Resume Writing

Look inside for......

- ➢ **Guidelines for what to include on your resume**
- ➢ **Tips for formatting, writing and printing your resume**
- ➢ **Samples resumes for third and fourth years**

Your resume will be one of the most important tools you use in marketing yourself to employers. You can use your resume to summarize your most relevant experiences and accomplishments while demonstrating your written communication skills and professionalism to potential employers. In turn, employers use resumes to select candidates for interviews and to structure interview questions.

When faced with the prospect of writing a resume, many students worry about what they will include. Far too many do not see their experiences and accomplishments as being significant to prospective employers. Nothing could be further from the truth! Most education, work, and extracurricular activities are relevant and can be presented in a manner that demonstrates your skills and potential. Remember, this is your opportunity to sell your strengths as a future employee.

This handout provides basic guidelines for constructing a resume. If you are interested in more information, Commerce Career Services (CCS) hosts workshops and employer panels each year on resume writing. Check *Career Services Weekly* and www.commerce.virginia.edu/career_services for the dates and times of these workshops. The CCS staff is also available to meet with you to discuss your resume throughout the year.

FORMAT

The resume should be limited to one page, prepared on a standard 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper. A standard 10-pt Times New Roman font is easy to read. No margins should be lower than 0.5". The resume should be structurally organized, with margins and titles logically arranged to guide the reader. White space should be used when appropriate to separate sections of the resume and to give the resume a strong visual appearance.

Most resumes have separate sections including the following information (not necessarily in this order):

- Identifying information
- Objective
- Education
- Honors and awards
- Experience, related experience, and/or other experience
- Leadership activities
- Skills
- Interests (optional section)

CONTENT

A. Identifying Information

This includes name, address, telephone number, and email address. Most students list both a current (school) address and permanent (home) address. You may also include a line below your identifying information.

> **EMPLOYER TIP!**
> *"When writing your resume and cover letter, remember to include both school and cell phone numbers. Remember that employers will be calling these numbers, so make sure your answering machine and voicemail greetings are professional." Dana Feinstein, Recruiter, Citi*

B. The Objective Statement

People have varied opinions about whether an objective statement should be included on the resume. Many employers rely on the objective statement to gain a quick understanding of what type of position the student wants. On an effective resume, the objective represents a focus or "theme," and the other sections of the resume support the objective.

1. **The objective should be focused.** It should include specific information about the type of position that is being sought (e.g., brand management) and the type of organization sought (e.g., consumer goods marketing company). Make sure that your objective is compatible with the opportunities available at the organization to which you are sending your resume. If you have more than one objective, you may develop and use different versions of the same resume, with each version having a different objective.

2. **Avoid using broad, "generic" objectives.** Do not use broad, sweeping statements such as "want to work with people" or "desire a position in management" or "to work for a dynamic company."

> **EMPLOYER TIP!**
> *"I suggest making it clear in the objective about what you want to do. This can be hard but take an inventory of the things that you like to do and go from there." Joanne J. Courtney, Project Coordinator-Recruiting, ExxonMobil*

C. Education

This section includes, in reverse chronological order, your graduate or undergraduate institution, expected date of graduation, academic concentration, and any other information that might be especially relevant to your objective such as study abroad. Many students include any relevant coursework, percentage of college expenses earned, and grade point average.

1. **Listing your GPA.** Although listing your GPA on the resume is optional, most recruiters indicate that they would prefer to see it. If you have a strong GPA, mentioning it on the resume will demonstrate your academic talents and achievements. If you choose not to list your GPA, recruiters may assume that it is not strong. In most cases, recruiters will raise the issue of grades in the on-Grounds interview. Students with lower GPAs should be ready to convince recruiters in the interview that they have the necessary skills to compete. Another option is to list your **Commerce GPA** on your resume, particularly if it is higher than your cumulative GPA. **SIS calculates these GPAs for you. Do not calculate them yourself.** Typically, students do not report their concentration GPA. If you decide to do so, make sure that you have taken more than one class that counts towards your concentration.

2. **Emphasize the McIntire School of Commerce <u>and</u> the University of Virginia.** The University of Virginia and McIntire have an excellent reputation nationwide.

3. **Listing your second major.** If you have a major from the College of Arts & Sciences, make certain to list it as a second major, not as a second degree. In other words, you cannot receive both a bachelor of arts and a bachelor of science. Please refer to the following for an example:

> Candidate for Bachelor of Science in Commerce
> Concentrations in Marketing and Management
> Second Major in Spanish from the College of Arts & Sciences

4. **Make sure to highlight special achievements.** Many students feel uncomfortable with the thought of "bragging" about themselves. If you have accomplishments you are proud of, let others know on your resume. List those special achievements, such as "one of six students selected for special honors program," or "full scholarship recipient," or "financed 100% of all educational expenses," etc.

5. **Should you include high school?** It is generally recommended that college students exclude high school information on their resumes. However, some students have good reasons for including their high schools. For example, the high school may be well-known, or the employer may have attended the same school, or the student may want a job in his or her hometown. If high school is included, merely list the school, its location, and date of graduation. More elaborate information is not recommended and should be included only when the information is relevant to the job.

6. **If you transferred from another school, should you list the corresponding information?** CCS recommends that you include your previous institution on your resume, especially if you decide to include information concerning your experiences and accomplishments from your previous institution. You will want to include the name of the institution, dates attended, and area of study. Include this information below your University of Virginia educational information so that an employer can reference those accomplishments and experiences during the dates of attendance at that institution. **Do not combine your GPA from your previous institution with your UVa GPA. Simply list each GPA under the corresponding institution.**

D. **Honors and Awards**
This section, when included, should contain academic achievements, such as Dean's List, scholarships received, and election to any honor societies. If you have achieved several academic honors, it is usually recommended to include them under a separate Honors and Awards section on your resume. Students with fewer academic honors may choose to include them in the education section. The listing of high school honors and awards is generally not recommended.

E. **Experience**
This section should include not only any paid positions (part-time and summer), but also any significant volunteer or extracurricular activities. Similar to the educational section, information presented here should be organized in reverse chronological order and should include names and locations of employers and dates of employment.

This section often presents students with the best opportunities to market themselves to employers. Don't sell yourself short. The description should detail the level of responsibility, as well as the breadth of exposure. It is most important in this section that strong, effective language be used. The language should be succinct, crisp, expressive, and personal. You will want to make the reader pay attention by using words that convey measurable accomplishments and problem-solving abilities.

1. **Know your transferable skills.** Many tasks you have performed may not seem pertinent to include on your resume. However, much of what you have learned is transferable to other jobs and can be presented in a way that is appealing to prospective employers. The key is recognizing your transferable skills. To help you, a list of commonly acquired skills is included in this handout.

2. **Make sure to support your objective.** Your experience section should directly relate to your objective by highlighting relevant skills. For example, if your objective is a position in brand management, then

your experience should demonstrate those skills brand managers look for (creativity, communication skills, etc.). You may want to have a RELATED EXPERIENCE section on your resume to emphasize the specific experiences you have acquired that directly supports your objective.

3. **Use active rather than passive language.** Use "action" verbs to give your resume more impact. Rather than saying "Responsible for all direct-mail marketing activities," say, "Created direct-mail marketing campaign." **A list of action verbs is presented at the end of this handout.**

4. **Indicate progressive increases in responsibility.** If you have worked for the same company for two consecutive summers, yet your job responsibilities have increased, make sure you specify the increased responsibilities on the resume.

5. **Indicate if you have received a full-time offer from your summer employer.** If your summer employer has extended you full-time offer after graduation, indicate this fact as one of your descriptors on your resume for that employer. We encourage you to include this fact even if you do not plan to accept the offer—for example, "offered full-time employment upon graduation as a result of positive performance review."

6. **Highlight either your job title or your employer.** Some students may have had experience when they have worked for impressive organizations (AMS, Chase Manhattan, etc.), but their job titles may sound unimpressive (receptionist, teller, etc.). If this is the case, it may be more effective to list the company first (highlighted by bold print or italics) and then the job title.

   If you have had an impressive-sounding title (project manager, assistant to the president) but worked for a less-known company (Jones and Company), you may want to list the job title first (highlighted) and then the company name.

F. **Leadership Activities**
This section includes those extracurricular activities in which students are engaged outside of the classroom. When listing extracurricular activities, give the name of the organization and the dates when you were involved with the organization. Make sure to mention any offices held. Employers will want to see signs of leadership potential. Community and civic organizations may be included here. Whenever possible, describe your extracurricular activities, rather than just listing your activities. Recruiters are more interested in knowing what you've done rather than what you've joined.

G. **Skills**
This optional section can be used to highlight skills that you feel deserve special attention. Good examples of these are computer and foreign language skills. Many students include these abilities in other sections of their resumes, but making a separate section may draw an employer's attention to these accomplishments.

H. **Interests**
This section, usually optional, includes such items as personal hobbies and travel experiences. If you decide to include an interests section on your resume, try to keep it interesting! Reading, cooking, and jogging appear all too frequently on many other students' resumes. Remember that employers are likely to ask you about one or more of your interest areas during an interview, so be sure to include only those interests in which you have been actively involved and feel comfortable talking about at length.

I. **References**
There is no need to include the statement "References Available upon Request." Employers assume that you have references. The space that becomes available by not listing a reference statement can be used more effectively to describe experiences.

Most students find it useful to prepare a printed reference sheet, with the names, titles, company/university affiliation, addresses, business telephone numbers, and email addresses of three or four references. The reference sheet may be taken to the interview to hand to the employer as requested.

You will want to make certain, however, that you have specifically asked people to serve as references. Usually, no more than three or four references are necessary. Faculty members, present and former employers, community leaders, business owners, and supervisors all make excellent references. Make sure that any references you list can recall and describe their interactions with you. Once you have secured a position, follow up with your references with thank-you letters for their role in assisting with this process. **An example of a reference sheet is attached to this handout.**

J. GENERAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE RESUMES

The following hints may be helpful while you are completing your resume:

- Have your resume critiqued by more than one person.

EMPLOYER TIP!
"I suggest students ensure that there are no typographical errors on the resume. They should triple check that there are no mistakes. Surprisingly, resumes do have mistakes in them at times. It is also good to keep the resume fairly short. It should be long enough to convey the information needed, keeping in mind that the interview following is the opportunity to provide more detail. I find that one page is typically sufficient for college students." Tessy B. Schlemmer, Director of Human Resources, Hantzmon Wiebel, LLP

- Use the minimum number of words necessary to convey meaning. For example, eliminate unneeded articles (a, an, and the) in your position descriptions.

- Avoid using passive phrases such as "Duties included…" or "Responsible for…"

- Use short, concise phrases, with each phrase starting with an action verb.

- Ensure that verb tense corresponds with timing of the experience. For example, if you are still involved in an activity, use present tense for verbs within that position description.

- Be sure spelling and punctuation are correct – check for typographical errors.

- If you have difficulty fitting everything onto one page, begin to eliminate the information that is least recent and least relevant to your job search.

- Use consistent phrasing and language throughout your resume.

- Spell out all names rather than using abbreviations or acronyms.

- Avoid using personal pronouns (e.g., "I" and "me").

- Use highlighting (italics, bold print, and capital letters) in a consistent manner to make the resume more readable.

K. PRINTING THE RESUME

The appearance of your resume is just as important as its content. In making final copies of resumes for employers, students should keep the following guidelines in mind. Always use a high-quality, medium-bond paper that looks and feels professional. Do not use standard photocopy paper. The color of paper should be white, off-white, gray, or beige. Also, make sure to buy enough blank paper of the same type and matching envelopes to use for cover letters and mailings.

L. HELPFUL WEB SITES

college.wsj.com	rileyguide.com
wetfeet.com	careerpath.com
vault.com	jobweb.org/jconline

Resume Critique Points to Consider

- ❑ Is contact information clear; are phone numbers included? E-mail address?
- ❑ Is the objective specific, if one is included?
- ❑ Does the resume lead with strength? What stands out when you look at it for 10 seconds?
- ❑ Is the overall appearance professional? Balanced margins? Font?
- ❑ Does it look burdensome to read? Is it longer than 1 page?
- ❑ Does it look cluttered?
- ❑ Does it look too brief?
- ❑ Is education clear? Is GPA included? Major GPA? Work-related coursework? Concentrations?
- ❑ Are academic honors included? Are they substantial enough to merit an "Honors" category?
- ❑ Is high school included? If so, does it make sense to include it?
- ❑ Are other educational endeavors such as study abroad, special programs, independent studies, minors, etc. included?
- ❑ Has the resume highlighted titles or organizations? Which look stronger?
- ❑ Are descriptions written with most impressive information first? Using action verbs? Is there enough information to visualize what you did?
- ❑ Has the formal (order of Experience, Related Experience, Activities, etc. categories) allowed most important experience to be up front?
- ❑ Has the resume highlighted accomplishments? Are items quantified where possible?
- ❑ Are leadership roles well defined?
- ❑ Are language and computer skills mentioned?
- ❑ Are dates included, but not highlighted?
- ❑ Are college summers accounted for?
- ❑ Are interests or personal data included appropriate? Does this information aid the reader in understanding the individual?
- ❑ Does the resume content confirm the individual's ability to use skills or perform roles mentioned in the "Objective" or "Personal Profile or position description?"
- ❑ Does the resume communicate a track record of success?
- ❑ Has the resume avoided personal pronouns?
- ❑ Is the highlighting "scannable?" Remember that computer scanners have difficulty with underlining.

Transferable Skills

Acquired customer service skills	Interview people
Administer programs	Inventing new ideas
Advise people	Investigate problems
Analyze data	Listen to others
Appraise services	Locate missing information
Arrange social functions	Manage an organization
Assemble apparatus	Measure boundaries
Audit financial records	Mediate between people
Budget expenses	Meet the public
Calculate numerical data	Monitor the progress of project
Check for accuracy	Motivate others
Classify records	Negotiate contracts
Coach individuals	Operate equipment
Collect money	Organize people and tasks
Compile statistics	Persuade others
Conduct research	Plan agendas
Confront other people	Plan organizational needs
Construct buildings	Predict futures
Coordinate events	Prepare materials
Correspond with others	Process status reports
Counsel people	Program computers
Create new ideas	Promote events
Decide uses of money	Raise funds
Delegate responsibility	Record scientific data
Design data systems	Recruit new hires
Dispense information	Respond to inquiries
Display artistic ideas	Repair mechanical devices
Distribute products	Review programs
Edit publications	Run meetings
Estimate physical space	Sell products
Evaluate programs	Serve individuals
Exhibit plans	Set up demonstrations
Find information	Sketch diagrams or charts
Generate reports	Speak in public
Handle complaints	Supervise others
Handle detail work	Teach lessons
Initiate communication	Update files
Inspect physical objects	Work with precision
Interpret languages	Write clear reports

Action Verbs

A	D	I	P	
accomplished	decentralized	identified	participated	staffed
achieved	decreased	implemented	performed	standardized
acquired	defined	improved	pinpointed	started
adapted	demonstrated	increased	planned	streamlined
administered	designated	influenced	prepared	strengthened
advanced	designed	initiated	presented	structured
advised	determined	inspected	prevented	studied
allocated	developed	installed	processed	suggested
analyzed	directed	instructed	procured	summarized
applied	discovered	integrated	produced	supervised
appointed	documented	interpreted	programmed	supported
approved	doubled	interviewed	projected	surpassed
arranged		introduced	promoted	surveyed
assessed		invented	proposed	sustained
assigned	**E**	invested	proved	
assisted	earned	investigated	provided	
attained	edited		published	**T**
audited	eliminated		purchased	tailored
	employed	**L**		taught
	enforced	led		tested
B	established	liquidated	**R**	traded
bought	estimated	located	realized	trained
broadened	evaluated		recommended	transformed
brought	examined		recruited	translated
built	exceeded	**M**	reduced	trimmed
	executed	made	reinforced	tripled
	exercised	maintained	renegotiated	
C	expanded	managed	reorganized	
calculated	expedited	marketed	reported	**U**
centralized	extended	mediates	represented	undertook
clarified		minimized	researched	used
collaborated		modernized	reshaped	utilized
combined	**F**	modified	resolved	
completed	financed	monitored	restored	
composed	forecasted	motivated	reviewed	**V**
conceived	formed		revised	verified
concluded	formulated			
condensed	founded	**N**		
conducted	fulfilled	negotiated	**S**	**W**
constructed			saved	widened
consulted			scheduled	won
contracted	**G**	**O**	secured	worked
contributed	generated	obtained	selected	
controlled	guided	operated	served	
converted		ordered	settled	
coordinated		organized	shaped	
corrected	**H**	originated	showed	
created	handled	overhauled	simplified	
cut	headed	oversaw	sold	
	helped		solved	
	hired		sponsored	

SAMPLE RESUME
Mark Donahue

mld7h@virginia.edu
Current Address: 6 Preston Place, Charlottesville, VA 22903 (434) 555-5555
Permanent Address: 100 King Solomon Drive, Annandale, VA 22003 (703) 555-5555

Education

University of Virginia, McIntire School of Commerce Charlottesville, VA   August 2008-May 2011
Candidate for B.S. in Commerce, Concentrations in International Business and Information Technology
Second major in Spanish from the College of Arts and Sciences
UVa Cumulative GPA 3.20; Commerce Major GPA: 3.33; Spanish Major GPA: 3.43

UVa Sustainable Development Practicum Course Bluefields, Nicaragua   January 2010
Learned through lectures from government officials, directors of NGOs, and business and labor leaders;
examined conditions in locale; proposed and presented development project.

Piedmont Virginia Community College   Charlottesville, VA   August 2007-May 2008
Major in Business Administration; PVCC Cumulative GPA 4.0

Honors

Warwick D. Johnston International Scholarship, spring 2006
Golden Key International Honour Society, 2005-Present
National Society for Collegiate Scholars, 2004-Present
Dean's List, 2003-Present

Experience

Philip Morris USA, Richmond, VA   Summer 2007
Information Systems IT Strategy & Planning Intern
- Researched and developed enterprise-wide strategy for retiring legacy computer systems
- Met with directors from the business to research and craft solutions for their problems
- Created a resource toolkit that employees could use when researching various IT topics
- Offered full-time employment upon graduation as a result of positive performance review

University of Virginia Conference Services, Charlottesville, VA   Summer 2006
Conference Assistant
- Handled the logistical housing operations for incoming seminar participants
- Worked with clients to assure satisfaction during stay at UVA
- Conference Assistant of the Month, June 2005

Coca-Cola Enterprises, Richmond, VA   Summer 2005
Warehouse Loader
- Built orders for various clients to be delivered to their stores

Wyndham Swim and Racquet Club, Glen Allen, VA   2002-2004
Office Assistant
- Answered phones and provided customer service to area residents

Activities

McIntire Information Technology Group   2005-Present
President
- Promoted the importance of IT knowledge and understanding for undergraduate students
- Coordinated yearly events, meetings, speeches, and seminars for group members

Virginia Alpine Ski Team, skied twice a week with the team   2004, 2006
Adult Learning Center, volunteer English tutor   Fall 2003

Skills

Languages: Fluent in Spanish, intermediate knowledge of French, elementary knowledge of Arabic and Chinese
Computer: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Visio, FrontPage, Project. Familiar with Java.

SAMPLE RESUME

Shelby Johnston
spj8s@virginia.edu
(434) 123-5647 (cell)
245 Maple Avenue Charlottesville, VA 22903

Objective	To obtain a full-time position in account management at an advertising agency.	
Education	**University of Virginia, McIntire School of Commerce** Candidate for Bachelor of Science in Commerce Concentrations in Marketing and Management, Cumulative GPA 3.3, Major GPA 3.26	May 2007
Activities	**PRESENTER, AAF National Student Advertising Competition** Created and presented an advertising campaign for Coca-Cola Classic, advanced to the national competition.	2006 - 2007
	ADVERTISING MANAGER, Corks & Curls Yearbook Create and manage the advertisement of the University's student-run yearbook publication with an advertising budget of $7,000 a year.	2003-Present
	ATHLETE, UVa Varsity Track and Field Team Full-scholarship athlete, 3-year letter earner, 15 hours a week commitment plus travel to 17 competitions a year. Recruited high school athletes in academic year.	2003-2007
	PROGRAM DIRECTOR, SNACK Co-founder and program director of SNACK, a volunteer program teaching underprivileged children about nutrition. Market and communicate with 50 volunteers.	2005-Present
	FACILITATOR, Multicultural Education Class Led discussions about societal issues, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism. Influenced greater acceptance and encourage discussion of issues.	2005-2007
	MEMBER, American Advertising Federation (AAF) Compete in AAF National Student Advertising Competition, won the regional competition and will advance to nationals. Create and present an advertising campaign.	2005-Present
	MEMBER, Alpha Delta Pi Sorority	2004-Present
Experience	**MARKETING INTERN, VAVi Sport & Social Club** San Diego, CA Analyzed, managed and implemented various sales strategies. Compiled weekly and monthly sales reports. Created a weekly newsletter sent out to 11,000 members.	Summer 2006
	EXTERN, Ogilvy & Mather New York, NY Shadowed an assistant account executive for a day. Observed the role of account management with in an advertising agency.	Jan 2007
	OWNER/INSTRUCTOR, Cooking Class Camp Houston/Dallas, TX Entrepreneur of a cooking class camp held for children ages 4-15 in one-week sessions during the summer. Instruct, plan and advertise for the camp. Average 50 attendees.	1993-Present
Academic Honors	**Dean's List** **Atlantic Coast Conference Honor Roll** **University of Virginia Scholar Athlete** Recognition for achieving at least a 3.3 GPA both semesters and/or overall GPA of 3.3 **University of Virginia Athletic Honor Roll** Awarded each semester for a 3.0 GPA or better	Spring 2004 2004-2006 2004-2006 2004-2007
Athletic Honors	**Indoor All-ACC Honors,** Silver Medalist in the High Jump	2003

SAMPLE RESUME

Outdoor NCAA Regional Qualifier, Sixth place   2004

GWENEVERE MICHAELS

Present Address:		*Permanent Address:*
1800 Jefferson Park Ave., Apt 200	804.221-6621 Cell	14 Chestnut Street
Charlottesville, VA 22904	gm2u@virginia.edu	Midlothian, VA 12345

EDUCATION: **University of Virginia, McIntire School of Commerce**   August 2004-Present
Charlottesville, VA

Master of Science in Accounting, May 2007; GPA 3.7

Bachelor of Science in Commerce, May 2006
Concentration in Accounting; UVa Cumulative GPA 3.6

George Washington University   August 2002-May 2004
Major in Business Administration; GPA 3.9   Washington, DC
Member of Beta Gamma Sigma and Beta Alpha Psi Honor Fraternities

Midlothian High School, International Baccalaureate Program   January 2002-May 2002
Study-abroad program in Europe with a focus on history and culture   Midlothian, VA

EXPERIENCE: **University of Virginia / Ernst & Young Your Master Plan Program**   Summer 2006 & 2007
Teaching Assistant   Charlottesville, VA
- Assisted in teaching over 70 students various accounting courses, including Intermediate I and II; explained accounting concepts and hosted exam preparation sessions
- Served as Senior Teaching Assistant for the 2007 summer, assisted with advanced accounting courses

Ernst & Young   Summer 2005
Audit Intern   Richmond, VA
- Prepared and tied servicing reports for Capital One's trusts
- Prepared Sarbanes-Oxley walkthroughs for major business processes at Hilb, Rogal, and Hamilton

University of Virginia, McIntire School of Commerce   August 2005-Present
Research Assistant   Charlottesville, VA
- Researched and compiled reviews of international accounting standards for pension accounting, accounting standards in China, and the factors and standards of pension fund valuation

Keiter, Stephens, Gary, Hurst & Shreaves, CPAs   Summer 2004
Accounting Intern   Richmond, VA
- Compiled handbook for company tax clients on the possible tax breaks for nonprofit businesses
- Prepared individual income tax returns

ACTIVITIES: **University of Virginia, Transfer Student Peer Advisor Program (TSPA)**   March 2005-Present
Tri-Chair   Charlottesville, VA
- Led 38 college students in mentoring incoming transfer students, organized training sessions and events
- Mentor 15 incoming transfer students on all aspects of student life and academics
- Compile a proposal to overhaul the TSPA program

University of Virginia, Beta Alpha Psi Honor Fraternity   August 2005-Present
Service Chair   Charlottesville, VA
- Co-chaired a charity run in memory of a UVA faculty member; all proceeds donated to a student scholarship fund in her name
- Managed all logistics and financial operations of the race

Burnley-Moran Elementary School   September 2004-May 2005
Volunteer   Charlottesville, VA
- Taught math to a class of 16 kindergarten students twice a week

- Taught reading, writing, and spelling to third graders twice a week

SAMPLE RESUME

Marley Carter

npb9t@virginia.edu
(434) 987-2222

Current Address:
123 Main Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Permanent Address:
456 Fort Street
Atlanta, GA 30322

EDUCATION

University of Virginia   Charlottesville, VA
McIntire School of Commerce, M.S. in Commerce, expected August 2009
Bachelor of Arts, May 2008
German and Philosophy double-major, Urban and Environmental Planning minor, Cumulative GPA 3.113
Attended New York Investment Banking Trip through McIntire Commerce School, January 2007.

The Westminster Schools   Atlanta, GA
Diploma May 2004, SAT: 1430: 740 Math, 690 Verbal. GPA: 94, Top 20% of class
Selected for "Running through History" program, experiencing history across nine European countries, Summer 2003.

The Chewonki Foundation Maine Coast Semester   Wiscasset, ME
Selected for a residential academic program in Wiscasset, Maine; a rigorous, environmentally focused experience while living and working in an organic, sustainable farm community. German language independent study at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, with German professors/students one night a week. Fall 2002.

The American International School   Vienna, Austria
Lived abroad four years while attending school with students from 43 different countries, 1996-2000.
Attended Jane Goodall's "Roots and Shoots" environmental program, Anzere, Switzerland, 1998.

HONORS

The Cum Laude Society – 2004
German Language Award – 2000, 2004
Discovery Leader (Environmental awareness and student team-building) – 2003-2004
Emilie Warren Morgan Memorial Scholarship – for scholastic achievement, community service, positive attitude, 2002.

ACTIVITIES

University of Virginia Honor Committee   Charlottesville, VA
Educator: Facilitated understanding of the Honor System with incoming students; served as a liaison between the University community and the Honor Committee, 2006-2007.

University of Virginia Dance Marathon   Charlottesville, VA
Executive Board, Family Committee Co-Chair: Assisted in the recruitment and involvement of Charlottesville community families to raise money for the U.Va. Children's Hospital through The Miracle Network. Raised a quarter of a million dollars in 2005. Time commitment approximately five hours per week. 2006-2007

Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority
Alumni Relations Chair: Promoted improved communications and relations with alumni, organized event, coordinating with over 150 alumni. 2005-2006.

