

**SUNY Binghamton Graduate Application Retreat**  
**Saturday, November 16, 2013**  
**Don Asher**

Tips for Writing the Graduate School Personal Statement

Provide personal perspective with research interests; here's why I'm interested in this discipline and here's why I fit into this discipline

Don't be too personal -don't begin with the word 'I'

Don't begin with the death of a family member, don't criticize your prior major, don't criticize faculty; "Let's Leave Dr. Seuss out of this."

**\*The catalyst for your academic interests should be your research and interest in a discipline\***

Writing Exercises

**Topic** - specific area of study; be as specific as possible

**Topical area** - specific topic you'd like to study/explore - focus

**Concept cluster** - cluster of interlinked ideas

**Keywords** - words that demonstrate you are up to date with and understand your field of study

Be specific about areas of research that interest you and why. Mention faculty (at least 2) whose research you're interested in and who would serve as potential advisors.

Provide a list of things you want to investigate in graduate school (things you are interested in)

Specificity + flexibility = Specificity shows advanced level of thought and flexibility shows that you embrace diversity and different ways of thinking.

I am particularly interested in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, as well as deepening my understanding of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in general.

"Of course I realize my interests will progress and evolve as I pursue my graduate studies, but these are the topics that are most fascinating to me at this time." **[Rephrase in your own words!]**

**Sell your university**

Example: I attended a small liberal arts college with considerable focus on faculty-student mentoring and cultivating students' independent research experience.

**Attitude of gratitude** - show appreciation for opportunities you've been afforded

Examples: I was honored to be selected for a program; I had the good fortune to be selected; I was honored to have been given this opportunity, etc.

**Academic protocol** - whenever you mention an accomplishment, mention your supervising faculty mentor

Example: I was fortunate to be selected by faculty recommendation to participate in the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, a program designed to prepare students for graduate research opportunities. While with the McNair Scholars Program, I designed and conducted an original research project under the guidance of Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. My most recent project explores/considers\_\_\_\_\_.

Tell a story about the most compelling and relevant experience. Then say, I've had \_\_\_ significant research experiences. Please refer to my CV for three additional research projects.

### Different Types of Graduate Admissions Essays

**Statement of purpose** - focuses forward; what do you want to do in the grad program? What skills are you bringing to the program?; what do you want to do with this degree after you graduate?

**Autobiography** - more of a personal story; emphasizes character development not melodrama or life crises

**Diversity statement** - how can you contribute to the diversity of thought on campus? How will you bring a new perspective? Never leave the diversity statement blank!

**When discussing adversity:** don't elaborate on adversity; use it in a subtle way; emphasize that you overcame something, but don't dwell on it; show how you've persevered and moved forward

**Be sure to customize each essay - customize all the way through - customization is key!**

- Put the names of 2-3 faculty members at the top of your essay; emphasize the context for mentioning each faculty member's name (i.e. you've read their research; you've corresponded with them, etc.)
- Curriculum - fit and match; why you want to be a part of this program (what the department does well and why you want to be part of it)
- Be disciplined about the word limit!

Before arriving at a graduate program next fall, I will have the chance to\_\_\_\_\_.

In my frequent correspondence with Dr.\_\_\_\_\_, I have discovered that your program's focus on \_\_\_\_\_ aligns with my research interests in \_\_\_\_\_.

**Sciences -- need to mention Principal Investigator (PI)/faculty or you won't get into their dept./lab**

Mention the location if you're applying to a program that is far away. I look forward to continuing my studies in \_\_\_\_\_because...

Personal interest (optional) - toward the end of your essay before the closing paragraph - be careful - relate it to the thing you're trying to do.

**Closing paragraph** - big finish! What are you going to do with this degree? The program wants to see that they're making a good investment in you - what will you do with the degree?

Example: Upon completing the graduate program, I plan to\_\_\_\_\_.

Be specific about your future goals and how this degree/program will help you get there.

**If you have any of the following experiences, they probably need to be mentioned in your statement:**

- faculty have noticed you (research, teaching assistant)
- teaching assistant -tutor, especially a departmentally approved tutor
- research assistant to faculty -extended independent research project resulting in a written work
- independent study
- senior thesis or capstone project
- summer internships, research opportunities
- anything to do with admissions, president's office or development, search committee for faculty position, residence hall adviser

### **What can I say about my GPA?**

Mention: high GPA; high GPA in your major; GPA over the last 4 semesters; GPA over last 4 semesters in your major (piecing and parsing the GPA to emphasize improvement)

### **When Writing about Research Projects...**

Projects: independent research projects, leader of organization, etc.

Working title: separate color from content

Supervising: Prof. Name

Why is the project interesting?

Has this been/will it be published?

Example: will be prepared for publication spring 2014; has been submitted to \_\_\_ pending response.

### **Final Tips**

- Help graduate admissions committees see stuff they need to know -- i.e. how grades improved, etc.
- Make sure your personality is reflected in your essay. It has to reflect who you are as a person and as a student!