic goals
 - What do you bring to the school?
 - Skills, talents, unique perspective
- Personal Contacts/Connection to school
 - Family—did you have an aunt who went to the school?
 - Faculty—do you have a faculty contact at the school?
 - Personal experience—have you been to the campus or had some other personal experience that indicated that this school is a good match for you?

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OPTIONAL: Weaknesses in your application (GPA, GRE)

- Factual explanations for valid reasons (family crises/illness/death, other circumstances beyond your control)
- A few schools may be understanding about having a difficult transition to college life in your first term or year. Talk to an advisor about whether to include this information or not.

3. Rules

- **BE TRUTHFUL**
- **BE POSITIVE**
- **BE CONCISE** (max. 2 pages double-spaced, 1” left margin, min. 10 pt. font—if no formatting guidelines are provided)
- **MAKE SURE YOUR GRAMMAR & SPELLING ARE CORRECT**
- **MAKE SURE IT’S RELEVANT** to the Admissions Committee
- **FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS**
- **BE CONSISTENT**
 - Application
 - Personal Statement
 - Format
 - Content
- **SCHEDULE A FACULTY/PROFESSIONAL EDIT**
- **BE SURE IT’S NOT JUST A SERIES OF LISTS**
- **BE YOURSELF—MAKE IT YOUR STYLE**
 - **Use language you are comfortable with but show off your vocabulary**
 - **Remember that this is a written document—stay away from oral speech patterns**