EXPERIENCE

The American Council on Germany   New York City, NY
Intern: Researched candidates for the Young Leaders program, worked and attended special events to foster the building of strong relationships between German and American business and government leaders, July-August 2007.

Tibi, LLC   New York City, NY
Public Relations and Sales: Interned as an assistant for a fast-growing fashion and design company, May-August 2007.

The Sea Island Company   Sea Island, GA
Junior Staff: Planned and organized children's activities while building relationships between counselors, families, and children. Promoted second summer from counselor to group leader. Full summers 2005, 2006; New Years 2004, 2005; Thanksgiving 2006.

Tao Jones, LLC Bar and Grill   Charlottesville, VA
Waitress: Provided a quality dining experience through exceptional customer service. Worked approximately fifteen hours per week, 2006-2007.

University of Virginia   Charlottesville, VA
Conservation Advocate: Promoted recycling and sustainability by reaching out to the university community and bringing recycling awareness to students as a dorm liaison. Time commitment about four hours per week, 2004-2005.

SKILLS, &
INTERESTS
Comprehensive knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.
Fluent in both written and spoken German. Interested in architecture, photography, community service.

SAMPLE REFERENCE SHEET

Mark Donahue

mld7h@virginia.edu

Current Address: 608 Preston Place, Charlottesville, VA 22903 (434) 977-1234

Permanent Address: 7839 King Solomon Drive Annandale, VA 22003 (703) 978-3669

REFERENCES

Dr. Margaret McGonagall
Professor of Finance
University of Virginia, McIntire School of Commerce
P.O. Box 400173
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 924-1234
mmcgonagall@virginia.edu

Mr. Donald Weasley
Manager
American Eagle Outfitters
234 Chain Bridge Road
McLean, VA 22003
(703) 223-6789
dweasley@aeo.com

Mr. Martin Malfoy
Volunteer Coordinator
Madison House, University of Virginia
170 Rugby Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 293-4949
mmalfoy@virginia.edu

Center for Engineering Career Development
U.Va. School of Engineering and Applied Science

RESUMES
Everything You Need to Know

Purpose

A resume is a brief, concise document that presents, and effectively sells, your most relevant and positive credentials for employment, admission to graduate school, consideration for a scholarship or fellowship, or other professional purpose.

An employer will usually spend 15 to 20 seconds reviewing your resume, so the content of your resume must be clear, concise, and targeted to the type of job for which you are applying.

Preparation

One-page resumes are preferred for most entry-level positions. Two-page resumes are acceptable if the information on both pages demonstrates the skills and/or experience relevant to your profession. Resumes should highlight skills and accomplishments that meet employer qualifications, excluding irrelevant information and experiences. Well-designed resumes will be visually appealing and free from any spelling, typographical, punctuation, or grammatical errors. All resumes should be written concisely in an organized format that presents the most important information first.

Employers who read individual resumes spend very little time on each resume-in most cases, only twenty to thirty seconds. Many large employers are now using optical scanning machines and various software programs to assist them with this initial review.

If your resume has a typo or grammatical error, it will probably jump off the page to an employer, and this is a way to weed you out of a candidate pool. Your resume may be the only chance you get to make an impression, so make it a good one.

Constructing Your Resume

Categories of information you include on your resume should provide answers to these questions:

Contact information

Begin your resume with your name by capitalizing and using bold type.
- Include street address, city, state, and zip code.
- Include a phone number(s) where you can be reached
- Include your e-mail address

Career/Job Objective

The purpose of the objective statement is to inform the employer of your career goal and targeted interests. The statement should describe the focus of your job search. If your resume is broader, relay the most relevant objective in an accompanying cover letter. A good objective includes type and/or level of position, type and style of organization, and skills/qualifications.

A career/job objective is advantageous when:

- You want to specify your interests and where you would fit in the organization.
- You want to present the impression of a focused, self-confident person.

A career/job objective is not advantageous when it is:

- Too broad and meaningless, reflecting indecision.
- Too exclusive, eliminating you from jobs for which you might be considered.

Qualifications or Experience Summary
A summary of qualifications can condense an extensive background by emphasizing experiences and accomplishments in brief keyword phrases. The qualifications summary is accomplishment-oriented and provides an overview of your work experience. It can also serve to summarize relevant academic, volunteer and leadership experience for those who have limited work experience. A summary is most appropriate for someone with substantial experience, for someone who is changing careers and wants to demonstrate transferable skills, or for someone with a varied background.

Education
If your education relates to your objective and is within the past three years, it should be the first section. If not, education should follow the work experience section of your resume.
In reverse-chronological order, this section includes the schools you have attended, dates of graduation or dates of attendance, as well as degrees sought or completed. Other information that might be included: related coursework, scholarships and honors, percentage of college expenses earned by you, and special projects (e.g. research projects, teaching).

- Start with your most recent degree or the program in which you are currently enrolled. List other degrees or relevant education in reverse chronological order.
- Highlight your degree by using bold type or capital letters.
- If the degree is relevant to your job objective, begin with degree and emphasis, followed by university, location of university, and date of graduation or anticipated date of graduation.
- If degree/program is not directly related to current job objective, begin with the university, followed by the location, degree and emphasis, and graduation date.
- If you are within two semesters of graduation, do not use "expected" or "anticipated" with year of graduation.
- Should I include my GPA? If you are uncertain about including your GPA, ask a Career Services advisor for recommendations based on your individual circumstances.

Educational Highlights
This section is most effective when you have experiences from your education that are impressive and/or directly relate to your objective. Adding this section is useful when you have developed skills and specific knowledge through education and related activities rather than work experience. This section can be used to highlight coursework, research, study abroad experience, leadership and student activities that complements your objective.
- Consider listing relevant coursework under the appropriate degree.
- An alternative to highlighting courses is to list the skills and knowledge acquired through
- important courses and research. Example:
- You may want to describe thesis, research or design projects.

Employment Experience (Chronological)
- Begin with your current/most recent position and work backward, chronologically.
- Devote more space to recent employment.
- If your job titles relate to your current job objective, start each position description with job titles. If not, begin with the organization.
- Follow job title and organizational information with the organization's city and state.
- Use the first and last month and year to describe dates of employment.
- Describe the last three to five positions in detail. Summarize earlier positions unless relevant to your objective. Within each listed position, stress the major accomplishments and responsibilities that demonstrate your competency

Employment Experience (Functional)
- Use two to four sections to summarize each area of functional skill or expertise.
- Develop the functional skill headings based on the skills you want to market to employers
- and/or that are most related to your targeted objective.
- Describe your skills in short phrases and place under the appropriate functional skill categories.
- Rank the phrases within each category and place the most important skill or accomplishment first.
- Do not identify employers within functional skills sections.

- List a brief history of your actual work experience at the end of the section, giving job title,
- employer and dates. If you have had no work experience or a very spotty work record, leave out the employment section entirely or summarize the nature of your jobs without providing specific details. If you do this, be prepared to discuss your specific jobs in more detail at the job interview.

- Both chronological and functional resumes must be succinct, emphasizing your experience and accomplishments. Resumes are often your first introduction to the employer and dramatically impact the screening process. Invest the time to create an excellent marketing tool - your resume - to increase job opportunities and career advancement.

Types of Resumes
Information related to skills and experiences can be presented in a chronological format, a functional format, or a combination of the two. Each format has its advantages and disadvantages. To select the type that best supports your strategy, review the following descriptive information and resume samples.

Chronological Resume
In the chronological resume, job history is organized chronologically with the most recent job listed first. Job titles and employers are emphasized and duties and accomplishments are described in detail. A chronological resume is easy to read, and can highlight career growth. It is suited to those whose career goals are clearly defined and whose job objectives are aligned with their work history.

Functional Resume
 In a functional resume, skills and accomplishments developed through work, academic, and community experiences are highlighted. Your skills and potential can be stressed and lack of experience or possible gaps in work history de-emphasized.

Resume Checklist
The following checklist has been designed to assist you in writing your resume. This checklist reflects the expertise of the Career Center staff developed through critiquing thousands of resumes, discussing selection criteria with numerous employers, and gathering input from a wide range of career professionals.

APPEARANCE
- Is it inviting and easy to read; not too much information uses appropriate font styles and font sizes (10-14 pts.)
- Incorporates enough white space between sections to facilitate skimming centers text; adequate margins creates visual impact using bullets, boldface, underlining, italics, and font sizes to emphasize key words (for scannable resumes, use boldface only)
- Printed on high quality (16-25 lb.) bond paper print is letter quality

ORGANIZATION AND FORMAT
- appropriate format includes keyword phrases of profession
- presents strongest qualifications first
- appropriate length: I page for every 6-10 years of work experience

WRITING STYLE
- begins sentences or phrases with powerful action verbs
- short paragraphs mostly under five lines; short sentences
- brief, succinct language; no unnecessary words
- absolutely free from grammatical, spelling, punctuation, usage, and typographical errors

CONTENT
Contact Information
- address, current and permanent (if necessary)
- telephone number(s) where you can be reached 9-5

Objective

(Optional for chronological resume. Required for functional resume.)
- briefly indicates the sort of position, title, and possible area of specialization sought
- for management or supervisory positions, indicates level of responsibility sought
- language is specific, employer centered not self-centered; avoids broad or vague statements

Summary of Skills, Accomplishments, or Expertise

- identifies 3-6 key achievements that support the objective
- summarizes relevant work experience and accomplishments that support the objective

Education and Training

- Highest level of attainment is listed first; work from most current degree backward degree in progress or most recently completed degree include type of degree, name of university, location of university, date of graduation or anticipated date list of other degrees, relevant higher education coursework, continuing professional education or training
- courses, and study abroad
- major, minor, or areas of concentration
- omit high school if you have completed more than two years of college unless referencing impressive honors or relevant extracurricular activities
- relevant courses, papers, projects; include paper or project titles
- GPA, honors, awards, scholarships
- percentage of educational expenses earned

Employment Experience And or Related Projects

- Include all paid, volunteer, intern, or cooperative education experiences that are relevant to your objective.
- Start with most recent experience if using chronological format.
- title held, organization name, city, state, or country location (if not U.S.A.)
- dates position held; if several positions for one employer, list employer once responsibilities listed in order of each item's relative value to the future employer; indicate transferable skills and adaptive abilities used on the job
- accomplishments on your job; what problems did you face? What solutions did you find?
- contributions to the organization, i.e., ways your work helped increase profit, membership publicity, funding, motivation, efficiency, productivity, quality; saved time or money; improved programs, management, communication, information flow etc.
- quantitative or qualitative indicators that describe the results of your contributions or accomplishments, i.e., "increased sales by $50,000"; "reduced staff turnover by 25%"; "significantly improved staff ability to access
- data"
- learning that took place on the job that is relevant to your job objective (optional) describe accomplishments in jargon of the field

Skills

- computer skills: software applications, languages, hardware, operating systems
- language skills: specific level of fluency and ability to read and write as "basic," "intermediate," or "advanced"
- other

TECHNICAL SKILLS

- Techies may want to place the skills section after the job objective and before the "Experience" section. But there are exceptions. If you're just starting out, you may want to place a greater emphasis on education and internship and then consider placing the list below the experience section or adding other elements, such as communication abilities and foreign languages, to the skills section.
- Here are examples of one job seeker's technical skills section:

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Languages: *Java, XML, C, C++, JavaScript, SQL, HTML, UML.*
Tools: *Borland JBuilder, Sun ONE Studio (Forte), Macromedia Dreamweaver MX, Rational Rose, UltraEdit-32, Borland CBuilder, Oracle SQL Plus.*
Operating Systems: *Windows (XP, 2000, NT), IBM OS/2 2.0, HP-UX 9.0, DEC VMS 4.1, Unix (Linux and Sun Solaris).*

List Format -- Gives Employers a Quick Overview
TECHNICAL SKILLS

Languages	Tools	Operating Systems
Java	Borland JBuilder	Windows (XP, 2000, NT)
XML	Sun ONE Studio (Forte)	IBM OS/2 2.0
C	Macromedia Dreamweaver MX	HP-UX 9.0
C++	Rational Rose	DEC VMS 4.1
JavaScript	UltraEdit-32	Unix (Linux and Sun Solaris)
SQL	Borland CBuilder	
HTML	Oracle SQL Plus	
UML		

List Format with Years of Experience -- Shows Depth
TECHNICAL SKILLS

Web Technologies	Dreamweaver, JavaScript, HTML	1-3 years
Languages	Java, C, C++, UML	1-2 years

List Format with Years of Experience and Skill Level -- More Detail
An alternative is to denote only the years of experience.
TECHNICAL SKILLS

Languages	Years' Experience	Skill Level
Java	6	Expert
XML	3	Intermediate
C	6	Expert
C++	4	Intermediate
JavaScript	6	Expert
SQL	4	Intermediate
HTML	6	Intermediate
UML	2	Novice

©2007 Monster

Extracurricular Activities, Community Service, Professional Associations

- list of significant positions of responsibility; include title, name of organization or team, dates leadership roles, achievements, and transferable skills that are relevant

Additional Resume Categories

To add relevant information to your resume that focuses on special knowledge or skills, consider the following resume headings:

RELATED PROJECTS	EDUCATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS	SKILLS
PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS	HONORS	QUALIFICATIONS
TECHNICAL SKILLS	TRAVEL	SUMMARY PRESENTATIONS
INTERNSHIP	LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES	PUBLICATIONS
EXPERIENCE ASSETS	SCHOLARSHIPS	REFERENCES
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	LANGUAGES	TRAINING
COOPERATIVE EDUCATION	INTERESTS	VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Proofread, Proofread, Proofread!

Does your resume:
- Include only relevant information?
- Use action verbs?
- Stress skills and accomplishments over duties?
- Make qualifications evident?
- Include specific info: figures, dates, numbers?
- Support your purpose/objective?

Evaluate Appearance
- Attractive layout?
- Headings highlighted?
- White space?
- Style appropriate?
- Font size readable?
- Length appropriate?
- Important items stand out through spacing and/or highlighting?
- Consistent placement of information (e.g. dates)?

KEY PHRASES
Resume Phrases and Words
The following phrases and words may help with organizing your resume statements. They convey involvement and accomplishments and make your resume more readable and effective.

Interaction with…
Established..
Edited…
Initiated…
Managed…
Maintained…
Instrumental in…
Remained as…
Honored as…
Recommendations accepted by…
Adept at…
Assisted with…
Coordinated…
Delegated…
Directed…
Developed…
Consulted..
Budgeted…
Evaluated…
Installed…
Instructed…
Negotiated…
Planned…
Presented…
Proven track record in…
More than [ ] years experience…
Successful in/at…
Knowledge of/experienced as…
Initially employed…
Proficient/competent at…
Sales quota accountability…
Served/Operated as…
Direct/Indirect control…
Assigned to…
Provided technical assistance…
…on an ongoing/regular basis……
Worked closely with...

Acted as liaison for/between…
Formulated…
Handled…
Implemented…
Assigned territory consisting of…
Promoted to/from…
Recipient of…
Innovation resulted in…
…amounting to a total savings of…
Administered…
Analyzed/Assessed…
Arranged…
Counseled…
Conducted…
Demonstrated…
Advised…
Delivered…
Drafted…
Gathered…
Improved…
Investigated…
Organized…
Performed…
Recommended…
Experience involved/included…
Expertise and demonstrated skills…
Experienced in all facets/phases…
Extensive training/involvement…
Specialize in…
Temporarily assigned to…
Reported directly to…
        In charge of…
Familiar with…
Contracted/Subcontracted…
Acted/Functioned as…
to ensure maximum/optimum…
        Resulted in...

Action Verbs By Skill Category Communicative

Tip: Circle all of the words relevant to your experiences, and then use them in your resume!

address	enlist	present
arbitrate	express	promote
arrange	follow-up	publicize
author	formulate	publish
brief	influence	question
communicate	inform	read
compose	interpret	reconcile
confront	interview	recruit
contact	lecture	refer
convince	market	report
correspond	mediate	rewrite
describe	meet	speak
develop	moderate	suggest
direct	motivate	summarize
document	negotiate	talk
draft	network	translate
edit	persuade	write

Creative

	establish	pilot
act	execute	pioneer
broaden	explore	plan
compose	fashion	redesign
conceive	forge	rehearse remodel
conceptualize	found	renovate
conduct	illustrate	replace
create	imagine	revitalize
design	improvise	shape
develop	institute	sketch
direct	integrate	spearhead
discover	introduce	start
draft	invent	stimulate
dramatize	market	strategize
draw up	modernize	transform
entertain	originate	
	perform	

Financial

account for	budget	market
adjust	calculate	monitor
administer	compute	plan
allocate	control	procure
analyze	develop	project
appraise	estimate	purchase
audit	finance	reconcile
balance	forecast	research
buy	manage	transfer

Helping

advise	encourage	orient
advocated	enlist	predict
aided	ensure	prescribe
anticipated	evaluate	protect
assessed	expedite	provide
assisted	facilitate	reconcile
care for	familiarize	rectify
clarify	forecast	refer
coach	foster	rehabilitate
counsel	guide	represent
demonstrate	handle	serve
diagnose	harmonize	support
educate	moderate	utilize
enable	observe	volunteer

Management

administer	dispatch	prioritize
account for	dispense	produce
analyze	employ	propose
appoint	evaluate	protect
approve	execute	realize
assign	formulate	recommend
assume	handle	recruit
attain	head	regulate
chair	hire	review
choose	leverage	revitalize
contract	manage	reward
consolidate	maintain	save
consult	orchestrate	set goals
decide	order	schedule
delegate	organize	supervise
determine	oversee	terminate
develop	plan	unify
devote	perfect	withdraw
direct	preserve	

Organizational

approve
arrange
catalogue
classify
collaborate
collect
compile
conserve
consolidate
cut
diagram
dispatch
distribute
enlist
execute
expedite
extract
generate

identify
implement
inspect
integrate
interface with
join
list
log
monitor
operate
organize
pinpoint
prepare
prioritize
process
record
reshape
reorganize

retrieve
revamp
revise
schedule
screen
set up
shape
specialize
specify
streamline
stretch
substitute
systematize
tabulate
target
update
validate

Research

acquire
amplify
analyze
calculate
chart
clarify
collect
compare
conduct
critique
diagnose
design

determine
disprove
evaluate
examine
extract
formulate
identify
inspect
interpret
interview
investigate
locate

modify
organize
process
review
research
study
summarize
survey
systematize
test
trouble-shoot

Results

achieve
accelerate
accomplish
add
advance
attain
augment
award
complete
compound
contribute
decrease
double
effect
eliminate
enlarge
establish

exceed
excel
expand
extend
fortify
improve
increase
initiate
introduce
launch
lower costs
map
maximize
measure
obtain
pioneer
prove

reduce
re-establish
resolve
restore
selected as
stabilize
standardize
succeed
transform
trim
triple
validate
widen
won

Teaching

accept	educate	modify
adapt	elaborate	motivate
advise	elicit	observe
actively	emphasize	organize
analyzes	enable	persuade
apply	encourage	ponder
appraise	evaluate	postulate
assess	excite	praise
assign	explain	provoke
attend	explore	question
calm	facilitate	reinforce
categorize	focus	rephrase
challenge	generate	reward
choose	guide	set goals
clarify	hypothesize	set standards
coach	identify	simplify
command	implement	solicit
communicate	incorporate	speculate
compliment	indicate	state
consider	infer	stimulate
cooperate	inform	structure
coordinate	initiate	synthesize
correct	inquire	systematize
define	instruct	teach
demonstrate	interact	tell
designate	integrate	thank
develop	investigate	theorize
direct	judge	train
discipline	listen	tutor
doubt	model	

Technical

activate	exhibit	sell
assemble	fabricate	service
began	install	solve
build	maintain	supply
calculate	navigate	train
compute	operate	upgrade
construct	overhaul	
contrive	participate	
convert	program	
deliver	rehabilitate	
design	remodel	
detect	repair	
devise	resolve	
display	retrieve	
engineer	screen	

(Monstertrak, 2007)

.

SHELLY JEFFERSON

sj@virginia.edu
1 Street, Vienna, VA 22205
743.600. 4444

OBJECTIVE

To obtain a position which would utilize my highly valued problem solving and analytical abilities, excellent communication skills, proven leadership, mature decision making and highly effective team building skills.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, School of Engineering and Applied Science *Charlottesville, VA*

ME in Systems Engineering, **GPA: 3.9** August 2000 - May 2005
BS in Systems Engineering with Distinction, Focus in Management Systems, GPA: 3.9
Minor in Engineering Business
- Thesis – An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Decision Making by EPA's Superfund Program
- Best Paper Award – IEEE Systems and Information Engineering Design Symposium, April 2004
- Dean's List – Fall 2000, Spring 2002, Fall 2002, Spring 2003

EXPERIENCE
July 2005 - present

ABC CONSULTING *Vienna, VA*

Client – MLI, New York, NY
- Served as Communications Lead, supporting deployment planning and managing the day-to-day operations of the Program Management Office.
- Managed a team of three, responsible for project and portfolio management, change request management, issue/risk management, resource management, financial analysis, and executive, program, and end-user communications.

Client – CPP, San Francisco, CA
- Served as a Business Analyst Lead, managing the work products of three resources within the Enterprise Application Integration group for requirements elicitation, use case elaboration, and interface specification of two custom development projects.
- Completed cost and time estimations, managed issues, and tracked progress of analysis and development efforts.
- Sold over $1.2M in add-on sales for work on the account including three resources for requirements gathering and technical design.

Client – Kodak, Rochester, NY
- Analyzed data for Magneto-optical crystals and statistical reliability modelling of optical Fibers.
- Evaluated million dollar problems affecting optical fiber connectors in communication systems.
- Recommended solutions on how to improve the quality of optical fiber connectors.
- Managed a team of four as Training Lead in developing customer support and finance related training documentation for a custom developed system. Facilitated and taught training sessions to clients. Provided on-going support to clients prior to launch.
- Served as a Business Analyst during the Inception and Elaboration phases of a digital media delivery project utilizing the Rational Unified Process, facilitating requirements gathering sessions and generating use cases.

Client – Gladstone, Atlanta, GA
- Served as a Business Analyst during the Inception phase of a billing system implementation, developing and validating current and future state process flows.
- Authored and executed system test cases, documented testing results, and communicated defect analysis reports to the development team and project sponsors.

CERTIFICATIONS AND AFFILIATIONS
- Certified Apprentice Engagement Manager, ABC Consulting *May 2007 – present*
- Certified Level 1 Software Engineer, ABC Consulting *December 2006 – present*
- Member, Omega Rho International Honor Society *August 2003 – present*
- Member, Phi Eta Sigma, National Honor Society *August 2001 – present*
- Member, National Society of Collegiate Scholars *August 2001 – present*

LEADERSHIP
- Co-Chair, Herndon Community Service Team, ABC Consulting *December 2006 – present*
- Editor in Chief, TME News to Peruse Newsletter, ABC Consulting *August 2006 – present*

SKILLS

PROFICIENT IN MICROSOFT OFFICE AND MICROCAL ORIGIN

CHRISTOPHER CAVALIER
@virginia.edu

School Address: Permanent Address

OBJECTIVE

To obtain a position within a related field of Electrical Engineering utilizing my strong analytical abilities and interest in the field.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCE   Charlottesville, VA
B.S Electrical Engineering, concentration in controls: *Cumulative GPA: 3.0 Major GPA: 3.4*   May 2009
Related Coursework: Electronics, Computer Architecture, Power System Fundamentals, Electromagnetic Fields, Signals and Systems I & II, Linear Control Systems, Computer Networks, Electrical Engineering Projects

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

UVA CENTER FOR APPLIED BIOMECHANICS   Charlottesville, VA
Project Assistant/Summer Intern,   Summer 2007– May 2009
  ➢ Researched magneto-rheological fluids and their effectiveness in high impact force dampers and decelerators.
  ➢ Used research knowledge and principles taught in ECE classes to design an electromagnet to house and manipulate the MR fluid to intricate specifications

US NAVAL RESEARCH LAB, CENTER FOR SPACE TECHNOLOGY   Washington D.C
Intern   Winter 2008
  ➢ Explored the lab; exposure to cutting edge research and development.
  ➢ Worked with a team that established the longest free-space laser communication link over the Chesapeake Bay Detachment.

UVA AUTO SAFETY LABORATORY (*Bio-Impact Mechanics/Aerospace Engineering lab*),   Charlottesville, VA
Project Assistant/Summer Intern,   Summer 2006
  ➢ Managed and aided in the modeling and conduction of the Fluid Percussion Brain Injury Project in relevance to non-lethal weapons/projectiles.
  ➢ Modeled an impact interface using a high impact ultra low friction piston/cylinder for the projectile to the brain simulator.
  ➢ Performed preliminary analysis of brain impact data.
  ➢ Installed and configured project related computer hardware for testing and data collection

OTHER EXPERIENCE

  ▪ **Private Tutor,** French, Biology, and Mathematics (Algebra/Geometry/Calculus)   2005-present
  ▪ **Volunteer**, INOVA Mount Vernon Hospital   2005-2008
  ▪ **Volunteer**, Yoo's Martial Arts   2004-2008

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Highly skilled in Excel, MS Office applications; experienced in Java; familiar with Visio, Access, SQL, php, html

LEADERSHIP

UVa Mentoring – Executive Board, President, Founder, Currently initiating university-wide mentoring program for freshman. Responsible for piloting the program advertising, training mentors, and recruiting mentees.
Tau Beta Pi (Engineering Honor Society) – Executive Board, Social Chair
Engineering Mentoring, Act as a mentor for a younger student. Develop worksheet curriculum for goal setting and progress assessment.
                        Madison House Volunteering – Buford Middle School; Charlottesville, VA

Frank A. Ichel

9709 Rambling Ridge Court   Fairfax Station, VA 22039   703-622-4669   FrankIchel@gmail.com

EDUCATION

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
Bachelor of Science, Chemical Engineering   Dec. 2008
Rodman Scholar
* Thesis research and technical report analyzing hydrogen production energy efficiency
* Energy Outlook and Technical Options: Proposed energy outlook scenarios for 2030

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology   Alexandria, VA
Student Government Class President (2000-2001), Academic Honors, Varsity Tennis Team   2000–2004

WORK EXPERIENCE

ExxonMobil Research and Engineering   *Fairfax, VA*
Process Engineering Division Intern, Distillation & Gas Processes Section   Summer 2007
* Created spray nozzle header design algorithm to optimize liquid distribution in fractionation towers to improve efficiency and reduce maintenance costs
* Constructed Excel tool to automate design algorithms to be used by process designers and software developer, to serve as foundation for proprietary design software (PEGASYS) distributed to EMRE engineers globally
* Analyzed experimental nozzle data, correlating drop-size distribution and pressure-drop to specify nozzle type
* Presented the tool to Distillation Section and incorporated user feedback
* Utilized tool to design spray nozzle headers for two columns in the Joliet Refinery
* Collaborated with software developer and project manager as a technical consultant during PEGASYS testing

ExxonMobil Research and Engineering   Fairfax, VA
Projects Division Intern, Process Design Section   Summer 2006
* Automated design of 3-Phase Separator Drums and Blowdown Drums in several Excel tools
* Specified Sour Water Stripper Feed Drum design in technical consultation with Chalmette Refinery
* Delivered validated Excel spreadsheet models to software developers to serve as foundation for PEGASYS

College Preparation Tutoring   Fairfax, VA
Private SAT and High School Prep Services   2003–2005

George Mason University – Krasnow Institute   Fairfax, VA
Research Mentorship   2003–2004
* Applied computational models of population dynamics to social science research (Complexity)

SKILLS / INTERESTS

Skills: AspenPlus, Laboratory Experience with H_2 Fuel Cell, Profitability Analysis
         Very Proficient in Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Power-Point, and Microsoft Word

Interests: Energy Options and Environmental Sustainability, Ethics, Economics, Sports, Weight Lifting

UVA Poker Club
Co-Founder, Poker Tournament Director   *2004–2006*
* Organized and supervised ~50 entrants weekly in Wahoo's Series of Poker tournaments

UVA Green Dining
Student Activist   *2008*
* Led Sustainable Community Design Team in developing a recycling strategy to compost used take out boxes
* Aligned private interests and University Recycling to gain approval for On Grounds composting

DAVID DARDEN

100 Engineer's Way   Home: 434-982-3131
P.O. Box 30000   Work: 434-924-2424
Charlottesville, VA 22904   bbbb@virginia.edu

OBJECTIVE
Mechanical or product development engineering position working on designing and testing cardiac related medical devices.

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS
Graduate researcher with experience designing and prototyping cardiac assist devices. Proven ability to work well within cross-functional teams. A talent for creative and simple solutions to challenging engineering problems. Some specific skills include:

- Strong analytical and problem solving ability
- Able to create and work from engineering models and CAD drawings (SolidWorks, Catia, and PRO/E)
- Knowledge of manufacturing processes such as machining, casting, molding, etc.
- Excellent technical writing and documentation skills using the Microsoft suite

EDUCATION
Masters Degree in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA (Expected May 08)   GPA 3.8
- Thesis work focused on the mechanical design of a magnetically suspended, axial flow, artificial heart pump
- Designed a test rig to validate CFD model predictions and test the fluid components of a left ventricular assist device

Bachelor Degree in Mechanical Engineering Program
Brigham Young University, Provo, UT (Apr 06)   GPA 3.6
- Solid background in mechanical design and analysis as well as sound understanding of basic electrical and civil engineering principles
- Courses completed in advanced CAD modeling, composites, materials science, machine design, and instrumentation

EXPERIENCE
University of Virginia, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department
Teaching Assistant (Jan 07-May 07)
- Developed a deep understanding of mechanics of materials
- Refined skills in communicating engineering concepts through teaching and tutoring

Brigham Young University, Physics Department
Physics Demo Area Assistant (Apr 03-Apr 06)
- Gained extensive hands on experience with modeling physical phenomenon from eddy current production to thin film interactions and more
- Designed and built multiple prototypes employing basic manufacturing techniques such as milling, turning, etc.

Team Lead (Senior Design Project, Sept 05-Apr 06)

- Strong leadership and organization skills developed
- Insight gained into carrying products from conception to production

Erin Engineer

Current Address – 120 Engineers Way, Charlottesville, VA 22903
Permanent Address – 127 Springs Circle, Fairfax, VA 20175
eeeee@virginia.edu   **U.S. Citizen**

EDUCATION

University of Virginia – School of Engineering and Applied Science – Cumulative GPA 3.581   Graduation Date: May 2010
- Bachelor of Science: Electrical Engineering – Major GPA 3.715
- Bachelor of Science: Computer Engineering – Major GPA 3.628

RELEVANT COURSEWORK

- Advanced Digital Design
- Advanced Software Development
- Computer Design Organization
- Operating Systems
- Computer Networks
- Analog Integrated Circuits
- Computer Architecture
- Electronics I and II
- Signals and Systems I and II
- Electromagnetic Fields
- Solid State Devices
- Data Representation
- Digital Logic Design
- Software Development Methods

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

The Boeing Company, El Segundo, CA   June – August 2009
Level-Entry Systems Engineer for Mobile Satellite Ventures (MSV) Program
- Developed XML/Schema files and documented requirements for an Interface Control Document (ICD)
- Learned industrial engineering concepts and tools to understand IDEF0 and sequence diagrams, to use company specified tools, to attend meetings, and to aid group in developing ICD's to meet customer's specifications
- Developed sequence diagrams, spreadsheets, and documents for various aspects of satellite network system
- Worked under Jonathan Fish

Naval Surface Warfare Center at Carderock Division, Carderock, MD   June – August 2008
Technical Aid Specialist for engineers and scientists
- Used OrCAD software to design and implement instrumental designs for GPS system
- Programmed tidbits of codes to communicate with serial communication ports (Rabbit3k microcontroller)
- Worked under Dave Bochinski and John Maurer

RELATED PROJECTS

University of Virginia Senior Thesis Project   Fall 2008 –
- Designing, building, and testing an analog and digital control systems for UVa's ROMAC project   Spring 2009
- Control system designed to ensure proper suspension of impeller in magnetic bearings of left ventricular assist device (LVAD) prototype

Analog Integrated Circuits Class Project: A/D Converter
- Designed and simulated an analog-to-digital converter to meet frequency and input distortion constraints   Spring 2008
using Cadence under UNIX environment

Electronics II: Operational Amplifier
- Designed, simulated, and built an operational amplifier using transistors (MOSFETs and BJTs)   Fall 2007

Electronics I: Electronic Temperature Sensor
- Designed, simulated and built a diode-based temperature sensor. Exposed to the PSpise for simulation and   Spring 2006
lab equipments (i.e. oscilloscope) for experimentation.

Software Development Methods Project
- Implemented and programmed software that serves as an interface for security cameras. It is a user-friendly   Fall 2005
software that controls the camera's movement (pan, tilt, and zoom)

COMPUTER SKILLS

Languages and Software:	- Java, C/C++, XML, HTML, VHDL, x86 Assembly
	- Eclipse, MathCAD, MATLAB, OrCAD, Cadence Tools, PADS, PSpise, FPGA Advantage, Quartus II, Microsoft Office
Platforms:	- Windows NT/98/2000/XP Professional, Linux/Unix

LEADERSHIP, HONORS AND ACTIVITIES

Vice President, Deafness Education & Awareness for all Students (DEAFS)	Fall 2007 – present
Treasurer, Deafness Education & Awareness for all Students (DEAFS)	Fall 2006 – Spring 2008
Deafness Education & Awareness for all Students (DEAFS)	Fall 2005 – present
Member of Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc. (IEEE)	Fall 2007 – present
National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS)	Fall 2005 – present

DANIEL JEFFERSON, PH.D.

Email: djeffersonn@virginia.edu

Office: Department of Biomedical Engineering, University of Virginia   *(434) 924-4444*
Residence: 4793 Wesley Chapel Road, Richmond, VA 22301   *(804) 234-4231 cell*

OBJECTIVE/SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

To obtain a research scientist position that utilizes cell biology approaches to engineering design with an emphasis on musculoskeletal tissue interaction with biomaterials.
- Expert at fabrication and characterization of biomaterial structures
- Skilled in cell biology techniques
- Knowledge of procedures related to filing patents

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, DEPARTMENT OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING   Charlottesville, VA
Doctor of Philosophy in Biomedical Engineering   2008
Dissertation Title: Sintered Poly[*bis*(amino acid ester)phosphazene] Microspheres Imbued with Poly(L-lactide) Nanofibers: Biomimetic Scaffolds for Bone Tissue Engineering

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, DEPARTMENT OF CHEMICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING, Norman, OK
Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering with special distinction   2003

FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, DEPARTMENT OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING   Charlottesville, VA
NIAMS, NIH Sponsored NRSA T32 Training Fellowship   2009

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, DEPARTMENT OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING   Charlottesville, VA
Postdoctoral Fellow   2009
- Construct model substrates from poly(methyl methacrylate)
- Investigate how focal adhesion assembly is affected by the physical properties of a substrate
- Investigate how signaling cascades are affected by the physical properties of a substrate
- Monitor how cell migration is affected by the physical properties of a substrate

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, DEPARTMENT OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING   Charlottesville, VA
Graduate Research Assistant   2003 - 2008
- Synthesize polyphosphazenes
- Fabricate composite nanofiber/microsphere scaffolds
- Characterize physicochemical properties of scaffolds and polyphosphazenes
- Assay osteoblast phenotype progression
- Assay osteoblast transcription factor activity

PATENTS

1. **Brown JL**, Nair LS and Laurencin CT. Solvent/Non-Solvent Sintering Technique for Creating Sintered Microsphere Scaffolds. US Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/940,549.
2. **Brown JL**, Deng M and Laurencin CT. Smart Nanosphere Capable of Targeted Cancer Cell Destruction. US Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/918,105.

PUBLICATIONS

1. **Brown JL**, Peach MS, Nair LS, Kumbar SG and Laurencin CT. Composite nanofiber/microsphere scaffolds: bridging nanoscale and microscale architectures to improve bioactivity of mechanically competent constructs. Under Review with Nature Materials

PUBLICATIONS, continued

2. Deng M, Nair LS, Nukavarapu SP, Kumbar SG, **Brown JL**, Krogman NR, Allcock HR and Laurencin CT. Biomimetic, Bioactive Etheric Polyphosphazene-Poly(lactide-*co*-glycolide) Blends for Bone Tissue Engineering. J Biomed Mater Res Pt A. 2009 Jan; Online.
3. Nukavarapu SP, Kumbar SG, **Brown JL**, Krogman NR, Nair LS, Allcock HR and Laurencin CT. Polyphosphazene/Nano-Hydroxyapatite Composite Microsphere Scaffolds for Bone Tissue Engineering. Biomacromolecules. 2008 Jun; 9 (7): 1818-1825.
4. **Brown JL**, Nair LS and Laurencin CT. Solvent/Non-Solvent Sintering: A Novel Route to Create Porous Microsphere Scaffolds For Tissue Regeneration. J Biomed Mater Res Pt B. 2008 Aug; 86B (2): 396-406.
5. **Brown JL**, Nair LS, Bender J, Allcock HR and Laurencin CT. The formation of an apatite coating on carboxylated polyphosphazenes *via* a biomimetic process. Mater Lett. 2007 Jul; 61 (17): 3692-3695.

PRESENTATIONS

1. **Brown JL,** Nair LS and Laurencin CT. Biomimetic Composite Scaffolds for Bone Tissue Engineering. 3rd Musculoskeletal Regeneration Symposium, Charlottesville, (2009).
2. **Brown JL**, Nair LS and Laurencin CT. Composite Microsphere/Nanofiber Scaffolds for Bone Tissue Engineering. World Biomaterials Conference, Amsterdam, (2008).
3. **Brown JL** and Laurencin CT. Poly[(amino acid ester)phosphazene] Sintered Microsphere Matrices: A New Direction in Bone Tissue Engineering. "Brown-bag" Bioresearch Seminar, Norman, (2007).
4. **Brown JL** and Laurencin CT. Polyphosphazene Microsphere Scaffolds: A New Direction in Bone Tissue Engineering. 1st Musculoskeletal Regeneration Symposium, Charlottesville, (2007).
5. **Brown JL**, Meng D and Laurencin CT. Smart Nanospheres for Targeted Cancer Cell Destruction: The Cure for Cancer. Nanonexus 2007, Oak Ridge, (2007).
6. **Brown JL** and Laurencin CT. Solvent/Non-Solvent Slurry Sintering Technique for Preparing Microsphere Scaffolds. BMES, Charlottesville, (2006).

POSTERS

1. **Brown JL**, Nair LS and Laurencin CT. Novel Biodegradable Polyphosphazene Lighter than Water Microsphere Scaffolds for Bioreactor Based Bone Tissue Engineering. Society for Biomaterials 2007, Chicago, (2007).
2. Nukavarapu SP, Krogman NR, Kumbar SG, **Brown JL**, Nair LS, Allcock HR and Laurencin CT. Novel Composite Polyphosphazene Hydroxyapatite Scaffolds for Bone Tissue Engineering. Society for Biomaterials 2007, Chicago, (2007).

JOURNAL REVIEWS

- Artificial Organs
- Journal of Biomedical Materials Research: Part B. – Applied Biomaterials

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Fluvanna County Officer of Election

REFERENCES

Available upon request

(Many thanks to the students and alumni who shared their resumes for this handout)

Your Resume Career Objectives

Why list your objectives?
Does your resume speak for itself? Is it clear from your work experiences what you want to be doing in your job or internship? If you are just graduating or looking to make a career change, the answer is probably no, which is why you want an objective on your resume. Let the employer know what you want. Your objective should be as specific as possible so the employer clear understands what you are looking for. If you are uncertain of what you are looking for, it is best to keep an objective off of your resume rather than creating a generic, vague objective.

Sample Objectives:
➢ Professional position using teamwork, chemistry knowledge, computer skills, and creative thinking to solve problems related to chemical engineering.

➢ To secure a challenging position that utilizes my engineering education and interests in the fields of technical business and consulting.

➢ To apply information technology skills to contribute to the success of a leading edge organization.

➢ To obtain a challenging position in the field of Systems Engineering as well as a knowledge of management and organizational methods.

➢ Seeking a position as a software engineer, circuit design engineer, or application developer.

➢ A position within the computer science discipline, preferably concentrating on network analysis or design.

➢ Seeking a position in the electrical engineering or computer science industry with special interest in communications, networking, digital signals, and microelectronics.

➢ To gain employment involving the design, development, or testing of technologies in the fields of aerospace and mechanical engineering.

➢ Position in information technology, network development, or a field related to aerospace/mechanical engineering.

➢ Position in consulting industry, focusing on e-commerce, internet strategy, and information technology.

➢ Utilize my civil engineering education and technical skills in a project management position for a construction firm.

➢ To obtain a summer position related to transportation engineering, focusing on traffic analysis or highway design.

➢ To gain experience in chemical engineering involving applications of engineering principles such as mass and energy balance, thermodynamics, fluid dynamics, heat transfer, and chemistry with possible exposure to labs and pilot plants.

➢ A position in consulting with a specialization in computer information systems.

➢ To gain hands-on experience through an internship in an information technology or information systems division.

➢ Summer position in computer industry focusing on programming or software development.

➢ To obtain a summer internship within the field of civil engineering in order to gain hands-on experience while utilizing my academic background and advancing my interest in structural mechanics.

➢ To obtain a summer position in mechanical engineering focusing on machine design and structural engineering.

➢ Position in civil engineering specializing in structural or transportation engineering.

REFERENCES FOR

(YOUR NAME)

NAME
TITLE AND RELATIONSHIP TO YOU
ADDRESS
PHONE
FAX
EMAIL

NAME
TITLE AND RELATIONSHIP TO YOU
ADDRESS
PHONE
FAX
EMAIL

NAME
TITLE AND RELATIONSHIP TO YOU
ADDRESS
PHONE
FAX
EMAIL

Writing Resumes

UCS

University Career Services

There is no right way to write a resume.

The Resume is . . .

- ✓ an advertisement
- ✓ an individually designed document
- ✓ a highlight of your background
- ✓ used by employers as a screening device
- ✓ just ONE piece of the job search process

What's on Your Resume?

- ✓ **Identifying Information:** Includes name, address (permanent and temporary), telephone, and e-mail. *Tip: Be sure you make your name stand out!*

- ✓ **Objective:** Short, specific statement that includes position, industry, and relevant skills.

- ✓ **Education**: In reverse-chronological order, this section includes the schools you have attended, dates of graduation or dates of attendance, as well as degrees sought or completed. Other information that might be included: related coursework, scholarships and honors, percentage of college expenses earned by you, and special projects (e.g. research projects, teaching).

- ✓ **Experience**: This section includes not only paid positions, but also significant volunteer, extracurricular, or field experiences. Names and locations of employers and years of employment should be included. Descriptions should detail the level of responsibility and breadth of exposure. Be sure to stress any accomplishment or unique contribution you made. Possible headings: Related, Leadership, or Volunteer Experience, Activities, Interests, and Qualifications.

    Tip: Make sure to put all of your experiences in reverse-chronological order within each section/category!

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 1 of 13

Language

Resume language should be succinct and expressive. Make the reader pay attention by using action verbs that convey measurable accomplishments and problem-solving skills.

- ✓ Use the minimum number of words necessary to convey meaning.
- ✓ Use precise action verbs to describe accomplishments and responsibilities.
- ✓ Avoid personal pronouns.
- ✓ Leave out articles: a, an, the.
- ✓ Use short sentences or phrases.
- ✓ Use parallel grammatical structures and consistent verb tenses.

Does your resume:
- include only relevant information?
- use action verbs?
- stress skills and accomplishments over duties?
- make qualifications evident?
- include specific info: figures, dates, numbers?
- support your purpose/objective?

Proofread, Proofread, Proofread!

- ✓ As a general rule, one page is the recommended length. This may vary if you have extensive experience.
- ✓ Use sans serif fonts, (fonts without serifs) such as Helvetica, Bookman, Arial and Times.
- ✓ Use a font size of 10 to 12 points.
- ✓ Avoid script and underlining; boldface and italics is generally acceptable.

Evaluate Appearance

- attractive layout?
- white space?
- font size readable?
- headings highlighted?
- style appropriate?
- length appropriate?
- important items stand out through spacing and/or highlighting?
- consistent placement of information (e.g. dates)?

University Career Services   www.career.virginia.edu
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium   (434) 924-8900
10/2/2008   Page 2 of 13

Cover Letters

When e-mailing or mailing your resume *always* include a cover letter to explain why you are sending the resume. For more information on how to write a cover letter and other types of correspondence, see the UCS handout *Cover Letters and Other Correspondence*.

Action Verbs By Skill Category

Tip: Circle all of the words relevant to your experiences, and then use them in your resume!

Communicative

address	convince	express	mediate	publicize	speak
arbitrate	correspond	follow-up	meet	publish	suggest
arrange	describe	formulate	moderate	question	summarize
author	develop	influence	motivate	read	talk
brief	direct	inform	negotiate	reconcile	translate
communicate	document	interpret	network	recruit	write
compose	draft	interview	persuade	refer	
confront	edit	lecture	present	report	
contact	enlist	market	promote	rewrite	

Creative

act	develop	execute	institute	pilot	revitalize
broaden	direct	explore	integrate	pioneer	shape
compose	discover	fashion	introduce	plan	sketch
conceive	draft	forge	invent	redesign	spearhead
conceptualize	dramatize	found	market	rehearse	start
conduct	draw up	illustrate	modernize	remodel	stimulate
create	entertain	imagine	originate	renovate	strategize
design	establish	improvise	perform	replace	transform

Financial

account for	appraise	calculate	finance	plan	research
adjust	audit	compute	forecast	procure	transfer
administer	balance	control	manage	project	
allocate	buy	develop	market	purchase	
analyze	budget	estimate	monitor	reconcile	

Helping

advise	clarify	encourage	forecast	orient	refer
advocated	coach	enlist	foster	predict	rehabilitate
aided	counsel	ensure	guide	prescribe	represent
anticipated	demonstrate	evaluate	handle	protect	serve
assessed	diagnose	expedite	harmonize	provide	support
assisted	educate	facilitate	moderate	reconcile	utilize
care for	enable	familiarize	observe	rectify	volunteer

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 3 of 13

Management

administer	contract	dispense	maintain	propose	set goals
account for	consolidate	employ	orchestrate	protect	schedule
analyze	consult	evaluate	order	realize	supervise
appoint	decide	execute	organize	recommend	terminate
approve	delegate	formulate	oversee	recruit	unify
assign	determine	handle	plan	regulate	withdraw
assume	develop	head	perfect	review	
attain	devote	hire	preserve	revitalize	
chair	direct	leverage	prioritize	reward	
choose	dispatch	manage	produce	save	

Organizational

approve	cut	identify	operate	retrieve	streamline
arrange	diagram	implement	organize	revamp	stretch
catalogue	dispatch	inspect	pinpoint	revise	substitute
classify	distribute	integrate	prepare	schedule	systematize
collaborate	enlist	interface with	prioritize	screen	tabulate
collect	execute	join	process	set up	target
compile	expedite	list	record	shape	update
conserve	extract	log	reshape	specialize	validate
consolidate	generate	monitor	reorganize	specify	

Research

acquire	collect	determine	identify	modify	summarize
amplify	compare	disprove	inspect	organize	survey
analyze	conduct	evaluate	interpret	process	systematize
calculate	critique	examine	interview	review	test
chart	diagnose	extract	investigate	research	trouble-shoot
clarify	design	formulate	locate	study	

Results

achieve	complete	establish	initiate	pioneer	standardize
accelerate	compound	exceed	introduce	prove	succeed
accomplish	contribute	excel	launch	reduce	transform
add	decrease	expand	lower costs	re-establish	trim
advance	double	extend	map	resolve	triple
attain	effect	fortify	maximize	restore	validate
augment	eliminate	improve	measure	selected as	widen
award	enlarge	increase	obtain	stabilize	won

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 4 of 13

Teaching

accept	coach	educate	identify	modify	simplify
adapt	command	elaborate	implement	motivate	solicit
advise	communicate	elicit	incorporate	observe	speculate
actively	compliment	emphasize	indicate	organize	state
analyzes	consider	enable	infer	persuade	stimulate
apply	cooperate	encourage	inform	ponder	structure
appraise	coordinate	evaluate	initiate	postulate	synthesize
assess	correct	excite	inquire	praise	systematize
assign	define	explain	instruct	provoke	teach
attend	demonstrate	explore	interact	question	tell
calm	designate	facilitate	integrate	reinforce	thank
categorize	develop	focus	investigate	rephrase	theorize
challenge	direct	generate	judge	reward	train
choose	discipline	guide	listen	set goals	tutor
clarify	doubt	hypothesize	model	set standards	

Technical

activate	construct	devise	maintain	rehabilitate	sell
assemble	contrive	display	navigate	remodel	service
began	convert	engineer	operate	repair	solve
build	deliver	exhibit	overhaul	resolve	supply
calculate	design	fabricate	participate	retrieve	train
compute	detect	install	program	screen	upgrade

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 5 of 13

Salim Dareshak

sdareshak@appropriateemail.com

College Address	**Permanent Address**
123 Thomas Jefferson Lane	123 Homecooked Meal Road
Charlottesville, VA 22058	Richmond, VA 23362
434-555-5555	804-555-5555

EDUCATION

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia   May 2010
Bachelor of Science, Computer Engineering   Overall GPA: 3.17
Computer Skills: Pascal, C++

Lee-Davis High School, Mechanicsville, VA   June 2006
Class Rank: 6/301   Overall GPA: 3.9

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Pakistani Student League, University of Virginia   August 2007-present
Treasurer (2008)
- ❖ Manage a budget of $10,000 for program and social event allocation, use Microsoft Excel to maintain budget
- ❖ Prepare annual budget proposal

School Board Committee, Charlottesville, VA   September 2007-June 2008
Student Committee Member
- ❖ Participated in school board budget reviews in preparation for decision-making process concerning anticipated budget cuts
- ❖ Assisted with designing and implementing college preparatory programs geared to first generation college students
- ❖ Served as liaison between committee and group of volunteer tutors/mentors

Hollymead Pool, Mechanicsville, VA   June-August 2007
Head Lifeguard
- ❖ Successfully rescued 3 swimmers; promptly administered first aid and alerted emergency personnel
- ❖ Enforced swimming rules
- ❖ Trained, created work schedules, rotated and assigned breaks for staff of 5 lifeguards
- ❖ Supervised maintenance of pool and pool area

Wal-Mart, Mechanicsville, VA   October 2005-April 2006
Cashier
- ❖ Operated computerized cash register and handled on average $3,00 daily
- ❖ Received Great Excellence Award for exceptional customer service
- ❖ Developed solid product knowledge and marketed merchandise to customers
- ❖ Processed new inventory, created displays, and maintained organized store floor end dressing rooms

INTERESTS

Running marathons, tenor saxophone and photograph

ELIZABETH CAVALIER
etc@virginia.edu

School: Permanent:
101 Cavalier Drive   200 Stadium Drive
Charlottesville, VA 22903   Boston, MA 02154
434-555-1212   617-899-4546

OBJECTIVE
To obtain a job in engineering that utilizes experience in technology.

EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCE   Charlottesville, VA
B.S. Systems and Information Engineering   May 2009
Cumulative GPA: 3.0; Major GPA: 3.78
Related Coursework
- Data Communications
- Human Computer Interface
- Operations Research/Network Modeling and Design
- Business Software Development

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE
GENUITY, INC. (formerly GTE INTERNETWORKING)   Columbia, MD
Network Controller/Summer Intern, Network Operations Center   Summer 2008
- Troubleshot data communication problems including fault isolation, equipment fault detection, and circuit outages.
- Developed network management/monitoring scripts using UNIX and PERL.
- Performed remote monitoring of dial-up, routing, and other network equipment.
- Attended professional training classes in ATM, TCP/IP, Ascend Max, T1/T3 Technologies and UNIX.

DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA   Charlottesville, VA
Web Assistant   Spring-Summer 2007
- Designed and implemented a website for the Department of Computer Science using HTML, JavaScript, and Photoshop.

HUGHES NETWORK SYSTEMS   Germantown, MD
Summer Intern, DirecPC Engineering Test Group   Summer 2006
- Installed DirecPC hardware/software and various Operating Systems.
- Configured and installed the Portmaster and Cisco Switch.
- Performed ping tests to insure network connections.
- Revised and edited Oracle forms using the form builder and SQL.

SKILLS
   Operating Systems: Windows NT, MacOS, UNIX, SunOS
   Applications: Microsoft Office (Access, Excel, FrontPage, PowerPoint, Publisher, Word),
   SilverScreen, Photoshop, Visual Basic, Visual InterDev, Oracle
   Programming Languages: PASCAL, C++, HTML, SQL, UNIX scripting, PERL
   Languages: Written and reading proficiency in Chinese

LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES
   Society of Women Engineers (Co-Webmaster, Secretary, Treasurer)   Fall 2006-present
   Engineering Student Council (Student Advisor)   Fall 2007-present

JACQUELINE SALERNO

(434) 222 2456

1235 Evergreen Circle, Charlottesville, VA 22901

jsalerno@virginia.edu

EDUCATION

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

May 2009

M.A. French Literature

Elected by fellow graduates students to serve as a liaison between students and faculty at all department meetings; Nominated for Departmental Graduate Teaching Award for 2008-2009

Instituto Cervantes, Paris, France

August 2006

Spanish as a Foreign Language Certificate

Alliance Française, Paris, France

September 2004

Degree to teach French as a Second Language

Université Stendhal, Grenoble III, France

June 2000

Equivalent to a B.A. in English and German

LANGUAGES

French: native speaker	Spanish: fluent
English: fluent	German: reading and speaking proficiency

TEACHING

University of Virginia, French Department.

August 2007–present

Foreign Language Institute House Director (*Summer 2008*): Prepare evening activities, coordinate test reviews, and tutor students who need extra help. As instructor will review material taught in the morning class and prepare cultural activities each afternoon.

Teaching Assistant: Teach intermediate (201-202) French courses with responsibility for preparing and leading two sections of 21 students each. Solely responsible for teaching French 201 in Summer 2008 and chair the same course in Spring 2003, which includes preparing the syllabi, suggesting composition topics, creating the first test and organizing all other tests and the final exam.

Altavista Combined Schools, Altavista, VA. *French and Spanish Teacher*

September 2007–June 2008

Prepared weekly lesson plans, taught French I-V and three classes of Spanish I, composed of middle school and high school students; was homeroom teacher for French I class. Attended faculty meetings and conducted parent-teacher conferences. Directed the French Club and organized monthly cultural activities, established pen-pal program with French high school.

Alliance Française, Paris, France. *French Teaching Assistant*

July 2004–April 2005

Organized lesson plans and taught Elementary, Business and Civilization courses. Emphasis was placed on the use of authentic and semi-authentic documents and the sole use of French due to the multicultural audience.

Pierre Overall, Paris, France. *French Teacher*

March–September 2005

Prepared and taught Intermediate courses to Austrian high school students on vacation in Paris. Reviewed grammar by developing creative and useful activities in order to prepare students for afternoon visits of Paris and surroundings.

Centre Scolaire, Le Péage de Roussillon, France. *English Teacher*

January–February 2002

Planned weekly work with other colleagues and was in charge of teaching introduction (6th and 7th graders) intermediate (9th graders) and advanced (11th graders) courses to native French speakers. Attended faculty meetings and conducted parent-teacher conferences. Served as homeroom teacher for 7th graders.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Opéra National de Paris, Paris, France, *Travel Agent Liaison*

October 2002–April 2007

A.E.G. Elektrowerkzeuge, Stuttgart, Germany, *Export Service Trainee*

March–July 1996

University Career Services

www.career.virginia.edu

Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium

(434) 924-8900

10/2/2008

Page 8 of 13

Inita Help

Local Address:	ith3r@virginia.edu	Permanent Address:
893 14th St.		316 Chocolate Ave.
Charlottesville, VA 22903		Hershey, PA 16432

Education **University of Virginia**
Bachelor of Arts, expected May 2009
Major: Biology   Minor: Economics   GPA: 2.87

Work **University of Virginia Hospital**, Charlottesville, VA
Experience *Pediatric Care Unit Volunteer*   9/07-present
- Assist physicians, nurses, and staff with minor medical procedures as well as clerical operations.
- Interact with patients and families to provide emotional support during hospital stay.
- Also aid classroom staff with educational activities for pediatric patients.

Dogwood Investment Management, LLC, Philadelphia, PA
Client Associate   5/08-8/08
- Talked with clients. Assisted Security Analyst in performance composites.

Matthew G. Tooth, D.D.S., Hershey, PA
Hygienist Assistant   8/06
- Assisted pediatric dental clinic staff with dental procedures as well as office administrative operations.

Hershey Band Camp, Hershey, PA
Teaching Assistant—flute   6/05-7/05
- Assisted in teaching flute technique and performance skills to children of all ages.

Activities **University of Virginia Opera Workshop**
Member—first chair flute   9/06-present

National Society of Collegiate Scholars
Member   9/07-present
- Perform volunteer and service activities for UVA and community.

Honor Council
Representative   9/05-12/05
- Coordinated activities and events for residence hall members.

Special Skills Languages; English, Punjabi, French
and Interests Working knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Widely traveled, strong interpersonal and communication skills.

Current Address:
893 14th St.
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Permanent Address:
316 Chocolate Ave.
Hershey, PA 16432

List relevant courses to the job, particularly those beyond your major (i.e. electives and special topic courses).

EDUCATION
University of Virginia (UVa)
B.A. Biology, Minor: Economics   May 2009

Lead-off your statements with a variety of power words to show the reader you possess many skills.

Related Coursework: Advanced Microeconomics; Statistics; Economics of Health; Corporate Finance

RELATED EXPERIENCE
Pediatric Care Unit Volunteer, **University of Virginia Hospital**, Charlottesville, VA   September 2007-present
- Assist physicians, nurses, and staff with minor medical procedures as well as clerical operations.
- Interact with patients and families to provide emotional support during hospital stay.
- Aid classroom staff with educational activities for pediatric patients.

Client Associate, **Dogwood Investment Management, LLC,** Philadelphia, PA   May 2008-August 2008
- Collaborated with Security Analyst to complete performance composites for potential investors.
- Operated extensively with contacts at Merrill Lynch and Pershing to perform accounting-related activities for clients.
- Communicated with clients and their professional advisors, including accountants and attorneys.
- Worked closely in small business environment with Portfolio Manager and Director of Client Services.
- Proficient with AXYS, popular asset management program, Excel, and Microsoft Office applications.

Hygienist Assistant, **Matthew G. Tooth, D.D.S.,** Hershey, PA   May 2006-August 2006
- Supported pediatric dental clinic staff of ten with dental procedures.
- Cleaned, sanitized, and maintained instruments and equipment.
- Greeted patients, escorted them to treatment rooms, and created comfortable environment.
- Recorded medical and dental histories of patients.

Flute Teaching Assistant, **Hershey Band Camp,** Hershey, PA   June 2005-July 2005
- Taught flute technique and performance skills to 25 children, aged nine to 16, for 25 hours per week.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE
Active Member, **National Society of Collegiate Scholars**, Charlottesville, VA   September 2007-present
- Recruit members through fliers, emails, and letters to potential candidates. Assist four officers in running of monthly meetings for over 200 members.
- Perform volunteer and service activities for UVA and community, including monthly park clean-up project and "sponsor a family for Thanksgiving" project.

Server, **Applebees,** Hershey, PA   May 2007-August 2007
- Worked collaboratively with team of ~20 cooks, hosts, and busers to provide quality dining experience.
- Recorded, processed, and delivered orders for up to 5 tables simultaneously.
- Resolved customer complaints immediately and professionally.

Representative, **Honor Council**, Charlottesville, VA   August 2005-May 2006
- Coordinated activities and events for 100 residence hall members.
- Raised funds of $500 through campus-wide bake sale.

Use numbers to show the scope of your accomplishments and give range to your duties.

LANGUAGES
Fluent English, Fluent Punjabi, Proficient French

Any time you talk about money, be sure to state the amounts.

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 10 of 13

Bobby Business
3902 E. Market St., Charlottesville, VA, 22903
434-999-0001
bbusiness@virginia.edu

EMPLOYMENT

UBS Investment Bank, *New York, NY* Summer 2008
Summer Analyst
Built financial models, analyzed financial statements, worked on fairness opinions, created hostile defense profiles, etc.

Transaction experience:

- $1.7 billion global industrials deal

- $1.3 billion sale of Beaver Dam Corp. to More Money LLC

- $500 million consumer products deal

- $380 million healthcare deal

- $120 million insurance deal

Blue Associates, Inc, *Charlottesville, VA* August 2008-present
Project Assistant Intern
Serve as researcher and data analyst on EPA contracted principles at environmental consulting firm. Provide primary data analysis and regulatory research for mobile source emissions trends report. Other duties include EPA rule-making support, software QA testing, contract proposals preparation and reviewing/proofing of drafts

LON, Inc, Hoover, MA Summer 2006
Independent Representative
Procured customers for local, long distance, and small business telephone services as well as natural gas and electric utility services. Promoted and sold services through presentations, sales meetings, and bill analyses. Provided ongoing review of customers' bills and options.

This area is a poor use of space. Best to use a different resume layout to maximize your descriptions to let the reader know that you possess many skills, abilities, and accomplishments

EDUCATION

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 2005-present

In process of earning degree in Foreign Affairs and Economics

Elm High School, *Virginia Beach, VA* 2004
Graduate

ACTIVITIES

Soccer Organization of Charlottesville-Albemarle, *Charlottesville, VA*
Lead two local co-ed teams of 20 children in Charlottesville-Albemarle
community, ages 5-8.

APO fraternity, *Charlottesville, VA*
Perform over 35 hours of community service per semester with 200 other fraternity members. Enforce attendance policy. Formulate major service projects in city of Charlottesville and surrounding community.

IR Organization, *Charlottesville, VA*
Prepared UNSC for high school conference.

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 11 of 13

Bobby Business
bbusiness@virginia.edu

Current Address:
3902 E. Market St.
Charlottesville, VA 22903
434-999-0001

Permanent Address:
4890 Moneymaker Ln.
Boston, MA 03164
978-555-0123

EDUCATION
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA   May 2009
B.A. Foreign Affairs & Economics, GPA: 3.33

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE
Blue Associates, Inc., *Project Assistant Intern,* Charlottesville, VA   Summer 2008-present
- Serve as researcher and data analyst on Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) contracted principles at environmental consulting firm.
- Provide primary data analysis and regulatory research for mobile source emissions trends report.
- Support EPA rule-making, testing software QA, prepare contract proposals, and review and proof drafts.

UBS Investment Bank, *Summer Analyst*, New York, NY   Summer 2007
- Built financial models, analyzed financial statements, worked on fairness options, created hostile defense profiles, conducted due diligence, and assisted deal teams in a variety of other tasks.
- Supported major transactions, including $1.7 billion global industrials deal, $1.3 billion sale of Beaver Dam Corporation to More Money LLC, $500 million consumer products deal, $380 million healthcare deal, and $120 million insurance deal.

LON, Inc., *Independent Representative*, Hoover, MA   Summer 2006
- Procured customers for local, long distance, and small business telephone services as well as natural gas and electric utility services.
- Promoted and sold services through presentations, sales meetings, and bill analyses.
- Provided ongoing review of customers' bills and options.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE
Soccer Organization of Charlottesville-Albemarle, *Coach, VA*   Fall 2007-present
- Led two local co-ed teams of 20 children in Charlottesville-Albemarle community, ages five-eight years old.
- Run weekly practices, keep in contact with children's parents, coach games on Saturdays.

Alpha Phi Omega Fraternity, *Chairman,* Charlottesville, VA   Spring 2007-present
- Perform over 35 hours of community service per semester with 200 fraternity members.
- Enforce attendance policy.
- Formulate major service projects in city of Charlottesville and surrounding community, including elementary school beautification, nursing home visits, and reading to the elderly program.

Internal Relations Organization, *Chairman*, Charlottesville, VA   Fall 2006-Spring 2007
- Prepared and presided over United National Security Council at Virginia Model United Nations Conference for over 30 high schools.
- Created 20 page background guide on three pressing international security issues.
- Moderated debates among 50 countries.
- Coordinated efforts of six staff members to provide realistic simulation.

If it is unclear from its title, provide a sense of what the organization does through the descriptions of your responsibilities.

Line up your dates on the right margin so they don't distract from your descriptions and to make your resume appear more balanced on the page.

University Career Services
Bryant Hall at Scott Stadium
10/2/2008

www.career.virginia.edu
(434) 924-8900
Page 12 of 13

SUSAN B. PHOENIX

123 University Way
Charlottesville, VA 22901
(434) 906-XXXX
Phoenixsb123@virginia.edu

REFERENCES

Joy Pugh
Assistant Dean
Office of Residence Life
University of Virginia
(434) 465-2345
pugh@virginia.edu
Supervisor

Patricia Kent-Jones, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Economics
University of Virginia
(434) 465-0991
kent-jones@virginia.edu
Professor/Advisor

Drew Cash
Executive Director
Tango and Cash Investments
Louis, Delaware
(212) 469-5757
dc45@yahoo.com
Previous Supervisor

Tip: There is no need for the phrase "References Available Upon Request" on your resume, it's considered a given. References are generally listed on a separate page than your resume.

开始写英文 CV，怎么描述自己相信对大家都是相当挠头的事。找了些比较实用的资料，在这里 share 给大家。

CV 有多大用处？陶瓷的时候，某些学校网申的时候，找实习找工作的时候。。。用得相当广泛呀~~可见大家的 CV 不管何时何地都要准备，还要针对不同目的写不同的 CV 哟~~

我要写哪些内容？

陶瓷ＣＶ是比较专业导向或者技术导向的。一般有几大板块。
页眉写个人信息（姓名、地址、联系方式） 已经获得学位的可以写上学位 MS/MA, Ph.D/ MD
教育背景 Education
　　本科、硕士、博士教育的年月和地点
工作经历 Career 　实习应该可以算在这里。如果错了大家提意见哈～
语言 Language
　　中文：native speaker 英文：一般写 fluent 列考试成绩更有说服力
学术背景 Academic Experience
　　接受教育期间和工作期间做的学术项目
学术成就 Academic Achievements
　　学术（会议）文章、专利等
其他经历 Other Experience
　　培训、义工、社团、学生会、各种竞赛
成就 Achievements
　　获奖情况
最后两个对技术方向申请不一定有帮助，可以简写。

我该用什么词？
描述自己参与了什么，完成了什么该用什么词？有以下几个原则：

原则一：用主动词来描述你的经历中文的简历喜欢把年月摆出来后直接以名词打头。比如 2012.9 某某实验室研究助理
英文则更倾向于用动词，主动词来描述。比如 9/2012 Acted as a research assistant in Prof.A's lab, B city, China

原则二：动词也要有变化
"launched", "created"
"managed a..." "...published..." or "...attended..."
"...held primary responsibility for..."
"increased sales/profits/customers by..."

以下是网络摘抄哈～太久了忘了抄哪个国外网站了，找到了再把引用源补上。 :

These are some general examples ofpositive "action/achieving" words to use when applying for jobs:

achieved	created	improved	proficient
administered	designed	initiated	profitable
analyzed	developed	lead	qualified

built	directing	managed	resourceful
capable	efficient	monitored	specialized
competent	established	organized	successful
communicated	expanded	participated	supervised
consistent	experience	positive	trained
controlled	guided	processed	versatile
coordinated	implemented	produced	willing

MIT Career Development Center 提供的 Action Verbs

Management Skills
Administered Analyzed Assigned Chaired Consolidated Contracted Coordinated Delegated Developed Directed Evaluated Executed Organized Oversaw Planned Prioritized Produced Recommended Reorganized Reviewed Scheduled Supervised
Communication Skills
Addressed Arbitrated Arranged Authored Co-
authored Collaborated Corresponded Developed Directed Drafted Enlisted Formulated Influenced Interpreted Lectured Mediated Moderated Negotiated Persuaded Promoted Proposed Publicized Reconciled Recruited Spoke Translated Wrote

Research Skills
Clarified Collected Critiqued Diagnosed Evaluated Examined Extracted Identified Inspected Interpreted Interviewed Investigated Organized Reviewed Summarized Surveyed Systemized

Technical Skills
Assembled Built Calculated Computed Designed Devised Engineered Fabricated Maintained Operated Pinpointed Programmed Remodeled Repaired Solved Operated Pinpointed Programmed Remodeled Repaired Solved

Teaching Skills
Adapted Advised Clarified Coached Communicated Conducted Coordinated Developed Enabled Encouraged Evaluated Explained
Facilitated Guided Informed Instructed Lectured Persuaded Set
goals Stimulated Taught Trained

Financial Skills
Administered Allocated Analyzed Appraised Audited Balanced Budgeted Calculated Computed Developed Managed Planned Projected Researched

Creative Skills
Acted Conceptualized Created Customized Designed Developed Directed Established Fashioned Illustrated Instituted Integrated Performed Planned Proved Revised Revitalized Set up Shaped Streamlined Structured

Helping Skills
Assessed Assisted Clarified Coached Counseled Demonstrated Diagnosed Educated Facilitated Familiarized Guided Inspired Motivated Participated Provided Referred Rehabilitated Represented Reinforced Supported Taught Trained Verified

Clerical or Detail Skills
Approved Arranged Catalogued Classified Collected Compiled Dispatched Executed Filed Generated Implemented Inspected
Monitored Operated Ordered Organized Prepared Processed Purchased Recorded Retrieved Screened Specified Systematized Tabulated Validated

Stronger Verbs for Accomplishments
Accelerated Achieved Attained Completed Conceived Convinced Discovered Doubled Effected Eliminated Expanded Expedited Founded Improved Increased Initiated Innovated Introduced Invented Launched Mastered Originated Overcame Overhauled Pioneered Reduced Resolved Revitalized Spearheaded Strengthened Transformed Upgraded

原则三：版面简洁
排版统一，注意对齐。两边空白不要太多也不要太窄。不要有花哨的界面和设计。

我如何突出自己的优势？

技术申请的亮点永远在技术上。强调你参与的项目、事情、实验。在其中承担的任务，解决了什么问题，收获了什么结果。
可以花两到三行描述你的贡献。即使是很小的事情也可以写出深刻来，挖掘细节怎么都不过分。

等我找到合适的例子了补上来哈～或者有研究经历不多简历不知道怎么写饱满的同学跟贴提问，咱们实例改改？

我不知道如何开始下笔怎么办？
1、平时做个有心人。大学里也许能参与的项目很多。各种社团活动，竞赛，校园活动，学术论坛......要记得至少每学期把它们都记下来哦～不光是回顾了自己成长的历程，知道时间花在哪儿了，还有助于提取精华给简历添色呢～

2、任何简历都是从简单罗列和流水账开始的。我会保留一个流水账式巨细的版本，再根据需要删减或者添加内容，加强侧重点。然后就形成了各种版本，针对各种目的。还可以扩充扩充写成Personal Statement的重要部分，是不是很好用呀～～😁

什么事情不要做？
1、最好不要有艳色块。如果真想用，可以用淡淡的浅灰、藏青、砖红、浅棕（知名咨询公司们常用的加强说服力颜色）来分隔一下不同板块的内容（统一用一个色调哦），并且将透明度调高（若隐若现～）防止阅读疲劳。但总的来说要把注意力引导到你的内容上而不是设计上。

2、自我评价不需要。中式的自我评价会给人空泛不可信的印象。你凭什么这样自己评定自己？这是不公正的态度哦。当然，如果有事例支持也许也勉强可以吧。。用数据和事实说话是最直接有效的方式。

Advanced Computer Science Masters Personal Statement

I've always been fascinated with computer systems and networking. I taught myself the C programming language at age 16, and installed my first Linux distribution at age 17. This motivation drew me to study my bachelors degree in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at X University, and to work in the industry for five years after graduation. While taking the degree course, I became interested in distributed systems and network programming, and took Distributed Systems as my specialist course option in the third year. We were given an academic paper on Distributed Hash Tables, a broken Java implementation of DHTs, and the course assignment was to fix the implementation. I found this really interesting, and so for my third year project, I built a distributed system in Java for a local software company.

After university, I worked as a web application developer, before moving on to the IT/systems side of things, where I administrated Linux systems and web application servers, including a high availability Java web application cluster. Most recently I worked full-time as a build and configuration engineer on enterprise-level Java application stacks for Y bank.

My reasons for application; I wish to learn about distributed systems at a very detailed level, so that I may one day be able to design and implement them as a systems architect. I am currently undertaking independent study towards my Z certification to further this goal, and studying to refresh my Java knowledge, while employed part-time in remote Linux server administration work.

Business and Information Systems Personal Statement

At college the various courses that I currently study are A2 Economics, AVCE ICT Double Award, and AS Chemistry. In the previous year I studied AS Geography, however I decided that I did not wish to continue the course into the second year. My favourite subject that I am studying is ICT. The ICT industry has been becoming more prominent and influential in the running of most businesses and corporations. A Personal Computer is being relied on more for domestic use as well

Computers and their technology affect each and every one of us. So the demand for people with considerable ICT knowledge is ever growing

The main reason that I find this course interesting is the knowledge that I gain in a large amount and variety of software. I have already used many applications, and I am able to use this software extensively. The software that I have been practising includes Microsoft Excel, Microsoft FrontPage, Illuminatus Opus Pro, and Sage

I am currently conducting coursework's on Microsoft Access and Visual Basic. I understand that a lot of these applications are used in businesses today

I also enjoy looking at how ICT is applied in businesses. This is also part of the AVCE ICT course - it teaches you how businesses apply ICT and how it affects their company. My enthusiasm for both ICT and businesses has led me to want to pursue a degree that involves the theme's Business and Information Systems. I hope this degree will aid me in a conceivable career in the information technology sector

For work experience, I worked as an assistant manager in Superdrug. At first, my responsibilities were on the shop floor where I stocked the shelves and helped customers. I helped them with any difficulties such as finding a product, or assisting them. As the week progressed, I was given tasks such as ordering goods that needed to be re-supplied, doing picking lists etc. I had to work co-operatively in the stock room to find certain items, and to ensure that all the goods had been delivered that morning

When I was younger, I went weekly to Scouts. A lot of my friends attended scouts as well. I participated in charity walks for 2 years running. Here I had to walk continuously for 20 miles in order to raise money for charity. It was good for me, as I felt that I was doing something productive for charity. I was proud of what I did. At Whitmore High School, I was part of my form's indoor football squad. I got the opportunity to play with my classmates in a school tournament

It was a great experience, as it involved communication and a lot of teamwork, and because of the fact that football is my favourite sport

I also attended weekly badminton sessions at high school, over the course of the final year. I looked forward to playing every week, as I was able to compete against my friends in an accessible, yet fun sport

I have been fortunate enough to travel to many destinations around the world on holiday. I have been to India, Florida, France and several Spanish islands over the last 11 years. Visiting such locations has broadened my perspective on life, and has made me aware of other people's lifestyles. I really enjoy meeting a wide range of people and learning about different cultures and traditions. Out of the various locations that I have visited, I would say that the Spanish (and European) lifestyle is the one that I am most intrigued by. This is because the cities are vibrant and the people are quite relaxed and laid back - but at the same time they have a great work ethic. If I have the opportunity to travel in my future career, I would like to be working somewhere in Western Europe

I am greatly looking forward to university life, as I will have the opportunity to meet new people, become more independent and further my life experience. I believe that with my hardworking, enthusiastic and devoted attitude I

will be very successful at completing my degree to the highest standard. In the future, I hope to use my degree to begin a successful career as an Economic Analyst.

Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Personal Statement

Over the past year; I've changed and developed as a person, becoming even more determined and self-motivated. I've overcome a multitude of challenges, adapted to a new environment and furthered myself both academically and personally. While I may have changed, my utter fascination with computers and technology hasn't. One of the reasons technology means so much to me is because I've experienced first-hand how it connects the world and the people within it together in profound, empowering and unexpected ways. To me, computers are the physical embodiment of human ingenuity; a ubiquitous force of limitless possibility. It inspires me that we live in an age where advances in computing have made, and continue to make; so much of what was once thought impossible - mundane. I've never been content being told a system works, "just because". Understanding how and why things work the way they do is what fulfils me; one of the reasons why I want to study Computer Science.

My diverse A-Levels have allowed me to develop valuable skills, both analytical and interpersonal. I've regularly participated in activities such as enterprise events; requiring leadership, teamwork and effective communication, fundamental qualities. Independent learning and time management were particularly important for my A2 ICT coursework in which I created a Java-based backup system for use by an organisation. This idea was inspired by software I originally wrote in BASH for personal use and my desire to learn Java as I know it's commonly taught at degree level. Not only has this experience given me an opportunity to improve my technical abilities, it's given me a better appreciation for meeting deadlines and of software engineering principles. As far as programming goes, I'm entirely self-taught and have been programming as a hobby for over five years. Besides Java, I've used AppleScript and the UNIX shell to automate tasks, modified simple open-source programs written in C or Python to fix bugs, add features and improve my knowledge; and more recently dabbled in mobile programming for HP WebOS. I aim to be familiar with as many platforms as possible, mainstream or otherwise. I view CS as an engineering discipline; with a versatile array of tools and a need to select the correct ones to solve the problem in an efficient and elegant way.

My main interests in the field relate to AI, Robotics and Embedded Systems; the synergy between them and the raw potential captivates me. My desire to study AI stems from my enduring interest in Cognitive science and the ethical aspects, as well as my belief that further innovations in intelligent, autonomous systems will change the world. I have some experience working with LEGO Mindstorms, which has taught me a lot about hardware programming and basic AI techniques. I'm interested in programming for embedded systems because they're everywhere; modern civilisation is made possible by countless unseen microprocessors. On that note; I recently obtained an Arduino, which I hope to do some interesting things with. I'm also interested in retrocomputing; last month I visited Bletchley Park, which provided an intriguing insight into computer history and how far we've come in so short a time. In my spare time; I enjoy creative writing (currently writing a screenplay), reading and have recently become interested in amateur Astronomy. Last year my brother and I ran a successful short-term computer repair business. My dream would be a career pushing technology beyond perceived limits, particularly in extreme environments such as outer space. This degree will help me achieve that. I believe I am a well-rounded, competent applicant with good knowledge of what the subject entails at degree level. I want to follow in the footsteps of the pioneers who; through their contributions to computing, transformed our lives. After all; "Nothing is impossible, not if you can imagine it. That's what being a scientist is all about".

Artificial Intelligence Personal Statement

It has taken some time for me to find the right course to study as my interests expands through many different fields, from Psychology, Philosophy and Economics, to Physics, Computers and Programming. During and after my time in High School I took the chance of trying different subjects and learn not only through academic resources but by life experience through work and travel. It isn't until pretty recently that I discovered the science of Artificial Intelligence and I truly feel it's the perfect match for my combined interests.

My interest in computers began pretty early and as my curiosity grew my choice for Upper Secondary School wasn't difficult at all. During the three years (age 16-18 as it is in Sweden) in a Computer Science and Information Technology school I got the opportunity to explore my main interest even further and truly discover the endless possibilities of Computer Science. Physics and Mathematics also became two of my favourite subjects.

I finished Secondary School in 2005 and even though I wanted to explore computers further I also wanted to learn more about the world and discover other areas of education. I started studying different University modules in several Universities on subjects spanning through, Environmental Ethics, Philosophy, Business Economics and Globalization.

One of my other major interest lie in understanding how people think and react, and trying to understand the patterns of human behaviour. Much of this I learned and explored in the different job opportunities I've had where I was responsible to lead and manage different groups of people. This was truly fascinating as the two jobs, as a youth leader in the Swedish Church and an assistant floor manager in a restaurant, are very different yet the human mind remains the same.

By this time I felt the urge to return to my main interest in computers and programming but didn't want to leave my interest in the human mind behind and so I discovered Artificial Intelligence. With subjects like Neural Networking, Human Computer Interaction and Affective Computing I don't think I could've found a better suited course. I choose to study in the United Kingdom because I know the English language is the future and UK is a far more advanced country in the "new" sciences than Sweden. No Swedish university offer courses in Artificial Intelligence and in my opinion the Swedish Computer Science education is not at a satisfactory level.

I believe that my broad experience in both the areas of Science and Humanities makes me a very suitable student in the science of Artificial Intelligence. I also believe my time gaining work experience and trying different academic subjects allows me to have unique and valuable input to add to the University.

Computer Science Personal Statement

I am interested in studying Computer Science because I find it fascinating. When I was a child, I was absolutely attracted by Computer games and later it was programming. I also like studying English and Graphic Arts , but I chose Computing as my career because of its opening, modernity and lots of challenges. I feel that a higher education I get the more it will enable me to approach to the most recent technologies and to practice myself in a competitive environment

There has been encouragement from my friends and family for me to approach the fields in which support me for my future success

Out of school hours, In my spare time, I enjoy going out to my friends house, walking around adventuring my cities limits and a wide range of activities. I spend lots of time reading computer and scientific magazines. I am also good on playing computer games and surfing on the internet which greatly benefits my study. I sometimes like to spend my time alone reading online reviews or listening to music, I listen to a wide variety of music including rap, pop and traditional music

I am hard working, responsible, ambitious, enthusiastic but most of all friendly, sociable and highly self-motivated. I am ready to share my experience and learn from others. Now, not only have I got experience in using a computer, but I have learned a substantial amount of HTML through A Level ICT and self-teaching. I would like to do this course so I can develop my talent to it's limits. I also enjoy watching shows such as the news, soap operas and music videos when I have time. I enjoy researching new developments in the IT industry

In the fall of 2001 I started working for La Pizza Loca. A small local pizza shop and this has given me the experience in dealing with money, ensuring hygiene standards, and dealing with difficult customers. This also developed my communication skills, sense of responsibility, and my determination to carry on with higher education! During my time at La Pizza Loca, I managed the branch's accounts database which also involved correcting faults in the system to ensure the program's reliability of use. My work experience has shown me that Computer Science is the ideal course for me. I am hard working, responsible, ambitious, enthusiastic, but most of all friendly. I think I will be a credit to the institution, if I am given the opportunity. I am ready to share my experience and learn from others.

Computer Science Personal Statement

It has never occur to me that one of these days I would have to write a personal statement for a graduate program for Computer Science. When I was young, I have always picture myself as an auto mechanic guy or even worse, working at a fast food restaurant. I picture myself as an auto mechanic not because I wanted to but the fact that my entire relatives do not think that I am capable of having a better career. In college, I started out as an Electrical Engineer major assuming that it would be an interesting field to get in to. However, I was wrong because I rarely go to class and did not concentrate in all my engineering studies. Therefore, education did not matter to me as much until March of 2000 when I was accepted for an Intern position at Spawar. While working at Spawar, I was asked by my supervisor many simple questions such as, "what is a capacitor formula?" That question was supposedly being an easy answer for all electrical engineer major but, I had no clue whatsoever on how to answer it. Thus, I felt very incompetent to be in this field and decided to change my major to Computer Science (CS). After switching over to CS I am proudly to say that I am doing extremely well in all my classes with a passing grade of at least a "B" or better. Now that I found my true career, I have never thought of ever becoming a mechanic again because working with computer is much easier plus, I enjoy it

In my three years of working experience related to my field of study, I have seen and coded many software programs for the real world application. During those times I was employed at three different companies. The first company I work for is Spawar. While working for Spawar I had to write up program using C/C++ to control the solar motor, plus using MATLAB to analyze and visualize each of the simulation. I work with a group of engineering to come up with a solution on how to embed my program into their hardware so that the solar achieve maximum functionality. Besides coding programs, I also design and soldier circuit board and then embedded my program into it

After working with Spawar for a year I landed myself a 2nd shift job with NMCI as a software tester writing scripts for legacy application so that it would communicate with newer application like windows 2000

Following that job, I worked as a consultant for Computer Vision and my duties was to manually install application for each of the workstation for NMCI users. This job was beneficial to me because it gave me a chance to improve my communication skills. Throughout, my entire job experiences helped me to develop my inner awareness by the skills and experiences I learn and obtain through hands on training I receive from work

While taking cases at San Diego State University (SDSU), I enjoy assisting other students with their programming assignments. Helping others, in return also helps me by giving me a chance to learn more and understanding the importance of being a programmer. When I help my other colleagues I just don't write up the codes but instead help them to understand why and how I came up with each line of code. Many of my colleagues appreciate having me as a friend because I am persistent in helping them out whenever possible. This goes to show that I am a valuable contribution to this University

My favorite hobby is to built personal computers therefore, during my free time I enjoy going to the local computer store to see if they have any good deals on computer parts. I love to build personal computer for friends and family members for free of change because in return, I gain knowledge. As a result of building so many computers that I would dare to say that I am capable of building a computer in less than an hour. Beside an interest in building computers, I also have an interest in playing tennis during the weekends. Back in high school a couple years ago I played varsity tennis for three years and two years at Mesa Community College

With my expertise in computers and people skills that I have acquire over the years, I believe that SDSU would benefit by having me as part of their graduate program. In addition to my y extensive knowledge in computer and

people skills this makes me a valuable candidate for this program. I enjoy helping people and I look forward to sharing my thoughts and ideas with other students and faculty members. With my acceptance to the graduate program here at SDSU there is only one outcome and that is a "win-win" situation for both party.

Computer Science Personal Statement

Computer technology has always been something that I have been intrigued by, from my very first Atari to the small home network that I now manage. Over the years my interest in the world of computer technology has grown to the Internet and I have decided that I would eventually like a career in this field and a university degree would help me greatly. The Internet has fascinated me for sometime now, from web page design to computer security. The idea that any information is easily and rapidly accessible from any connected computer terminal in the world is fascinating. The computer world is expanding rapidly and I feel that nowadays, more than ever before, it is important to keep up with the new technological advances, as these are the future. I am extremely fortunate to be studying Information Technology in a specialised Technology College, which has national recognition, as it is also a Beacon School and the only Learning Network Community with radio WAN equipment in the region. Thus I have access to the most up to date equipment

Problem solving and being able to use figures can be a big part of computer technology and this is one of the reasons why I took Physics as an A Level and Maths to AS Level - to improve the quality of my problem solving skills

In 2000 I went on work experience to two business venues in Liverpool, namely Merseycabs' offices and Bleinheim Guest house. I used the computer systems for tasks such as booking customers' rooms at the hotel and editing Taxi drivers' records at Merseycabs. Although the work that I did on the computers was very basic and did not specifically concern the Internet I feel that it has helped me to recognise how the business world uses computers for everyday tasks

I have also gained experience with computers through the Young Enterprise programme, during which I was IT Director of the company and had many responsibilities, such as taking care of the company website and processing online orders, which has helped me to realise the responsibility of meeting deadlines, as when deadlines were not met the whole company was let down and not just the individual. During this marketing experience we visited primary schools, where I presented a PowerPoint presentation on the importance of healthy eating to promote our product. The product produced was a recipe book with contributions from famous local and international stars like Michael Owen and Dame Mary Peters. Our company enjoyed much success winning a trip to the European Trade Fair in Brussels, being featured on many occasions in the media and winning trough to the North West Final. At this final, although we did not win outright, we did win an award for best customer service. This experience has improved my confidence greatly, as well as giving me an insight into the world of marketing and promotion. Being in three school plays has also added to my confidence, I find that now I am more prepared for public speaking

In the summer of last year I attended a volunteer course for the Commonwealth Games, which consisted of first aid training and dealing with emergencies, I learnt how every detail of an event such as the Commonwealth Games must be planned out and implemented with extreme care to avoid problems. In my spare time I enjoy going to ice skating lessons, going to the cinema with friends and, of course surfing the 'net. I also like to design Macromedia Flash presentations and websites. Both the academic and social side of university life appeal to me and it is one of my ambitions to experience the student life first hand

As I look forward to my dreams, I see myself as a confident, successful businesswoman with a university degree and a computer related career. Can you help me make my dream a reality?

Computer Science Personal Statement

My approach to life's challenges is one of perseverance; the harder the problem that I am faced with, the more determined I am to solve it. When I first started to experiment with programming it was incredibly satisfying to see my hard work begin to take shape and this only encouraged me to further branch out to new languages and use more elaborate techniques. From this simple beginning I set my sights on a career in the computing industry, and many years later I still have no doubt whatsoever that is exactly where I want to be.

From a relatively low-key debut with HTML and CSS, my love of programming and dedication to the subject ensured that it wasn't long until I was experimenting with server-side scripting and relational databases. As my confidence grew, I was given the opportunity to create small scripts for projects owned by a group of like-minded peers and not long after, I began my first full-scale venture; a canine simulation game that used a script to create unique images on the fly.

Being a logical thinker, I have always been in my element around subjects such as Mathematics with Mechanics and Physics and enjoy applying my knowledge to analyse and solve complex problems. Creativity is also very important to me, particularly with regards to dealing with challenges, so in my second year of A-Level study I took up an additional AS in Design Technology to further develop these skills.

The reasons behind my desire to study Computer Science are that I would like to expand my existing knowledge of programming and learn to apply it in various applications such as Artificial Intelligence, games and software development. I feel that having a good insight as to how a computer actually operates and deals with data would provide me with a solid base in understanding errors and the best ways to optimise code. I have opted for a year in industry in order to develop my ability to work both as part of a team and independently and to translate my education into productivity in a working environment.

One inspirational aspect of computing that fascinates me is the ability that many ingenious pioneers have taken existing technology and used it in innovative ways, for example when Johnny Lee used Wiimote technology to turn any screen into an interactive whiteboard. Working on a project that has the potential to provide benefit or entertainment to others gives me a real sense of satisfaction, and I'm looking forward to developing programs that have the prospect of being used worldwide.

As an active person I jump at the chance to get involved with extracurricular activities, and last year I took on an important role in a Young Enterprise team. As Head of ICT I was tasked with creating the designs for the product as well as several marketing aids such as business cards and a functional and informative website. I was able to work well within my team and was able to take on a leadership role from time to time. I am a very able individual and can work well on my own without being prompted, shown by my independent study of Further Mathematics during my final year of Sixth Form.

In my spare time I enjoy experimenting in the kitchen (much to the dismay of my parents). I also have a deep interest in the natural world around me, and like spending time outdoors and watching documentaries. Later on in life I intend to travel the world and visit places such as the Alps, or the ruins of Machu Picchu.

Computer Science Personal Statement

Since the age of six, when I received a Commodore 64 as a Christmas present, computers have fascinated me. As I have grown up, the use of computers has increased beyond most expectations. Today they are involved in almost every aspect of our lives, and it seems as if the list of possibilities that they will offer us tomorrow is almost infinite. This is why I want to study Computer Science

At a very young age, I began to write simple programs in BASIC to run on my Commodore 64. Soon after I was introduced to the internet, I learned HTML and JavaScript and set up my own website. When the time came, I was delighted to be able to take up what had previously been a hobby as an academic subject - first with GCSE Information Systems and then with AS and A-Level Computing. As part of my A-Level Computing course, I had to learn Turbo Pascal, which taught me about the need for structured programming. My project is a browser-based intranet that uses ASP to take information from a database and display it on the relevant web pages. The system will hopefully be used by my school to provide general and subject-specific information for students

I have many specific interests within the field of Computer Science that I wish to develop during my time at university. These include Artificial Intelligence, Language Processing, Information Security and Encryption and Human-Computer Interface. In February of this year, I spent a week with **** Software Ltd in Belfast, where I tested a document management system that was being developed and got a real insight into the world of a software developer. In order to help people and gain further relevant experience, I hope to volunteer to work in an internet café operated by the RNIB next summer

I am studying what many would consider to be a broad spectrum of A-Level subjects. I chose Biology because I enjoy finding out about the human body and I have a particular interest in Genetics and Biotechnology, areas that I feel will rely heavily on computer modelling in the future because of the sheer amount of data involved

History helps me to understand today's world by learning about the past and also helps to develop my analytical skills. I decided to study Mathematics because of its obvious relevance to Computer Science, and because it provides me with an intellectual challenge and a sense of satisfaction that only comes with arriving at a completely correct solution to a given problem. I feel that this varied academic background will help me immensely in my studies and in my ambition to become well-rounded

Aside from studying, I have a number of diverse interests. I am heavily involved in debating and mock diplomacy. My recent achievements include being highly commended for my representation of China on the Security Council at the **** College Belfast Model United Nations summit in October 2001, being a runner-up in a Youth Leadership Competition organised by the Rotary Club, and being part of a team of four who won a debating competition organised by Amnesty International to raise awareness of the new Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. I also enjoy playing the clarinet. While I was a member of a jazz band, I went on concert tours to Washington DC and Boston, Massachusetts and played at the official opening of the Waterfront Hall in Belfast

In my spare time, I enjoy socialising with my friends, going to the cinema, using the internet and reading. My favourite work of fiction is probably Catch-22 by Joseph Heller. As for non-fiction, I particularly enjoyed A Brief History of the Future - The Origins of the Internet by John Naughton and A Beautiful Mind by Sylvia Nasar

When I finish my degree, I may decide to undertake post-graduate study. Whether or not I do so, I would eventually like to use my Computer Science skills to work for a government agency, or another non-profit organisation.

Writing the Statement of Purpose
Dr. Gloria Chun

Things to Keep in Mind

- What they read between the lines: motivation, competence, potential as a graduate student.
- Emphasize everything from a positive perspective and write in an active, not passive, voice.
- Demonstrate everything by example; don't say directly, for example, that you're a persistent person—you must demonstrate it.
- You don't want to make excuses, but you have talk about the mistakes you've made as a learning experience.
- If there is something important that happened (poverty, illness, excessive work, etc.) which affected your grades, go ahead and state it, but write affirmatively, that is, in a way that shows your perseverance.
- Make sure everything is linked with continuity and focus.
- 500-600 words, 1 to 1.5 pages single spaced, typed.

Writing the Statement of Purpose

Part 1: Introduction

- This is where you tell them what you want to study. For example, I wish to pursue a MS degree in Mechanical Engineering with an emphasis in controls.

Part 2: Summarize what you did as an undergraduate

- Research what did during your undergrad career. Describe your best project(s), indicating with whom, the title of the project, what your responsibilities were and the outcome. Write technically, professors are the people who read these statements.
- Important class or classes you took which stimulated your desire for graduate study, or a specific project for a class.
- Work experience, especially if you had any kind of responsibility for testing, designing, or researching a product or apparatus.

Part 2: If you graduated and worked for a while and are returning to grad school, indicate what you've been doing while working.

- You can discuss your company, work/design team, responsibilities, what you learned, etc. You can also indicate here how this helped you focus on your graduate studies.

Part 4: Here you indicate what you want to study in graduate school in greater detail.

- This is a greater elaboration of your opening paragraph.
- Indicate area of interest, then state questions you might have which are associated with the topic, i.e., what you might be interested in studying. You should have an area of emphasis selected before you write the statement.
- Call the department or look on the web for information about the professors and their research. Are there professors whose interests match yours? If so, indicate this, as it shows a sign that you have done your homework and are highly motivated. (Be sincere, however, don't make up something bogus just to impress people.)

Part 5: Conclusion

- End your statement in a positive and confident manner with a readiness for the challenges of graduate study.

Beatriz Lopez-Flores
Director, GrAD
(510) 643-6443 (tel)
(510) 643-5600 (fax)

cblf@berkeley.edu

Graduate Academic Division
Center for Underrepresented Engineering Students
312 McLaughlin Hall #1702
Berkeley, CA 94720-1702

THE UC PERSONAL STATEMENT

WHAT IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT? The Personal Statement is an integral part of the UC application. The content of the Personal Statement should add clarity, richness and meaning to the information you present in other parts of your UC application, enabling the Office of Admissions to form the best impression of you.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

- You have 1,000 words to answer both prompts.
- Your shortest response should be at least 250 words.
- Avoid the use of special characters.
- Feedback and suggestions from others are useful, but you are responsible for writing the Personal Statement.

PERSONAL STATEMENT PROMPTS

Prompt #1 (Freshman):

Describe the world you come from – for example, your family, community or school – and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

Suggestions for Prompt #1 (Freshman)

- You don't need to talk about family *and* community *and* school. Pick one and be descriptive.
- Keep your response relevant; focus on events that happened in the four years of high school.

Prompt # 1 (Transfer):

What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had in the field – such as volunteer work, internships and employment, participation in student organizations and activities – and what you have gained from your involvement.

Suggestions for Prompt #1 (Transfer)

- Consider including coursework experience. This may include working with faculty or doing research projects.

Prompt #2 (All Applicants):

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

Suggestions for Prompt #2

- Think about answering this prompt first, as it may help set the context you want to describe in Prompt #1.
- Choose a topic that has not been addressed in detail in another section of the application.
- Keep the information relevant to your personal experiences.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Answer the question. Take time and think about each prompt before you start writing. Use details and examples to make your point. Use your words strategically. Write to add context and depth, not to fill space.

Give yourself time to edit. Start writing to answer each prompt, then go back and review the word count, content and overall message. You may not have space to tell us everything so make your words count.

Stick to one topic per response. Making a list of accomplishments, activities, awards or work will lessen the impact of your words. Expand on a topic by using examples and facts for maximum impact to an Admissions reader.

Brainstorm topics. When you are composing your Personal Statement, **consider** including:

- Personal triumphs or challenges – If you decide to talk about a challenge or triumph, do not forget to explain what you learned from the experience.
- Leadership opportunities – Define your leadership role, your accomplishments and what you learned from the experience.
- Experiences outside the classroom – Consider experiences that have made an impact on your life (e.g., travels, church or temple, work, youth groups or your family).
- Disabilities – If you are living with a disability, talk about it! What does it mean to live with your disability?
- Culture – Describe the influence culture has had on you. Don't define the culture; instead explain what you have learned because of that culture.

Stay focused. Avoid common mistakes:

- Don't be campus specific. You're talking to all the UC campuses in your response.
- Inappropriate use of humor.
- Creative writing (poems, scene-setting or clichés).
- Scene-setting – We don't need to be in the moment with you.
- Quotations – We want to know your thoughts and words, not someone else's.
- Generalities – Stick to facts and personal examples.
- Repetition – Give us new information we cannot find in other sections of the application.
- Philosophy – Don't ask questions. Get to the point and tell us what you mean.
- Acronyms – We won't look it up, so spell it out.

THE UC PERSONAL STATEMENT

The following worksheet is geared to help you start the writing process for your Personal Statement on the freshman application. **There is no 'correct' answer to the Personal Statement,** so just start writing. The UC application is available online at **www.universityofcalifornia.edu/ apply.** Additional hints and suggestions can be found on the University of California website. Good luck!

Prompt #1:

Describe the world you come from – for example, your family, community or school – and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

Ask yourself these questions. What answer do you want to share with us that we have not seen elsewhere in your application?

- What are the challenges or opportunities you find in your community?

- What role do you play in your family, and how has that influenced your decisions in and out of school?

- Do you identify with one or more cultures? Can you speak more than one language? What has that allowed you to do in life?

- What is a typical day or week in your life, and how do you manage to accomplish everything?

- What is your school like? Are you in a magnet or academy? Describe the program and why you enrolled.

- How are you challenging yourself in school to prepare for college? Is attending college common for graduating seniors?

- If you hold a leadership role: Did you apply or were you nominated? What does that role mean at your school or in your community? How did you grow in this role?

- Do you have a major or career in mind? What is it and why did you choose it? Are there any courses and/or extracurricular activities you have completed to get you started in this area?

Prompt #2:

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

Things to consider before answering Prompt #2:

- Make a list of four things that describe you (e.g., athletic, a leader, first in my family to go to college, started a club, own my own business, etc.):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Now ask a friend or family member to do the same thing:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Did anything overlap? Can you see areas where you want to share more information? If so, consider using this topic to respond to Prompt #2.

- What do you consider one of your strengths?
- What activities, awards or honors do you wish to discuss?

Final hints:

The Personal Statement is your interview with the University of California.

We don't look at writing style; we look for content. Your response should add clarity, depth and/or context to the application as a whole.

Be you. Use plenty of "I" statements. Talk about yourself so that we can get to know your personality, talents, accomplishments and potential for success on a UC campus.

Write a First Draft

After you have collected and reviewed these materials, it is time to start writing. The following is a list of concerns that writers should keep in mind when writing a personal statement or application letter.

Answer the Question

A major problem for all writers can be the issue of actually answering the question asked. For example, an application might want you to discuss the reason you are applying to a particular program or company. If you spend your entire essay or letter detailing your qualifications without mentioning what attracted you to the company or department, your statement probably will not be successful. To avoid this problem, read the question or assignment carefully both as you prepare and again just prior to writing. Keep the question in front of you as you write, and refer to it often. With application letters, the question is implicit: "Who are you, and why should you be considered for this job?".

Consider the "I" Problem

This is a **personal** statement; using the first person pronoun *I* is acceptable. Writers often feel rather self-conscious about using the first person excessively, either because they are modest or because they have learned to avoid first and second person (*I* and *you*) in any kind of formal writing. Yet in this type of writing using first person is **essential** because it makes your prose more lively. Using third person can result in a vague, wordy essay. Don't start every sentence with *I*, but remember that you and your experiences are the subject of the essay.

Avoid Unnecessary Duplication

Some writers repeat information in their personal statements that is already included in other parts of the application packet (resume, transcript, application form, etc.). However, it isn't necessary to include specific information such as your exact GPA in your personal statement. It is more efficient and effective to simply mention academic progress briefly ("I was on the Dean's List" or "I have taken numerous courses in the field of

nutrition") and then discuss appropriate work or volunteer experiences in more detail.

Make Your Statement Distinctive

Many writers want to make their personal statements unique or distinctive in some way as a means of distinguishing their application from the many others received by the company or program. One way to do this is to include at least one detailed example or anecdote that is specific to your own experience—perhaps a description of an important family member or personal moment that influenced your decision to pursue a particular career or degree. This strategy makes your statement distinctive and memorable.

Keep it Brief

Personal statements are usually limited to 250–500 words or one typed page, so write concisely while still being detailed. Make sure that each paragraph is tightly focused on a single idea (one paragraph on the strengths of the program, one on your research experience, for example) to help keep the essay from becoming too long. Also, spend a little time working on word choice using a dictionary and a thesaurus, and include adjectives for more vivid and precise writing.

Organize Your Statement

As mentioned before, the requirements for personal statements differ, but generally a personal statement includes certain information and can follow this format (see sample below).

Introduction
Many personal statements begin with a catchy opening, often the distinctive personal anecdote mentioned earlier, as a way of gaining the reader's attention. From there you can connect the example to the actual program or position for which you are applying. Mention the specific name of the program or company, as well as the title of the position or degree you are seeking, in the first paragraph.

Detailed supporting paragraphs
Subsequent paragraphs should address any specific questions from the application, which might deal with the strengths of the program or position, your own

qualifications, your compatibility with the program or position, your long-term goals, or some combination thereof. Each paragraph should be focused and should have a topic sentence that informs the reader of the paragraph's emphasis. You need to remember, however, that the examples from your experience must be **relevant** and should support your argument about your qualifications.

Conclusion
Tie together the various issues that you have raised in the essay, and reiterate your interest in this specific program or position. You might also mention in a closing paragraph how this job or degree is a step toward a long-term goal.

An *application letter* may contain many of the same elements as a personal statement, but it is presented in a business letter format and can sometimes be even shorter and more specific than a personal statement. An application letter may not contain the catchy opening of the personal statement but instead includes detailed information about the program or position and how you found out about it. Your application letter usually refers to your resume at some point. Another difference between a personal statement and an application letter is in the conclusion, which in an application letter asks for an interview.

Allow Time for Revision

Because this piece of writing is designed to get you either an interview or a place in a graduate school program, it is **vital** that you allow yourself enough time to revise it thoroughly. This revision needs to occur on both the content level (did you address the question? is there enough detail?) and the sentence level (is the writing clear? are the mechanics and punctuation correct?). While tools such as spell-checkers and grammar-checkers are helpful during revision, they should not be used exclusively; you should read over your draft yourself. Have others do so as well.

Sample

The following sample is a personal statement like one that might be included in an application for admission to a graduate MBA program. The writer is responding to

instructions which state, "Describe your background, work experiences, and career goals. How will admission to IU's MBA program help you fulfill those goals?" Note the specific details she includes about her work experiences, and how she relates her background to her career goal.

    As a child I often accompanied my father to his small coin shop and spent hours watching him work. When I was older, I sometimes set up displays, waited on customers, and even balanced the books. This experience instilled in me the desire to own and manage my own business someday, yet I understand that the business world today is complex. This complexity requires more education, and with that in mind, I am applying to the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB).
    In addition to helping out in my father's business, I have had numerous other work experiences that further enhance my qualifications for this program. My resume enumerates the various positions I have held at Kerasotes Theaters, Chili's restaurants, and IU's new Student Recreational Sports Center (SRSC), all of which have emphasized serving the public effectively. As an assistant manager at the movie theater and a staff coordinator at the SRSC, I have valuable expertise in managing employees and creating work schedules. Both of these positions have allowed me to develop my sales and people skills, which are extremely important in an increasingly service-driven marketplace.
    Not all of my work experience has been as a paid employee. Part of my experience as a volunteer at Middle Way House, the local battered women's shelter, involved extensive work on computers, including word processing, organizing databases, and creating spreadsheets. Also, I recently participated in an internship program for academic credit with the Eli Lilly Corporation in its personnel division. As

a management intern, I was able to watch the workings of a major corporation up close. I would like the opportunity to combine my practical experiences with the theoretical background available in the MBA program at IUB, with its emphasis on computers, marketing, and human resources.
    My successful internship is one element of my overall academic success as an undergraduate here at IUB, yet I have also made time for a variety of extracurricular activities, including working for my sorority and competing in intramural basketball. My positive experiences here have resulted in my desire to stay in Bloomington to continue my academic endeavors; furthermore, continuing my education here would allow me to make important business contacts as I move toward my career goal of opening a computer consulting firm in the Midwest.

For free help at any stage of the writing process:

Writing Tutorial Services

Wells Library Information Commons
Indiana University
855-6738
www.indiana.edu/~wts/

See our website for hours, times, and locations

Revised 08/11/11

Writing Personal Statements and Application Letters

The process of applying for jobs, internships and graduate/professional programs often requires a *personal statement* or *application letter*. This type of writing asks writers to outline their strengths confidently and concisely, which can be challenging.

Though the requirements differ from application to application, the purpose of a personal statement is to represent your goals, experiences and qualifications in the best possible light, and to demonstrate your writing ability. Since your statement or application letter introduces you to your potential employer or program director, it is essential that you allow yourself enough time to craft a polished piece of writing.

Prepare Your Materials

Before you sit down to write, do some preparation in order to avoid frustration during the actual writing process. Obtain copies of documents such as transcripts, resumes and the application form itself; keeping them in front of you will make your job of writing much easier. Make a list of important information, in particular names and exact titles of former employers and supervisors, titles of jobs you have held, companies you have worked for, dates of appropriate work or volunteer experiences, and the duties involved. In this way, you will be able to refer to these materials while writing in order to include as much specific detail as possible.

From Book <Graduate Admissions Essays -- Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice>. Asher, Donald. Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, CA, 2000.
page 99-100
The following points are all culled from interviews with admissions readers at the top programs in the nation. You should pay close attention to these comments, but never forget that every admissions reader is different.

The Essay Hall of Shame
* "Errors and sloppiness, misspellings, even an occasional handwritten essay. You have to wonder how they made the grades on their transcript."
* "Spelling errors, poor English."
* "Anything that starts out, 'I've always wanted to be a ____.'"
* "Sometimes they don't really answer the question. We ask each question for a reason."
* "When they just seem to be saying what they think we want to hear. We can pick up on that right away."
* "Our application is a little different. We want original work. I hate it when I can tell that they're recycling material they wrote for other schools."
* "The essay sounds like they want to be the next Mother Teresa, but there's nothing in the rest of the application to back up any claims of altruism."
* "We ask for dates on activities. It's a red flag if all the activities are brand new."
* "A whole essay on deep personal problems or excuse for past performance. It's amazing how common it is. The essay should be upbeat, convincing, persuasive."
* "Too long. It shows no discipline."
* "Every year there is always at least one essay from someone who tells us how proud he would be to be admitted to ____, but this isn't that school."
* "Students are so afraid to take a risk that they don't really tell us anything. That throws us right back on the numbers."
* "Don't tell us what ____ is. I know what my own discipline is! What can they be thinking? Tell me what ____ means to you."
* "Some students think they can use the essay to manufacture a person who doesn't exist. It doesn't work."
Review your essay in light of these comments. Would it earn a place in the Essay Hall of Shame? How would you like to read a whole lot of this:

I have been fondly looking forward to a bright entry at your faculty. In making this assertion, I hope I am not just facile enough to make a claim, for, the facts about my academic antecedents vouch for my superior academic credentials-if I should borrow a phrase out of the vernacular parlance. In this regard, let me crave your indulgence in what I furnish below, concerning my prospective career related to Graduate Studies.

This is from an actual application, and it went on like this for pages.

From Book <How to Write a winning PS for Graduate and Professional School> Stelzer, Richard J. 3rd ed. Peterson's: Princeton, NJ. 1997.
page 5-6
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF
* What's special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story? What details of your life (personal or family problems/history, any genuinely notable accomplishments, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
* When did you originally become interested in this field and what have you since learned about it -and about yourself-that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
* How do you learned about this field-through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
* If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has the work contributed to your personal growth?
* What are your career goals?

* Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades and mediocre LSAT scores, for example, or a distinct improvement in your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
* Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (e.g., economic, familial, physical) in your life?
* What personal characteristics (integrity, compassion, persistence, for example) do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
* What skills (leadership, communicative, analytical, for example) do you possess?
* Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school-and more successful and effective in the profession or field-than other applicants?
* What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

page 11-13
* Remember that, in a general statement, what's most important is what you say and how you say it.
* Whatever else you do, be sure to answer the question(s) the admission committee is asking.
* Determine what you would tell an admission committee member if you had five minutes to answer the question "What's the most important for us to know about you?" This exercise will force you to do the type of thinking that must precede the preparation of an effective personal statement. For help, refer to the list of questions you should ask yourself.
* When appropriate, find an angle and tell a story about yourself. If your life story has drama, use it.
* You are preparing a PERSONAL statement. Often it is appropriate and useful to include material that is quite personal in nature.
* Grab the reader's attention in your opening paragraph.
* Review your life carefully - with outside help, if necessary- to make certain you're including all relevant information.
* Be selective. Don't introduce inappropriate material or get into so much detail that your judgement can be called into question.
* Try to maintain a positive and upbeat tone. While it is often useful to deal candidly with aspects of your history that might be perceived negatively, overall you still want to project confidence and enthusiasm.
* Be specific when appropriate.
* Avoid potentially controversial subjects.
* Express yourself clearly and concisely.
* Adhere to stated word limits.
* Be meticulous (type and proofread your essay carefully).
* If a school wants to know why you're applying to it rather than another school, do a bit of research if necessary to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.
* THINK about what's you're saying. (Is it interesting, relevant, different, memorable?)
* Be honest. Are you being yourself and revealing yourself? In many instances, admissions people are interested in finding out about who you are, and they appreciate honesty and candor. (One representative from a leading business school even told me that he likes to hear about applicants' setbacks because "through events like that, we see a lot of the qualities of rebounding. A lot of the real superstars have failed miserably at times. We think the best candidates are ones who have failed and learned from it.")
* Are you providing something more than a recitation of information available elsewhere in the application?
* Are you avoiding obvious cliches? For example, a medical school applicant who writes that he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought. (One law school admissions representative told me, "When we discuss mistakes, we jokingly refer to the person who starts out a personal statement with a quote, either from de Tocqueville or from Shakespeare, such as the one that says, 'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.' ")
* Use the Evaluative Questionnaire yourself (in addition to giving it to others) to access the effectiveness of your rough draft.

+++++++
PREPARATORY QUESTIONNAIRE

I am applying to _____ and must prepare a personal statement as a part of that process. I want to be sure to include all

relevant data about myself and my background, so I am soliciting information from various individuals who know me and whose judgement I value. Thank you for you help.

1. What do you think is most important for the admissions committee to know about me?
2. What do you regard as most unusual, distinctive, unique, and/or impressive about me (based on our association)?
3. Are you aware of any events or experiences in my background that might be of particular interest to those considering my application to graduate school?
4. Are there any special qualities or skills that I possess that tend to make you think I would be successful in graduate school and/or the profession to which I aspire?

+++++
What To Talk About

Schools phrase their prompts for the statement of purpose in a variety of ways. They even name them differently; what is a statement of purpose at one school is a letter of intent or a personal statement at another. Some schools will even call it an autobiographical statement. These prompts will also impose different restrictions on length, and some will give you more guidance than others will. Nonetheless, they're all asking for pretty much the same four pieces of information:

1. What you want to study at graduate school.
2. Why you want to study it.
3. What experience you have in your field.
4. What you plan to do with your degree once you have it.

These four points provide an accurate sketch of an admissions committee's interest in you. They want to read about a candidate with clear, well-defined research or career interests based on academic or workplace experience in the field. They seek someone who has a specific degree goal and who understands what's involved in getting that degree. They want a candidate whose ambitions don't end with the attainment of the degree, but include a career afterward that has some relationship to the degree earned.

It takes considerable dedication to earn a master's degree, and earning a doctorate requires still greater commitment and focus. Admissions committees know this quite well, and they examine candidates carefully, looking for indications that applicants have the right stuff. They want to hear that you care deeply about your chosen discipline; they ask why, not because there's a right or wrong answer, but to find out how deep your commitment runs. They'll examine your reasons for undertaking graduate work to see how badly you want it and how well you know what you're getting into.

Your job is to tell the committee about any experience that helps to establish you as a dedicated student of your field. Use the statement to prove that you are a diligent researcher capable of working hard and a consistent individual able to stick to a difficult task for a long time. Your job is also to avoid bringing up topics of no interest to a prospective admissions committee.

What Not to Talk About

There are a few things you should avoid discussing in your personal statement. Remember, they have to read hundreds, or even thousands, of essays. A paragraph that wastes the reader's time will annoy your committee -- something you obviously want to avoid. It may also cause the committee to wonder how well you really understand the academic world that you are trying to enter.

Applicants commonly make the error of including an undergraduate-style paragraph about how well-rounded they are: They're avid ultimate-frisbee players, they write science fiction short stories, or they love to cook. Colleges are interested in this stuff, since they're trying to build communities of creative, interactive individuals, but this is not true of graduate schools. Grad schools are looking for the best minds in one subject area that they can round up and are trying to build a department of at least a few people working in every major field.

The activities that interest admissions committees are strictly those that speak to your suitability for graduate work in that specific subject area, be it engineering or archaeology. As a graduate student, you'll be called upon to do difficult coursework, and unless you're in a professional degree program, you'll do extensive research. You'll need to write up your results precisely and clearly. You may have to teach undergraduate classes within your field and conceivably even design a course. And you'll have to get along with a diverse group of colleagues who will sometimes work very closely with you. Any experience in school, work, or your extracurricular life that speaks to those abilities is worth talking about.

You've got a lot of latitude in your essay. You can talk about whatever you want to, within certain constraints. The most important constraint is the need to answer the questions asked in the essay prompt. Whatever you do, don't ignore those four pieces of information. You can be sure that the administration phrased its questions carefully, and no matter how creative or flashy your essay is, the committee will notice if you don't give them the information they've requested.

Making Your Statement of Purpose Unique

If you're applying to a Ph.D program, why not make the effort to differentiate your essay from the others? You won't write a very memorable essay if you simply list the facts of your academic life. Most applicants write very similar, straightforward essays, and march through the basic topics in the order they're listed in the prompt, which produces a huge pile of essays that all sound the same:

"I studied yadda yadda as an undergraduate at XYZ University. There, I had the opportunity to take part in the yadda research project, where I became fascinated with the questions of yadda yadda and their implications for society. I am pursuing doctoral study in yadda yadda in order to deepen my understanding of these topics and extend my research further into the area of yadda yadda yadda."

To distinguish your essay, add something unique to it without throwing in irrelevant information that will annoy your readers. One of the best ways to do this is to discuss, briefly, an idea in your field that turns you on intellectually. It's an effective essay-opener, and it lets you write about something besides yourself for a bit. There are other benefits as well. The idea you choose to talk about, and your comments on it, often tell an admissions committee more about you than your own self-descriptions can.

Discussing an idea will catch people's attention and give your readers a reprieve from people writing about themselves. That "me-me-me" stuff can get irritating after a while, even though it's what the prompt asks for. A discussion of an idea demonstrates your interest in your field, rather than just describing it. Ultimately, that's more convincing.

A Few Last Words of Advice

No matter how difficult this may be, be sure to show your statement of purpose to someone you respect, preferably the professors who are writing your recommendations, and get some feedback before you send it in. Pay attention to what they say. It's absolutely vital to get an external viewpoint, since you'll often find yourself too close to your own writing to see it clearly. If you need to revise it, do so and then ask for another opinion.

Also, make sure you have someone else proofread your essay. A fresh set of eyes often picks up something you might miss. Better yet, if you have enough willing friends, have a couple of people proofread each statement.

Finally, don't just reuse the same statement of purpose for each school you apply to. You can recycle the same information, but make sure you tweak it for every school. Your statement will sound stale and the admissions committee will notice if you don't do this.

++++++
Graduate School - Statement

Graduate and professional schools often require some sort of written statement as a part of the application. The

terminology differs, but may include "statement of purpose," "personal statement," "letter of intent," "personal narrative," etc. Some statements require rather specific information--for example, the applicant's intended area of study within a graduate field. Others suggest subjects which should be addressed specifically. Still others are quite unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of matters. Some applications call for one statement, while others require responses to a series of six or more questions, ranging from 250 to 750 words each. The importance of the statement varies from school to school and from field to field.
    * Determine your purpose in writing the statement
    * Determine the content of your statement
    * Determine your approach and style of the statement
    * Words and phrases to avoid without explanation

Determine your purpose in writing the statement

Usually the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant who should be chosen. You may wish to show that you have the ability and motivation to succeed in your field, or you may wish to show the committee that, on the basis of your experience, you are the kind of candidate who will do well in the field. Whatever its purpose, the content must be presented in a manner that will give coherence to the whole statement.

    * Pay attention to the purpose throughout the statement so that extraneous material is left out.
    * Pay attention to the audience (committee) throughout the statement. Remember that your audience is made up of professionals in their field, and you are not going to tell them how they should act or what they should be. You are the amateur.

Determine the content of your statement

Be sure to answer any questions fully. Analyze the questions or guidance statements for the essay completely and answer all parts. Usually graduate and professional schools are interested in the following matters, although the form of the question(s) and the responses may vary:

    * Your purpose in graduate study. This means you must have thought this through before you try to answer the question.
    * The area of study in which you wish to specialize. This requires that you know the field well enough to make a decision and are able to state your preferences using the language of the field.
    * Your intended future use of your graduate study. This will include your career goals and plans for the future.
    * Your special preparation and fitness for study in the field. This is the opportunity to join and correlate your academic background with your extracurricular experience to show how they unite to make you a special candidate.
    * Any problems or inconsistencies in your records or scores, such as a bad semester. Be sure to explain in a positive manner and justify the explanation. Since this is a rebuttal argument, it should be followed by a positive statement of your abilities. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to provide this information outside of the personal statement.
    * Any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in the application, such as a significant (35 hour per week) workload outside of school. This, too, should be followed with a positive statement about yourself and your future.
    * You may be asked, "Why do you wish to attend this school?" This requires that you have done your research about the school, and know what its special appeal is to you.
    * Above all, this statement should contain information about you as a person. They know nothing about you unless you tell them. You are the subject of the statement.

Determine your approach and style of the statement

There is no such thing as "the perfect way to write a statement." There is only the one that is best for and fitting for you.

There are some things the statement should not be:

* Avoid the "what I did with my life" approach.
 * Avoid the "I've always wanted to be a " approach.
 * Avoid a catalog of achievements. This is only a list of what you have done, and tells nothing about you as a person. Normally, the statement is far more than a resume.
 * Avoid lecturing the reader. For example, you should not write a statement such as "Communication skills are important in this field." Any graduate admissions committee member knows that and is not trying to learn about the field from the applicant. Some statements do ask applicants about their understanding of the field.

These are some things the statement should do:

 * It should be objective, yet self-revelatory. Write directly and in a straightforward manner that tells about your experience and what it means to you. Do not use "academese." This is not a research paper for a professor.
 * It should form conclusions that explain the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself and your field, your future goals, and your career plans. Draw your conclusions from the evidence your life provides.
 * It should be specific. Document your conclusions with specific instances, or draw your conclusions as the result of individual experience. See below a list of general words and phrases to avoid using without explanation.
 * It should be an example of careful persuasive writing. Career Center Counselors can help you determine if this is so by reviewing your draft statement.
 * It should get to the point early on and catch the attention of the reader.
 * It often should be limited in length, no more than two pages or less. In some instances it may be longer, depending on the school's instructions.

If you want a career counselor to read your personal statement, you must submit it through our online statement review service. Before you do that, we recommend that you attend a "Writing the Statement for Graduate School" workshop.

Words and phrases to avoid without explanation
significant interesting   challenging   satisfying/satisfaction   appreciate   invaluable   exciting/excited
enjoyable/enjoy   feel good   appealing to me   appealing aspect   I like it   it's important
I can contribute   meant a lot to me   stimulating   incredible   gratifying   fascinating meaningful
helping people   I like helping people   remarkable   rewarding   useful   valuable   helpful

Graduate School Application Essays

The Writing Center
At Rensselaer

4508 Sage Lab
518/276-8983
writingcenter@rpi.edu
www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter

Developed by:
Maureen Murphy
Patricia Nugent
Jennifer Taylor

Introduction

Admission to graduate school is highly competitive. Writing an essay, or personal statement, is often the most difficult part of the application process. Requirements vary widely, with some programs requesting only one or two paragraphs about why you want to pursue graduate study, and others requiring five or six separate essays in which you are expected to write at length about your motivation for graduate study, your strengths and weaknesses, your greatest achievements, and solutions to hypothetical problems. Business schools are notorious for requiring several time-consuming essays.

This handout is designed to provide some general guidance on how to write a successful essay.

Essay Checklist:

- ❏ Start early enough to allow for several rewritings.

- ❏ Carefully review the instructions and prepare an outline of what you are to include.

- ❏ Write concisely. Demonstrate your ability to think and express ideas clearly.

- ❏ Articulate your motivation and capacity to succeed, and why you and this program are a good match.

- ❏ Use first person ("I") and active voice. This essay is about you.

- ❏ Be unique and creative while still writing in a scholarly fashion.

- ❏ Keep the length to one or two pages.

Purpose and Audience

Your aim should be a clear, succinct statement showing that you have a definite sense of what you want to do and enthusiasm for the field of study you have chosen. Your essay should reflect your writing abilities; more important, it should reveal the clarity, the focus, and the depth of your knowledge about your chosen field of study.

Before writing anything, stop and consider what your reader might be looking for; the general directions or other parts of the application may indicate this. Additionally, you should research the school, department and faculty to which you are applying. Your audience for this essay will consist of faculty and staff members of the department to which you are applying, and perhaps, members of the university's graduate school department. These readers will often have varying levels of knowledge in your field; therefore, keep your readers in mind when explaining any technical work or research you have done.

Admissions committees may be trying to evaluate a number of things from your statement, including the following things about you:

- Motivation and commitment to a field of study
- Expectations with regard to the program and career opportunities
- Writing ability
- Major areas of interest
- Research and/or work experience
- Educational background
- Immediate and long-term goals
- Reasons for deciding to pursue graduate education in a particular field and at a particular institution
- Maturity
- Personal uniqueness – what you would add to the diversity of the entering class

Content and Format

An essay or personal statement for an application should be essentially a statement of your ideas and goals. Usually it includes a certain amount of personal history, but, unless an institution specifically requests autobiographical information, you do not have to supply any. Even when the requirement is a "personal statement," the possibilities are almost unlimited. There is no set formula to follow, and, if you do write an autobiographical piece, it does not have to be arranged chronologically. The following areas are typically addressed in a graduate school essay, but pay attention to the specific content requested by your school.

Background & Abilities

- ❑ Correlate your personal information with the degree program you wish to enter.
- ❑ Highlight your unique skills, abilities and character traits, focusing on those that correlate with success in graduate school.
- ❑ Show a logical transition from your experience in school/work to graduate school. How has that experience cultivated your interest in this degree program?

❑ Feature your relevant experience. Balance content between academic and work-related experience.

Goals & Motivation
❑ Discuss your motivation for pursuing graduate education. Demonstrate how the degree program can help you achieve the goals you have set for yourself.
❑ Relate your qualifications, experiences and skills to your goals and to your school's resources.
❑ Ensure that your goals are a logical extension of your qualifications, experiences and abilities.
❑ Spell out your short- and long-term goals, including proposed areas of research and professional interests.
❑ Answer the question, "Why this school/program and why now?"

In every cases, make sure that you:
❑ Convey that you know what you want to do and why. Sound enthusiastic about it.
❑ Be concise. Choose what's most important rather than trying to mention everything.
❑ Don't ramble on or be self-indulgent in your presentation. Avoid redundancies.
❑ Avoid unnecessarily large words, trite expressions and cuteness.

Essays should be typed. Attach pages to your application if the space provided is insufficient; however, limit your essay to 2 pages maximum. Depth is more important than breadth; do not try to cover everything. Neatness, spelling, and grammar are also important. Be sure you have someone read it over your draft, and use the Writing Center at any stage of the process.

Dealing with Problems Areas in Your Academic Record
If there is information in your application that might reflect badly on you, such as poor grades or low admission test scores, it is better not to deal with it in your essay unless you are asked to. Keep your essay positive. However, you will need to explain anything that could be construed as negative in your application because failing to do so may eliminate you from consideration. The best way to do this is on a separate sheet entitled "Addendum," which you attach to the application, or in a cover letter that you enclose.

In either form, your explanation of these shortcomings should be short and to the point, avoiding long, tedious excuses. In addition to supplying your own explanation, you may find it appropriate to ask one or more of your recommenders to address the issue in their recommendation letter. Ask them to do this only if they are already familiar with your problem and could talk about it from a positive perspective.

Process

There are two main approaches to organizing an essay.

- You can outline the points you want to cover and then expand on them

OR

- You can put your ideas down on paper as they come to you, going over them, eliminating certain sentences, and moving others around until you achieve a logical sequence.

Making an outline will probably lead to a well-organized essay, whereas writing spontaneously may yield a more inspired piece of writing. Use the approach you feel most comfortable with.

Whichever approach you use, you will want someone to critique your essay. Your adviser and those who write your letters of recommendation may be very helpful to you in this regard. If they are in the field you plan to pursue, they will be able to tell you what things to stress and what things to keep brief.

Do not be surprised if you get differing opinions on the content of your essay. These diverse reactions are important, as your essay will most likely be read by more than one person. However, in the end, only you can decide on the best way of presenting yourself.

Sample Application Essay 1

As a senior biomedical engineering student at RPI, I am receiving a particularly well-rounded education in engineering, complemented by studies in the sciences and humanities. During my sophomore year, I became interested in dentistry and began to select courses that would prepare me for dental school. While this meant additional work, I improved my study skills, and I have earned a grade point average of 3.4 over the last three years. Because of this rigorous course load, I will be graduating this August instead of last May. I had planned on applying to dental school this fall for the 2002-03 entering class, but after receiving your letter earlier this month and subsequently speaking with the admissions office, I found that it was still possible to apply for the September 2001 entering class.

My interest in the health care field began while I was in high school. I was first introduced to many different aspects of the medical field as a member of the Medical Explorers. My further research experience in college has inspired me to enter the dental profession.

My background in biomedical engineering has introduced me to some of the practical applications of biomaterials in dentistry. Dentistry is a challenging field that would enable me to provide health care to many people. Oral health is a crucial part of well-being, and I believe that I can make a significant contribution to dental medicine. Though I anticipate that much of my time as a professional will be spent providing clinical care, I am determined to continue with researching new techniques for improved treatment.

My career goal is to specialize in the area of oral surgery. I am encouraged in this aspiration when I consider the achievements of the 2000 SDOS graduating class, where both the number and percentage of students admitted to post-graduate residency programs were higher than those for any other dental school in the country. Another thing that appeals to me about SDOS is the favorable ratio of staff to students, which undoubtedly enhances both individual instruction and the development of close relationships between students and instructors.

This summer, at RPI, I will be assisting Dr. Joan Smith, DDS, and Dr. Robert Adams, PhD, in determining the effect of magnesium on the crystal development of dental enamel in newborn rats. The rationale for this research is that magnesium is closely associated with acid solubility and, thus, potentially with the tooth-decay process. As a result of this research, I am already co-author of a poster presentation entitled "The Detection of Magnesium According to Developmental Age," which was shown at the March 2000 meeting of the International Association of Dental Research. By the end of the summer, I should be co-author of at least two journal publications.

I would be pleased to join the distinguished class enrolling at SDOS in September 2001. Overall, I feel that SDOS can help me achieve my goals by preparing me to fulfill my obligation to myself, to society, and to the dental profession.

Sample Application Essay 2

As the science of theoretical chemistry has matured, its focus has shifted from analytically solvable problems, such as the atomic structure of hydrogen, to more complex problems for which analytical solutions are difficult or impossible to specify. Important questions about the behavior of condensed phases of matter, the electronic structure of heavy atoms and the in vivo conformation of biological macromolecules fall into this class. The powerful, highly parallel supercomputers that have evolved from recent advances in computing technology are ideally suited to the mathematical modeling of these complex chemical phenomena. Simulations in which the trajectories of a large number of interacting bodies must be computed simultaneously, such as statistical-mechanical Monte Carlo studies or molecular dynamics simulations, are particularly appropriate for implementation on parallel machines. I plan to devote my graduate and postgraduate work to the theoretical study and computational modeling of these many-body systems.

In preparation for this work, I have developed a strong background in mathematics and computer science in addition to my coursework in chemistry. Given the current demand for increased computing capacity, this background should prove beneficial. For example, while recent advances in computer hardware alone promise potential tenfold increases in speed, truly significant jumps in computing power (speedups of, say, a thousand-fold) will require changes in currently available programming environments and the reformulation of popular simulation algorithms. Furthermore, until highly parallel machines become widely available, even modest increases in capacity will depend in part upon the innovative use of existing hardware through the continued modification of available software and the development of new algorithms. My elective work in computer science and mathematics should prove useful for both the revision of existing programs and the eventual development of new programs and languages specifically designed for the parallel architecture of tomorrow's supercomputers.

After completing my doctoral work, I plan to seek employment as a university professor. I believe the rewards of such a position far outweigh the greater monetary compensation available in industry. For example, academic scientists are generally allowed a greater degree of freedom in their choice of research areas. They also benefit from exposure to co-workers who have a broad range of experiences. Finally, the satisfaction I have derived from my undergraduate tutoring and consulting experience has convinced me that I would enjoy a career in teaching.

How to Write a Great Statement of Purpose

Vince Gotera
English Language and Literature
University of Northern Iowa

January 2006

The Statement of Purpose required by grad schools is probably the hardest thing you will ever write. (Incidentally, the statement of purpose may also be called an Application Essay, Objectives for Graduate Study, Personal Background, Cover Letter, or some comparable title.)

I would guess virtually all grad-school applicants, when they write their first draft of the statement of purpose, will get it wrong. Much of what you have learned about writing and also about how to present yourself will lead you astray. For example, here's an opening to a typical first draft:

> I am applying to the Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing at the University of Okoboji because I believe my writing will blossom at your program since it is a place where I will be challenged and I can hone my writing skills.

How's that? It's clear, it's direct, and it "strokes" the MFA program, right? Wrong. All of it is obvious and extraneous.

The admissions committee knows you are applying to their MFA program because everyone in the stacks of applications they are reading is applying for the same thing. The admissions committee will also know that your writing will "blossom" there since they feel they have a strong program. Of course you will be challenged — all undergrads going on to a grad program will be challenged, no matter how well-prepared they think they are. And of course the new grad student will "hone [her] writing skills" — isn't that the main purpose of the MFA program?

Let's assume the required length of this particular program's statement of purpose is 300 words. Well, with this opening you will have used up 15% of your space saying virtually nothing. 15%!

In fact, not only is this opening paragraph obvious, extraneous, and space-stealing, it's *boring!*Imagine who's reading this and where: five professors "locked" in a room with 500 applications. Do you think this opening paragraph will command their attention? Will they read the rest of this statement of purpose with an open mind that this applicant is the kind of student they want? Will they remember this application later? You be the judge.

Remember what you learned in first-year composition? You need a "hook."

A former student of mine applying to enter a master's program in library science had a great hook. I don't remember Susan's exact words, but the opening paragraph of her statement of purpose went something like this:

> When I was eleven, my great-aunt Gretchen passed away and left me something that changed my life: a library of about five thousand books. Some of my best days were spent arranging and reading her books. Since then, I have wanted to be a librarian.

Okay ... it's clear, it's direct, it's 45 words, and, most important, it tells the admissions committee about Susan's almost life-long passion not just for books but for *taking care of books.* When the committee starts to discuss their "best picks," don't you think they'll remember her as "the young woman who had her own library"? Of course they will, because having had their own library when they were eleven would probably be a cherished fantasy for each of them!

Suppose Susan had written this opening paragraph instead:

> I am honored to apply for the Master of Library Science program at the University of Okoboji because as long as I can remember I have had a love affair with books. Since I was eleven I have known I wanted to be a librarian.

That's 45 words too. Do you think the admissions committee will remember this application among the 500 applications they are wading through? Probably more than half of the applications, maybe a*lot* more than half, will open with something very similar. Many will say they "have had a love affair with books" — that phrase may sound passionate until you've read it a couple of hundred times.

All of us have had some event, some experience, like my student's personal library at eleven, which drives us toward the discipline(s) we inhabit. I was speaking to a group of students recently about this. One student — let's call her Jennifer — said she wanted to get a master's degree in speech therapy. When I asked her why, Jennifer said she had taken a class in it for fun and really loved it. But then I pressed her: was there some personal reason she found that field significant enough to spend her whole life doing it? At first Jennifer said no, but after more questioning she revealed that her brother had speech problems. This was a discovery to her; she had not entered the field with that connection in mind — at least not consciously. But there it was; Jennifer now had her hook.

You have to really dig. Be introspective. Don't settle for "I love this field." *Why* do you love this field? Why do you want to work in this field for *the rest of your life?* Why does it *complete* you? Cut through the bull you tell your parents and

relatives and friends. What is *your* truth? Find it and then find a memorable way to say it. Grad schools require the statement of purpose not only because they want to find about you as an applicant, they want you to really think about why you are taking such a life-changing step — truly and profoundly why.

Okay, back to the scene of the five professors surrounded by stacks of applications, maybe more than 500. Do you know who they are? What they want? What they like to eat? Obviously, no. Conversely, do they know you? Well, no. But ... the statement of purpose is your chance to help them get to know you! Your statement of purpose should portray you as a person, not just an application among hundreds of others. Not just paper and ink.

Here's one way to do it. When I was an undergrad senior first applying for grad schools, I knew a grad student — I'll call him Nigel — who told me he had written a three-sentence statement of purpose to get into Stanford:

> I want to teach English at the university level. To do this, I need a PhD. That is why I am applying.

That was the whole thing. That's only half of 45 words. It certainly portrays Nigel as brash, risk-taking, no-nonsense, even arrogant. If this is how you want to portray yourself, then by all means do this. But you should also know that Nigel's statement of purpose is an all-or-nothing proposition. You can bet there will be members of probably any admissions committee who will find Nigel's statement of purpose offensive, even disrespectful. And they might not want such a student at their school. But then I suppose Nigel wouldn't want to be a student at that school, either.

Try to make your paper-and-ink self come alive. Don't just say, "I used to work on an assembly line in a television factory, and one day I decided that I had to get out of there, so I went to college to save my own life." How about this: "One Thursday, I had soldered the 112th green wire on the same place on the 112th TV remote, and I realized the solder fumes were rotting my brain. I decided college would be my salvation." Both 35 words. Which narrative do you think will keep the admissions committee reading?

Tell stories (briefly). Use vivid language. Be specific. Be dynamic. Liven up a moment in the lives of those five professors trapped with those 500 applications. Maybe 600. Maybe more.

At the same time, be careful not to be glib. Don't be slick. Don't write your application in a sequence of haiku. Don't put in photos. Just be yourself, but a more heightened version of yourself in words (since face-to-face nuance and gestures won't be there to help).

Remember your statement of purpose should portray you as (1) passionately interested in the field;(2) intelligent; (3) well-prepared academically and personally; (4) able to take on the challenges of grad school; (5) able to have rapport with professors and fellow grad students — in other words, collegial; (6) able to finish the graduate degree in a timely fashion; and (7) a potentially outstanding representative of that grad school in your future career.

That's a lot to cover in a few hundred words (the length of a statement purpose, as required by different schools, tends to be around 300 to 1000 words). "Passionate interest in the field" will be covered by the kind of hook I have described above. "Intelligence" will be conveyed by the overall writing, organization, expression, etc. of your statement. Being "well-prepared" can be demonstrated by using the lingo of the field (theory, craft, etc.), describing the specific kinds of coursework and other accomplishments you have in the field. Ability "to take on the challenges of grad school" can be shown by describing the rigor of the work you have done. "Collegiality" is not particularly important but is nevertheless a factor — if you can show yourself as a generally nice and cooperative person, that will do — just be true to your own style. Ability "to finish the graduate program" can be conveyed implicitly by your success thus far and more explicitly if you can tell some (brief) story about adverse obstacles you have overcome. Being a "future outstanding representative" can be implied by your being an outstanding representative of your undergraduate school — for example, don't "bad-mouth" your current college or professors.

Often, grad schools will ask you to address other or similar qualities as I've listed above. Just use common sense in focusing on each. Don't address them in the same order as the grad school has listed. Combine them; rearrange them; do whatever you need to do to show yourself as an imaginative person, not a parrot following a line of Brazil nuts to crack.

If you have some problematic academic background, address that as well to reassure the admissions committee. For example, let's say that you got all C's one semester. Take a (brief) paragraph to explain that you had some emotional setback that semester but then demonstrate how your grades have been sterling since then, and that you now have a 3.83 grade-point average in the discipline. If you spin this well, your story will enhance the admissions committee's image of you as someone with the abilities to "take on challenges" and "to finish on time."

Here's an organization I would recommend: (1) passionate hook; (2) segué to your background in the field; (3) specific classes by title and professors you have had (especially if well-known in the field); (4) related extracurricular activities (especially if they hint at some personal quality you want to convey); (5) any publications or other professional accomplishments in the field (perhaps conference presentations or public readings); (6) explanations about problems in your background (if needed); and (7) why you have chosen this grad school (name one or two professors and what you

know of their specific areas or some feature of the program which specifically attracts you).

I should probably expand on item 7. This is a practical issue as well. If you are applying to ten grad schools, it's a mismanagement of time to write ten separate, tailored statements of purpose. Items 1 through 6 above can be exactly the same for all the statements. Then when you get to item 7, put in a different paragraph for each school. Remember this means the ten statements will all be as long, in terms of word count, as the shortest required length among the ten schools. If the shortest length is 300 words, probably that length will be okay for the 500-word school (in fact the admissions committee at the 500-word place may see you as savvy for not going on and on). But those 300 words will clearly not work for the 1200-word school, so you'll need to expand that one. Don't pad. Find other engaging material in your background.

About mentioning professors at each grad school: doing this will portray you as someone "who has done her homework," as someone who is genuinely interested in the field, enough to have done some prefatory work in that area. Don't just mention their names (anyone who can browse a web site can do that). Say something of substance about each professor by name, something that reveals you know and appreciate that person's work. Don't necessarily pick the most famous professor at the grad school; chances are many other applicants will do the same, and the admissions committee members will soon be unconsciously filtering those mentions out. (Besides, the most famous professor doesn't always work with all graduate students or may be out of town half the year, and you may come off as naive if you say you're looking forward to working with her.) Find a lesser-known professor whose work truly intrigues you (and *truly* is the operational word here). Then say something about what you know of that professor's work — remember that person may be on the admissions committee. Don't suck up — don't be a sycophant. Be fair and honest.

Be sure to show your statement of purpose to several professors. Remember they will have different ideas about what constitutes an appropriate and effective statement of purpose. If one of your professors has a connection with a specific grad school, she may have some inside knowledge about what kind of statement of purpose will work best at that school. Make your final editing decisions based on what will convey you most accurately as you see it. Again, be specific, be dynamic, come alive on paper. Continue to get advice from your professors on later drafts.

Proofread your statement of purpose. Copyedit for consistency, accuracy, and style. Ask your friends to copyedit and proofread your statement; perhaps you can do the same for them if they are also applying for grad school.

Remember that style in writing can be parallel to style in dress: the second affects your image in person while the first affects your image when you may not be present. Leaving in typos and misplaced commas is like dressing in your grubbies for

a coat-and-tie / cocktail dress event. Being too wordy is comparable to dressing in an evening gown or a tuxedo for a casual get-together. Being too glib, too mannered, may be like wearing a furry rabbit costume to a party which turns out*not* to be a Halloween bash. Be careful. Be a perfectionist.

Keep working on your statement of purpose even after you have sent it to the school(s) with the earlier deadline(s). You might have a later epiphany about your personal and academic background, your motives for applying for grad school, your long-term plans, and this epiphany may be just the thing that gets you into the school(s) with the later deadline(s).

To close, the statement of purpose, in the eyes of Department Heads, Program Chairs, and Admissions Committee members, can be the most important document in the application. Other parts of your graduate-school application — test scores, transcripts, letters of recommendation, writing samples — do not say as much about you as a person as the statement of purpose can: your proudest accomplishments alongside your fondest hopes and dreams.

Checklist for Writing a Statement of Purpose
Vince Gotera | University of Northern Iowa

[ ] Organization ...

    [ ] A "hook" that demonstrates your passion for the field
    [ ] Segué to your background in the field
    [ ] Description of your academic background in the field
        [ ] Specific classes you have taken, given by name
        [ ] Specific professors you have had, especially if well-known in that field
    [ ] Extracurricular activities in the field
    [ ] Publications or other professional accomplishments in the field (perhaps conference presentations or public readings)
    [ ] Explanations about problems in background (if needed)
    [ ] Explanation of why you have chosen the specific grad school
        [ ] Mention one or two professors in that school and what you know of and appreciate about their work
        [ ] Specific features of the grad program which attract you
[ ] Get advice from several of your professors — philosophical advice as well as specific writing advice
[ ] Proofread and copyedit; ask friends to proofread and copyedit as well
[ ] Keep working on the statement of purpose, even after you have already sent it to school(s) with earlier deadline(s)

The Computer Science Student

Statement by MIPT Alumnus (01/2003)

This application is very important for me because completion a PhD degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering is the best chance for a unifying my interest in information technologies and my natural inclination to mathematics. I am confident that when I become a serious and mature researcher my desire to make a contribution to science and to our understanding of this world will remain my main driving force.

It took a long time until personal computers became widely available in this country and until then my only single interest was mathematics. At the age of 14, during my school holidays, when my classmates had a rest, I willingly got up at about 7 in the morning and till the evening was absorbed by mathematics. At that time these were mostly Olympiad problems, but two years later, still being a High School student, I attended a course on inequalities in Kiev State University and conducted my first research work. Essentially it was a proof of Karamat inequality that utilized properties of convex functions and Murhead inequality. It was unforgettable, how main idea of my central proof dawned upon me. Although, relatively simple, it was something innovative, something that no one had ever done before with methods of elementary mathematics. That evening I went to sleep the happiest boy in the world. Later I refined the proof and being a freshman at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology(MIPT) presented it at the 52nd MIPT Scientific Conference where it was honored the first prize.

In the third-year at MIPT I started working at the Institute of System Programming (ISP), which is a part of Russian Academy of Sciences. Lectures on computer science at the ISP expanded my knowledge in many important fields such as complexity of algorithms, parallel computing, compiler technology, software engineering and so on. Especially I enjoyed studying new Autonomous Adaptive Control (AAC) method under the guidance of Prof. X. The essence of the AAC method is in simultaneous solution of such problems as pattern recognition, knowledge obtaining, presentation and decision-making. During my work in the ISP I had rare opportunity to interact closely with scientists who stood at the origin of computer science in Russia: Prof. X, Dr. Y and Prof. Z.

In my fourth year I joined Moscow office of NetCracker Corp. that selected several students for training. NetCracker produces software for modeling, analysis and interpretation of complex telecommunication networks. My work in NetCracker gave me solid practical knowledge of many technologies and concepts such as Java, Oracle, XML, Object-Oriented Design and Programming. But much more important is that the project required extensive knowledge of both mathematics and computer science. I personally wrote some modules to NetCracker where actively utilized graph theory, parallel computing and discrete mathematics. Moreover sometimes generalization of classical algorithms was required. For example, I extended Dejkstra algorithm to

allow multiple search of optimal paths.

Along with my study of computer science I am involved in research activity in fundamental mathematics. Under supervision of Professor X I conducted research in convex analysis, wrote my thesis Integration of Multivalued Mappings and defended it with Honors. Essentially it consisted in a study of necessary and sufficient conditions under which there exists Riemann integral of multivalued maps. During this work I acquired a broad range of research experience and strong background necessary for further research. My current research work is devoted to differentiation of multivalued mappings and differential inclusions and is mostly concerned with nonconvex case. One of the most challenging tasks in the work is to obtain Pontryagin maximum principle in Hamiltonian form from Lagrange form (in terms of tangent cones).

My research topic is closely related with and often serves as a background to theory of optimal control and theory of decision making that are widely used in network optimization and graph algorithms - areas that are of great interest to me. Moreover my work on network performance in NetCracker adds up to this framework. Investigations in these fields, in discrete mathematics and in the theory of compilers are widespread at the department and it makes admission to your University particularly desirable. I have strongest incentive to advance as far as I can in this field and to discover something that has not been known before. I am certain that application to Carnegie Mellon is the best possible step to accomplish it and I would regard my admission not only as a great honor but also as a great responsibility and an obligation to work hard.

Applicant:Ivan   Ivanov
12.16.2002

留学个人陈述范文(通信专业)

Personal Statement

Applied Program: Wireless Telecommunications

On August 27, 2002, at the Central Institute of the Datang Telecom Technology and Industry Group based in Beijing, a young woman, full of energy and self-confidence, was giving a presentation entitled "The Design of the Switching Numerical Method of the Radio Resource Management (RRM) Strategy in TD-SCDMA, and the Testing of Its Simulated Systems," which received rapt attention and high remarks from all the experts in Computer and Telecommunications who attended the meeting. That woman was I. At present, TD-SCDMA, W-CDMA, and CDMA 2000 are considered the main technological standards in the third generation of the world's technological development in mobile telecommunications. And the design of a switching computation method for the RRM Strategy is a key element and technological crux for the TD-SCDMA technology. In retrospection, I found that it was my great enthusiasm for mobile telecommunications, and my persistent pursuit of accuracy and perfection that have helped me win accolades from colleagues and experts.

In China, since the TD-SCDMA uses a smart antenna, it makes a demand for a finer research on the computation method for the RRM Strategy, in areas such as PC, DCA, and HC. To me, a new starter in the company, it was a real challenge. Since the research team was new, it lacked engineering data and practical experience, although the equipment of the lab was quite advanced. It was only after much library research, thinking, and consultation with experts did I find a RRM computation method suitable for a smart antenna. Because a smart antenna has its advantages of a more accurate VE locating and reduced searching areas, this computation method effectively lowers the complexity of the switching process and its failure rate. During the time when I worked for the project, I often stayed up several days in a roll to perfect a lab test. But I also derived an enormous sense of satisfaction and fulfillment after overcoming obstacles, which more than compensated the pains and difficulties that I had to go through.

留学个人陈述范文(通信专业)

The rapid development of mobile telecommunication technology places a high demand on professionals working in this field. To a certain extent, it has to be a labor of love. My keen interest in mobile telecommunications emanated from the concept of "personal communication." During my undergraduate years at the Northwest University of Industry, I spent much of my spare time browsing over professional publications and journals, to keep myself abreast of current developments. The concept of "personal communication" I encountered during this process impressed me immensely. A system of "personal communication" is one that allows the user to communicate at anytime, anyplace, to anyone, and in any way. It painted such a beautiful of picture of a future society that I became fully convinced that it is a subject well worth my lifelong pursuit. This was why I chose Mobile Telecommunications as my area of specialization in the graduate program. As a graduate student, I completed several research projects independently and successfully, including, for instance, "Turbo Code and the Application of Its Coding Concept." In short frame conditions, the Turbo Code, with its improved application in engineering, seems to have a bright future in real-time voice-data service (Please see the attached article). After completing my graduate degree, I entered Datang Group, a pioneer in China's software development. Here I did software design for the switch control template used at the RNC equipment for the TD-SCDMA system, and developed a switching computation method for the RRM Strategy. I went through the entire process of software design for the switch control template for the RNC equipment, from topic analysis to the project outline and then to actual program writing.

The present development of telecommunication technology indicates that the smart antenna, software radio, and the transmission technology of subline 下行 high-speed subdivided exchange data (下行高速分组交换数据传输技术) are key technologies for today's mobile telecommunications. Software radio, in particular, has attracted much public attention. The use of DSP and software to solve the problem of wireless interfaces of diverse standards on a public hardware platform has become a major issue pursued by many professionals in our field. I too hope to make my own contribution to the technological development in this area. In the next few years, the traditional concept of using

chips to build wireless equipment for mobile telecommunication will be seriously challenged. In recent years, the technologies and standards of the third generation of mobile telecommunication have been rapidly updated. Software radio, I believe, will be the future of our trade.

My desire to know more about computer engineering prompted me to rise above my present conditions. The United States, as technological superpower, have first-rate teaching faculty and research facilities in the world. Its ideological openness and tolerance make a sharp contrast to Chinese culture, which tends to value tradition rather than innovation. Wireless telecommunication may be said to be one of the newest research areas, and it is new concepts and new vision that give life to the industry. I believe that in the fine research environment in the United States, I will be able to make "shortcuts" in attaining my academic and career goals.

I would like to apply for admission to the Center for Wireless Telecommunications of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. As the most prestigious research institute in Wireless Telecommunications, the Center has a large number of famed scholars and professionals dedicated to the theoretic research of Wireless Telecommunications. Meanwhile, it maintains close contact with the telecommunication industry, and in this way can test the theory in practical experimentation, which in turn promotes theoretic research. It is an ideal place for me to fully develop my research potential.

I look forward to finding a teaching position at college level in China after completing my graduate education, which will allow me to continue my research work in Wireless Telecommunications. I will impart my theoretic and practical knowledge to my students, and hope that this will benefit China's wireless telecommunication industry, and society at large. I will make every effort to make the idea of "personal communication" a reality.

留学个人陈述范文(自动化专业)

Personal Statement

I have a lot of dreams.

If we dream, everything will be possible.

In retrospect, I have much to be proud of. As a 10-year-old teenager, I was already obsessed of painting the concrete forms of my dreams with the brush in my hand. At such a young age, I had already learned the necessity to practice painting deep into the night in order to achieve constant improvement in the sophistication of my brushwork. My endowments and my dedication helped me secure three major prizes at international adolescent fine art competitions. My substantial progress in practicing fine art also opened the door to developing my perceptive horizon and to tapping my tremendous potential. As a result, I handled my studies with much facility, especially in mathematics for which I had a particular penchant. No matter how difficult the courses in my high school were, I could almost invariably achieve full marks in all of them. Apart from virtually perfect performance in the scholastic aptitudes at my school, I achieved remarkable scores in a variety of national contests for high school students in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Those distinguished achievements resulted in my being enrolled by Tsinghua University, exempted from entrance examination. In China, this could properly be deemed the highest honor that a high school student could possible attain.

On the way to the realization of your dreams, there is no substitute for hard work

Teamwork fulfill your dreams easily

Upon entering this most prestigious university in China, which is Tsinghua University, in my usual spirit of dedication and perseverance, I once again embarked on my journey of industrious study in the Department of Automation. My exceptionally solid foundation in mathematics provided me with a stepping stone with which I proceeded onto the exploration of other sophisticated and erudite subjects. As a freshman, I taught myself such mathematics courses as Real Analysis and Advanced Numerical Analysis that are only scheduled for senior students. My performance in all the specialty-related coursework not only enabled me to secure the second highest GPA ranking in my class but also furnished me with a powerful instrument whereby to materialize my dreams in the research and development of computer and network technology.

In the scorching summer of 1999, with an entrepreneurial passion that was much more vehement than the scorching sun, two classmates and I commenced to establish our own business and to operate our own company. By any imagination, it was a challenging undertaking. We focused on the development of online multimedia entertainment platform and on the research and development of virtual reality (VC) technology. In the process of developing the software for the VC products, we encountered the major obstacle of how to realize globular equation of the pictures actually taken of the real objects.

Under my organization and leadership, the task team, which consisted of a number of senior undergraduates and graduates, consulted a huge amount of technical literature, solicited professional guidance from specialists in the field, conducted surveys and interviews, analyzed feedbacks, and wrote business proposals. It was common for me to sleep only four hours a day. We worked under the conviction that, even if we failed 99 times, we would be ultimately victorious if we could succeed in the 100th trial. Any notion of defeatism would cause one to relinquish and end up in eternal failure.

Within two months, we eventually succeeded in developing the semispheric equation algorithm whose effect could perfectly parallel the globular equation algorithm of the software. In autumn, the season of harvest, we won the Prize for Excellent Original Conceptualization at the annual Entrepreneurial Competition with the business proposal based on this project. In the meantime, we succeeded in attracting a risk, investment worth 5 million RMB (approximately 600000 US dollars). The immediate infusion of the cash into our company guaranteed the overall inauguration of our company.

In the initial stage of establishing our business, we foresaw that the VC technology would make tremendous headway in the future network application. The problem we faced at that time was the limited bandwidth of the network, which in turn circumscribed the development of VC technology. After nearly one-year development, our technology has become increasingly mature. Furthermore, our collaboration with Britains Rotography Company has acquainted us with some refreshingly constructive concepts. With the continued improvement of the Chinas domestic network environment, we have formally initiated serial services to our clients in the application of VC

technology. In this process, our companys website for supplying technical service www.senex.net was consummated. So far, many manufacturers availed themselves of our VC solutions, including Beijing Garment Manufacturing Factory, the largest of its kind in Beijing. Meanwhile, I participated in a seminar on the development of network virtual passage VPN project jointly undertaken by Zhejiang University and NingPo Golden Leave Information Technology Company. By conducting a survey of U.S. VPN market and by studying VPN technology, I presented some unique insights of my own at the seminar, which were positively evaluated by computer specialists from Zhejiang University.

With our products started to increase the market share, the reputation of our company became increasingly widespread. As a burgeoning company, we managed, through fierce bidding, to secure a project of Demonstration System from Sony Company. Though finally the project did not take long to complete, the success of winning the first project through tender excited the whole group of young entrepreneurs. At present, in reaction to the strong demands for information concerning rubber market by more than 20000 manufacturers and related enterprises, our company is cooperating with Reuter Agency and Information Headquarter of China National Rubber Industry in developing and designing China Rubber Business Website, which aims at providing the most updated global rubber information for domestic rubber manufacturers and ultimately realizing the B2B business platform for Chinas rubber industry. This is a newly-emerging field which integrates conventional industry with IT industry, thus requiring rich professional knowledge and experience in conventional sector as well as powerful and comprehensive analytical and problem-solving capability. Under such circumstances, I am forced to augment my knowledge in a totally strange profession within the shortest possible time. But I know that with, my usual confidence, I will surmount this challenge.

If we can dream it, we can do it.

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

Now I have a dream to become a well-trained engineer so that I can enjoy myself in the field of technology application as well as in the field of theoretical research. Furthermore, I love the feeling of being challenged. Only by plunging oneself into a challenging environment will one be able to keep on scaling new

heights. For me, this challenging environment that fascinates me most is Harvard University, the ideal university to undertake my Ph.D. program.

In my prospective degree program, I would like to concentrate on the following fields: (a) VLSI & Microelectronics; (b) Systems and Control; (c) Robotics and Computer Vision; (d) Communications & Signal Processing; (e) Operations Research & Systems.

I am convinced that the advanced training in your established graduate program will help develop me into a successful professional in my chosen field. In the highly challenging academic environment of Harvard, I will rely on two effective strategies that I have consistently employed in my heretofore studies and business operations: competition and cooperation. I can imagine that, with the international perspective and professional expertise developed at Harvard University, I will be best assisted in bringing my tremendous potential into full play in my future efforts to blaze new trails in the virtually unlimited future world.

留学个人陈述范文(计算机专业)

Computer Science Personal Statement

My motivation to study computer science extends further than my basic interest in technology. For me computing, both innovative and exciting, is a profession offering unlimited boundaries.

Computing changed from being more than a hobby when I started at DLD College in 1996. DLD was the first educational establishment I had attended that offered a full-time Computing course, enabling me to take this A-Level a year early in 1997. The principal invited me to head a specialist computer course for some staff members and pupils, which I found rewarding and proved very successful. Other activities I participated in at the college included being a founder member of the student committee, editor of the student newspaper and goalkeeper for the 1sts.

Outside of college, I created centralperk.com, a website dedicated to the Friends TV show which received over 500,000 visitors per month. The popularity of the site earned me a place in the 1997 UK Web awards held at BAFTA in London. It was at the awards that I was approached by Online Magic,

the UKs leading web agency, and started to work for them during breaks from college. Through this, I gained extremely valuable commercial exposure to clients such as British Airways, Economist, Channel 4 and Decca Records.

In 1997 I embarked on building an online sign language tutorial, called SignHear, as part of the ThinkQuest Internet Challenge. The site provided 200 basic signs and the alphabet. To date, the site has received over 2 million visitors and its success was officially recognized in 1999 by the judges at ThinkQuest. Along with teammates from the UK and USA, I was invited to the award ceremony in Los Angeles and presented with a $20,000 prize by Marlee Matlin, an Oscar winning hearing-impaired actress. It was an uplifting experience for me to witness the life enhancing contribution that technology can make.

With the fast pace at which the Internet and surrounding technologies were developing during 1998, I decided to take a gap year in industry before starting a Computer Science course at university. My gap year began when I commenced full-time employment with Online Magic, which continued until October 1998. I was then headhunted by Traxdata and joined their team as an Information Architect.

Despite my age and lack of commercial experience, within a year of joining Traxdata I was promoted to Head of IT/Internet for their European operations. This meant responsibility for a network with over 300 users across 5 countries as well as directly managing five members of staff. Other responsibilities included running our live, in-house Internet servers that coped with over 250,000 visitors per month and supporting the marketing team with custom CD-ROMs, presentations and field demonstrations. At Traxdata my gap year turned into four amazing years that gave me the opportunity to travel and work in countries across three different continents. I also gained invaluable experience on both technological and human levels.

On a lighter note, I recently created my own online diary, inkiboo.com, which so far has had over 11,000 visitors from all over the world. I am also a sound engineer/manager for a rock band consisting of students from both Imperial College and UCL. These close friends were also a great comfort and support to me when my mother died from cancer in March last year. This started my

involvement with the local division of the Macmillan Nurses where I help with computer training and support.

Although I would not have passed on the last four years, I now realize the value that a degree affords in underpinning the foundations of computer technology. I believe I have grown in both confidence and maturity and if given the opportunity of a place at university, I will be fully committed to successfully completing a degree course.

留学个人陈述范文(机械工程专业)

Personal Statement

Applied Program: Mechanical Engineering

In China there is an old custom called one-year anniversary fortune-telling: by the time the new born is one year old, its family prepares a lot of objects of different shapes and functions for it to choose from. The first object that attracts its eyes and hands is supposed to be a symbol of the baby's future career. Unscientific as it is, it truly predicted my profession and future. At that time the toy car in my hand greatly aroused my wonder at the wheeled monster. As I grew up, I was no longer satisfied with collecting car pictures and making car models. I was determined to be an expert in automobile design and manufacturing. As it turned out, the specialized education I have received in both my undergraduate and graduate programs have fully equipped me for undertaking more ambitious academic tasks in the field of mechanical control.

I know I am no genius and I also know that success is to result from extraordinary efforts. I chose as my starting point Beijing Institute of Technology, one of the 3 universities in China that majored in automobile research. There besides the specialty and theory studies, I made use of my free time to read large quantities of references both in Chinese and English, to catch up with the latest development in theory and to be immersed in the widest range of information. As a graduate, my academic performance had always ranked No.1 in my class, especially for the 20 also specialty courses in the junior and senior years, among which Automotive Manufacturing got full scores. For 4 years I got the first or the second class scholarships consecutively and was awarded many honors such as Outstanding Student,

Outstanding Cadre, as well as appraised by the department leader as the best student in the recent 5 years.

The strong interests in automobile forever stimulated my enthusiasm in study and motivated me to equip myself with specialty knowledge to the greatest possible extent. Apart from the study task, I also served as teaching assistant in the course of vehicle electronic technology. As a post graduate and with the specialty knowledge getting more and more profound, I worked as a research assistant in the laboratory and came to better my ability to apply theory into practice, thus capable of carrying out scientific research activities independently. Meanwhile I took part in many research and development projects and accumulated rich experiences on that. In the joint-venture project between our school and the first automobile manufacturing plant in China, I was responsible for building up experimental framework composed of the electric motor, hydrostatic gearbox, loading device and the control system and carried out the functional adjusting of the automatic shift, thus getting a better knowledge of the power train. The experiment was a great success and provided reliable support for the overall vehicle experiment.

The thesis for my master degree is Research of Loader with Automatic Shift Technology and Fuzzy Control Strategy. At present, China's research on automation of construction machinery has not started yet. I choose this subject in order to realize automatic shift control and computerization of construction machinery. It is mainly concerned with coordination control of the engine and the gearbox, power distribution, recognition and fuzzy control of the working state of construction machinery and so on. This is based on the joint venture----the automatic shift control of ZL50 loader between our school and a gearbox manufacturing plant in Hunan. The purpose of this research project is to change the loader's original manual shift into automatic shift control. The stumbling blocks here are the recognition of different working states, the coordination of the engine and the gearbox and the realization of the potential engine power to the greatest possible extent.

In that project I was responsible for the whole process from the project demonstration, program selection, simulation research and project implementation. We largely enhanced the automation level and working efficiency of ZL50 loader and made convenient its operation. At the same time

I benefited a lot from a deeper understanding of the essence of automatic shift techniques. Apart from the completion of my graduation thesis and based on the experimental statistics and the project's early stage work summary, I published, on the national central periodical named Construction Machinery, a paper titled Research on the Mechanical Parts of Electronically Controlled Automatic Shift on ZL50 Loader and also another paper, on Construction Machinery and Equipment, titled Research of ZL50 Loader with Electronic Controlled Automatic Shift System, which has the project outcome as its theoretic basis. They were highly praised by experts in this field for their values in academic research and of creativity. Because of the need to collect large quantities of experimental data for possible future renovation reference, I independently developed a set of data collecting soft ware, with the transmitter soft ware written in C language and the receiver soft ware written in VC++, communication between the two through series connections. This soft ware was highly usable throughout the whole experiment and greatly increased my work efficiency.

Automobile industry is the main industry for a country. It started very late in China and lags far behind the advanced countries such as the United States, Germany, Canada and others, its competency comparatively low. To shorten the distance, it is necessary to go abroad and learn from the developed countries the advanced automobile manufacturing technology and for that reason it is also urgent to perfect my knowledge structure and enhance my specialty level. The specialty of mechanical engineering in University of Michigan ranked No. 11 in the United States. It has rich technical resources and its research centers and laboratories are proud of state-of-the-art equipments. The research work of Vehicle Power train Dynamics and Control being carried out there by many famous professors well fits into my postgraduate research work. So I wish to continue my education in your university. A scrutiny of my educational background and of the research projects that I have performed will indicate that I have a solid foundation in mechanical control. Therefore, my knowledge and specialized trainings in mechanical control will also enable me to prove competent in control-related programs. If my qualifications suit me also for a program in mechanical control, do not hesitate to transfer me to such program because I am equally interested

in those programs. My study plan is to learn the fundamental knowledge first and then, based on my own research background, decide on a research direction that will best facilitate the development of China's automobile industry. In this way I will try to work out valuable academic achievements and write high-level doctorate thesis. Eventually I will return to China to contribute my learning to the development of automobile industry in my fatherland and thus realize the dreams of my childhood

SAMPLE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE - ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING EXAMPLE ESSAY

My decision to pursue graduate study in the United States is underscored by my desire to be a part of the graduate program at your institution. Purdue University offers the flexibility needed for such a vast and rapidly changing field. The research facilities and the faculty at the university are par excellent.

review para1

Communications is an industry that has changed our lives. In a very short period it has changed the way we have looked at things since centuries. It is one industry that is going to shape our future for centuries to come. Hence my desire to do

masters in electrical engineering with communications as my major.

My interest in electronics blossomed during my high school years. It was the time when technology had begun to make an impact on the lives of people in India. Hence engineering with electronics as my major was the first choice for my undergraduate studies. Right since the beginning of my undergraduate study electronics is a subject that has fascinated me with its power of applications. The subjects that I have studied include Linear Electronics, Digital Electronics. These laid the foundation for my courses in Electronic Communication & Communication Systems at a later stage. My undergraduate studies already focus on the communications aspect of electronics. A masters degree in electrical engineering with communications as major field is the next logical step.

For the past four months I have been working as a project trainee at the Indian Institute for Advanced Electronics. I am working on the design and development of a "PC Controlled Digital Serial Data Generator". This short stint has given me invaluable practical experience. It has given me the confidence to pursue a masters degree and also kindled a desire to do research.

review para4

During the course of my work at IIAE, I have come across several scientists. Most of them work in different areas of communications. Interactions with them have made me realize the vastness and the scope of communications. My discussions with them convinced me that specializing in communications will suit me very well.

review para5

The subject of research which interests me very much is spread spectrum communication systems. Coding theory and

combinations is another research subject which arouses my curiosity. The subject Communication Theory which I am studying at present introduces these topics in theory. I am eager to find out more about the applications of coding theory to spread spectrum communication systems.

review para6

In addition I have been a student member of the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.) for the past three years. Through its workshops/seminars and publications like the 'The Spectrum' it has exposed me to a lot of emerging technologies in the field of communications.

review para7

It is a strong belief in my family that the American education system has the best to offer in the whole world. This belief arises out of the experience that my parents had when they did their Masters of Science in the University of Pennsylvania during the years 1967-69. If I can get an opportunity to be a part of that intellectually stimulating environment, I am sure my talents will be put to optimal use.

review para8

India is a developing country with an enormous potential in the information technology business. To serve the needs of this developing industry and more important its vast population, communications is going to become of utmost importance. Thus conditions here are very conducive to supplement my aspirations when I return after completing my graduate studies

College Admission Essay

I am not the people and places I grew up with. This is the lesson two years of college has taught me, and it has taken me until now to do something about it.

The idea of living in a new environment always enticed me. When I was younger, I used to picture what life would be like as a sophisticated New York City professional. I imagined myself bustling through the streets of Manhattan, business suit-clad, on my way to meet with a client. That

was as far as the fantasy went, but I've always thought there was something more to my childhood musings, a morsel of real ambition. I wanted to be independent, to be busy, to be relied upon by others. Currently I am studying business at the University of Southern California. Although I still have many of the same goals I had as a child, my experience feels somehow incomplete. I can't help but feel that I am stuck in that murky place between where dreams are conceived and dreams are realized. Let me explain:

My dad remarried when I was sixteen. Up until that point, I had always enjoyed having him to myself in a . One time when I was four years old, he came home from work looking worn out. "Daddy, come here," I said, beckoning him with my small hand. I placed my palm on his forehead and saw that it was hot. "You have a temperature," I announced. "Time for bed." When he told me that it was only seven o'clock, I started whining until he finally humored me, lying down in bed and pretending to sleep. That experience typified my relationship with him: although he was the dad, I loved taking on the parental role.

When I was fifteen, my stepmother moved in. That's when everything changed. She and my dad spent most nights together, , leaving very little time for me. I suddenly sensed that he no longer needed me, and that all of my control was slipping away. The situation left me feeling heartbroken; but more than that, I was confused about llc operating agreement. If dad didn't need me anymore, then who was I supposed to nurture?

The resulting emotional instability continued into college application time. My decision to attend USC was heavily influenced by a resistance towards change. Los Angeles was the only city I ever knew. My very identity was tied to it. If I left, I would have no hope of regaining the control I had lost when my stepmother moved in. As a result, I could hardly entertain my childhood fancy of coming to a school like NYU.

It took two years for me to finally understand about : rather than clinging to a childhood I can never re-create, I should have taken a chance on the future that I've always envisioned.

Spending the next two years at NYU would help me to distinguish myself as an individual. I love New York's fast-paced, energetic ambiance. It is the perfect complement to the education I am seeking, for it would enhance my sense of independence and security. My grandmother attended NYU and took with her an experience that has guided her through life. I hope to be able to do the same.

NYU's student life and educational programs are the most fascinating to me. The school seems particularly well-suited to motivated individuals who are driven to secure their own success. I also look forward to partaking in NYU's special interest groups, especially in the realm of Jewish life. Most importantly, I have heard excellent things about the Economics major in the College of Arts and Sciences, and am enthusiastic about studying with many of the well-known professors who teach there.

With a restless spirit and a fierce eagerness to learn, I believe I would be a great asset to NYU's student body. If accepted, I plan to pursue my education with a new kind of

The first program used to test the setup should be very simple and test every LED in the array. Figure 5 shows an example program that demonstrates how to turn on every LED in the matrix, changing which color LEDs are lit at even intervals. Note the infinite while loop, since we just want the microcontroller to run this routine for as long as it is powered up. This section of code would appear in the main() of your C source file. The only other code that would be necessary would be the #include libraries for your specific microcontroller and whatever lines of initialization may be required depending on the application. The code is extrememly simple, with the main 'for' loop simply iterating down the rows of the matrix while simultaneously updating the column data on the Ports of the microcontroller. The delay in between each

row must be calibrated depending on the speed of the microcontroller being used. The target value is to use the longest delay possible without being able to see any flickering of the LEDs. The delay is desired to ensure that the LEDs are getting enough current each time to achieve full brightness. The counter variable outside of the for loop allows states to change according to the length of the duration variable.

The Computer Science and Electrical Engineering Student

Statement by a student from India (12/2002)

Conceiving ideas and developing systems that deliver that promise is a personal goal that I have set for myself. When translated into actions this goal has reinforced my belief in leadership through creativity.

As a student in high school I had the idea of a drip irrigation system by a windmill. Using some old hose pipes, plastic tubes and a pulley arrangement I developed the model. This model won the gold medal at the prestigious Indian National science congress. While still in the third year of undergraduate program in Engineering I became the Technical consultant for a start up company. My technical idea won the first prize at Eureka 50K, Indians first Business Plan competition. For the past two and a half years I have been working in XXX corporation. The will to learn and the ability to spend long hours of cerebration on trouble shooting have made me a dependable team player.

Today as a 24-year-old individual I perceive that life for me has been a process of conscious evolution. The most integral part of this growth is the value system imbibed in me by my parents, teachers and my mentors and an intrigued liking for science. This played a vital role in my decision making for the future. As I finished high school I was selected for the Indian Naval Academy with merit ranking in the Top 25 in the country. However my liking for science guided me into pursuing a Bachelor degree in Electrical Electronics and Power (EEP) Engineering. This decision gave me ample opportunity to consolidate my creative energies and harness my technical aptitude.

In college, I always enjoyed long hours in the labs. It gave me the opportunity to correlate theory to practical phenomena. This in turn gave me a better understanding of the subject and newer lines of thinking. The course in EEP covered a wide panorama of subjects. Besides the core Electrical Engineering subjects I also studied major electronics subjects like electronic devices and circuits, Linear Integrated Circuits and Pulse and Digital switching circuits. I learnt programming in ANSI C and by the time I was in final year I developed a fair amount of expertise writing complex pieces of code.

In the third year of my engineering studies I was introduced to the subject of Control Systems. The first session in the labs was devoted to developing simple programs for a Simatic PLC. A combination of AND, OR blocks generating a complete control circuit for a motor fascinated me. I took up an internship in the Controls Lab and got to interact with Prof. A, a professor of great repute in the field of Automation and Controls. He introduced me to the synergies of Information technology and Automation systems. Under his guidance I completed the thesis in PC based Load Flow Analysis and also worked with the Mechanical Dept for PC based control of Robotic Arm.

Working on the projects gave me a sound technical base. But the greatest advantage of involving myself in these activities was that I developed the ability to multi-task effectively. Besides the college academics I was actively involved in the extra-curricular activities. I represented my college at state level Table Tennis and Debate competitions. I wanted to self-finance my

education and worked part-time. I was also an active amateur environmentalist. The driving force behind all this was my aim to develop all the facets of my personality. In this process I could not achieve the grades I wanted to in the first and second year. But soon I garnered the skill of judicious allocation of time and energy. I did well in the third year and final year of Engineering. Moreover I do not feel that the marks I scored are the sole indicators of my understanding of the subject. A cogent reason to augment my belief is the final year of my engineering.

XX (my present employer) visited the college campus and offered me a job in the area of Process Automation and MES. I was among the twenty candidates selected from the best institutes across the country. I passed the six rounds of technical and personal interviews and I was the only student to be selected from the college. I decided to take up the job. For me it meant a chance to apply the knowledge gained so far in Controls and Automation systems and gain some industrial exposure. Besides this the job can help finance some part of my future education.

Unlike the milieu of the college, the corporate environment was very much different. The concept of learning on the job, accountability for the work at hand, conformance to in- housework flow standards gave me a greater focus. The most challenging aspect however was the rate of the learning, which was immense. In one year I developed competence in Real - time Energy management solutions. As part of my first project I developed software for Energy Management in a Cement Plant. The concept was based on the collection of Real-time Data from the DCS (Digital Control System) and populating a Database. With a certain degree of intelligence built into the software energy saving in the Cement unit was as high as 5%. This was a solution implemented for the first time by XX corporation in a Cement Plant. In recognition of my work I was selected as a team member for the deployment of the XX Industrial IT platform solutions.

I deployed solutions in the field of Statistical Process control and Asset Optimization in Metals and Cement Industries. During these projects I got to interact with the R&D teams in XX and I also went through some research papers in my leisure time. The experience gained in the deployment of solutions and interaction with the technical teams of customers gave me a new insight. I realized that the business process decision making and the technical processes are not integrated in Real time. Although solutions like ERP aim to achieve this goal, information still exists in islands. In order to seamlessly integrate these areas a new architecture that links Automation systems and MES solutions needs to be developed. However this calls for comprehensive research. I cannot pursue this idea while still in a job. Besides an academic program under the guidance of able professors would help me identify my specific research interests. Hence I have decided to pursue my Master degree in a research-focused environment.

The Center for Intelligent Machines Industrial Automation Lab at YY offers the best courses in this domain. The application driven research and development carried out in this lab coheres to my liking. I would like to carry out my research under the guidance of Prof. B. I believe that under his supervision I can proactively contribute to the work done in the Lab. His areas of work are of great interest to me and I believe that I can prove to be an effective and reliable team member in carrying out cutting edge research in this domain.

✦ Lesson One: Preparation

The purpose of this section is to get you acquainted with the task that confronts you. The first step is to understand your audience and what your readers will be expecting. You should view this knowledge as a foundation from which to build your own creative composition, not as a set of limiting factors. Once you understand the context of your assignment, you must approach the brainstorming process with a free and open mind. Allow yourself to reflect without the interference of preconceived notions. Create a long and varied list of possible topics, and then narrow down that list using the criteria we provide.

The preparation process is essential here as it is for any important project. If you don't identify and develop the optimal set of ideas, then no degree of effective structuring or engaging language will make the essay as strong as it could have been.

✦ Select One:

- Assess Your Audience
- Key Attributes
- Common Flaws
- Brainstorming
- Topic Selection

✦ EssayEdge Extra: The Potential Impact of the Personal Statement-Good and Bad

"It's possible to redeem yourself or to kill your chances of admission with the personal statement. What's most important to me is for the candidate to make a compelling case for himself or herself. I want to be persuaded that I should admit this person."
-**The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University**

"If I sense that a candidate is just filling out half a page cursorily - just doing the personal statement pro forma - and has not put much time or imagination into it, that's the kiss of death."
-**Graduate English Department, UCLA**

★ The Audience

Unlike undergraduate admissions committees, which usually are comprised of full-time administrative staff, a graduate admissions committee consists of professors in the specific program to which you are applying. Occasionally, the committee will also invite a small number of students currently enrolled in the program to participate in the process.

An applicant's file consists of transcripts, GRE or other test scores, letters of recommendation, and one or more essays. Admissions committees read the essays within the larger context of a candidate's application. The essays are your chance to tell the personal story that the other pieces of the application cannot.

Admissions committees for programs in different fields evaluate personal statements according to vastly different criteria. Professors reading applications for programs in language-intensive fields such as literature and philosophy examine the originality and elegance of the applicant's thoughts as well as fine points of style. In engineering or scientific fields, on the other hand, admissions committees seek to gain more basic insight into the applicant's goals and to confirm a baseline of competency in written English. In fact, for many applicants to graduate programs in the sciences, English is not even their primary language.

As the committee members make their way through stack after stack of applications, they often place the applications they have already reviewed into a hierarchy of admission. The particular aspects of this process vary, but according to an admissions officer at the University of Washington, their hierarchy of admission is as follows, in decreasing order of applicant attractiveness: "Admit with guaranteed funding, Admit with potential funding, Tabled (a sort of admissions purgatory), and Reject." It is in the case of "Tabled" and "Admit with potential funding" applications, the admissions officer reports, that the personal statement can make a real difference: "If there is a good match between the applicant's research interests and the particular strengths of the school, this can bump them up a level or two in the hierarchy of admission."

Among the schools whose admissions officers we consulted, the minimum number of readers who look at an applicant's essay(s) ranged from two to ten, with an average of twenty minutes spent on essays for laboratory and computational science programs, and thirty minutes on those for all other programs.

★ Key Attributes

To a large degree, the particular graduate program you are applying to will dictate the content of a successful application essay. However, certain qualities of these essays apply equally to all fields. Admissions committee members are looking for interesting, insightful, revealing, and

non-generic essays that suggest you have successfully gone through a process of careful reflection and self-examination. Your essay should offer a very thorough, probing, and analytical look at yourself and your objectives.

Insight Into Your Character

When we say "non-generic" above, we mean a personal statement that only you could have written, one that does not closely resemble what other applicants are likely writing. You achieve this type of statement by being personal and analytical. Don't waste space on superficial generalizations about your life. Instead, give the reader specific, personal details so that he or she will be able to understand your character and motivation. Then analyze those details in a way that drives home clear, illuminating points.

Sincerity

Don't focus too heavily on what you think admissions officers want to see, at the expense of conveying your own message in your unique way. Be yourself rather than pretending to be the "ideal" applicant. Inundated with countless cliché-ridden essays, admissions committees respond very favorably to honesty. Don't be afraid to reveal yourself. Admissions officers are interested in finding out about who you are, and they appreciate candor.

Sincerity is important to stress because it's hard for most of us to achieve, despite the fact that it seems so simple. The pressures and anxieties of the situation have locked us into a mindset that prevents us from writing honestly. Further, because we are not used to writing about ourselves and being so close to the subject, we cannot assess the sincerity of our own writing. Thousands of students every year will read this same advice, whether in a guidebook or even in the application instructions themselves, but they simply will not be able to put it into practice. If you can be one of the few who truly understand what it means to be sincere, then you will already have separated yourself from the pack in a crucial way.

You might question how a reader who doesn't know you can judge your statement's sincerity. The basis for judgment usually lies in the context your reader has developed from reading hundreds or thousands of other essays. Assessing your essay against others is one essential area in which EssayEdge can offer a more critical eye than your friends, relatives, or teachers who have not accumulated the expertise specific to the personal statement. Moreover, our perspective in reading your essay is just as objective as your admissions reader's perspective will be.

Background and Motivation

Detail your interest in and exposure to your particular discipline in a thoughtful way. You are aspiring to become a professional in your field; therefore, you should express an interest in contributing something novel to it. Make clear that you have a realistic perception of what this field entails. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or any other sources of specific

information about the career you want and why you're suited for it. Remember not to make this a laundry list in which you rattle off impressive names or theories. Any specific people or ideas you mention should be thoughtfully addressed and seamlessly interwoven into the essay as a whole.

Goals

When you were applying to colleges, no one expected you to be certain about your future. At the graduate level, however, you need to demonstrate a more mature sense of what you want to do, and how the program you're applying to fits in with that intended path. Although admissions officers are well aware that people's goals will change, they at least want to see some sense of direction so they can evaluate your self-awareness and commitment.

"I seek a sense of commitment, a sense of discipline, and a sense specifically of what the student wants to do. I don't think it's advisable for anyone to write that he or she just loves English literature and wants to read and write. People have to know what field they want or are most likely to work in, or what specific kinds of projects they want to pursue in a field."

-Graduate English Department, UCLA

"I think the main thing is to see whether the student is aware of and has thought about the field to which he or she is applying."

-Graduate Engineering Program, California Institute of Technology

Attributes of the Program

Explain why the particular school's unique features attract you. Again, graduate study is much more focused than undergraduate work; it's not a time for unbounded exploration. For your own sake, you need to determine whether a specific program meets your needs, and sharing what you discover with the schools can show them why you're a good fit. Do the research necessary to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs.

Do not, however, waste space on empty praise. For example, don't cite the "world-renowned faculty" and "diverse student body" as your main reasons, because these are trite, obviously prepackaged points that you could say about any school. Instead, refer to specific courses or unique aspects of the curriculum, and show an interest in specific clubs or organizations.

"You really have to let the admissions committee know what it is about this program in particular that interests you."

-The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University

"It helps for the student to have done some research on the university being applied to. It is easy to differentiate an applicant who really wants to come here because of our special

resources from someone whose knowledge of the program comes simply by way of the brochure we send to all interested applicants."

-Graduate English Department, UCLA

Writing Ability

Again, the importance of writing ability varies according to different programs. A great flair for language will not get you admitted into a biochemistry program, but it's still essential to demonstrate strong written communication skills. On the other hand, you should also keep in mind that a well-written essay makes its points clearly and forcefully, so your content benefits as well.

Good writing means more than the ability to construct grammatical sentences. You also must create a coherent structure and ensure proper flow as the piece progresses. Because the process of developing ideas and putting them down on paper is so intimate and personal, all writers end up needing editors to assess the effectiveness of their product. You should consult people whose writing you respect for advice or even more hands-on help. Having been trained specifically in the nuances of admissions essay writing, EssayEdge editors are the best equipped to provide assistance in this crucial area.

Common Flaws

Knowing what turns off admissions committees in an essay is as important as knowing what they find desirable.

Careless Errors

There is really no excuse for careless errors, and having even one in your application can affect the way you are perceived. You have more than enough time to proofread and have others look over your essay. If an error slips through, your readers may assume that you are careless, disorganized, or not serious enough about your application.

Remember that spell check does not catch all possible errors, and even grammar check is far from perfect. In addition to typographical errors such as repeated words, you have to read the essay carefully to catch mistakes in meaning that might come in the form of a grammatically correct sentence.

Let these humorous but unfortunate examples be a lesson to read your essay carefully for unintended meanings and meaningless sentences:

It was like getting admitted to an Ivory League school.

Berkeley has a reputation of breeding nationalists and communists.

I'd like to attend a college where I can expose myself to many diverse people.

I was totally free except for the rules.

In a word, the experience taught me the importance of dedication, friendship, and goals.

I have an extensive knowledge of the value of intelligence.

I envy people with a lot of time in their hands.

Vague Generalities

The most egregious generalizations are the ones that have been used so many times that they have become clichés. For example, "I learned the value of hard work." That statement doesn't tell us anything insightful or interesting about the writer's character, because it has been said so many times as to become meaningless.

Generalities come in the same form as clichés, except with different content. They are always superficial and usually unoriginal, but haven't quite reached the level of predictability that would make them qualify as clichés. Consider this before-and-after set to learn how to evaluate this factor in your writing:

Before: In the first project I managed, I learned many valuable lessons about the importance of teamwork.

After: In the first project I managed, I made an effort to incorporate all my colleagues as equal members of a team, soliciting their feedback and deferring to their expertise as needed.

Terms like "valuable lessons" and "teamwork" are vague and do not really convey anything meaningful about the applicant's experience. In contrast, the revised version explains the team dynamic in more detail, showing specifically how the applicant exercised teamwork principles. The passage should go on to include even more detail, perhaps by naming a particular colleague and discussing his interaction with that person.

Sounding contrived is a problem related to overly general writing. Applicants often have preconceived notions about what they should be discussing, and they try to force those points onto the experiences they relate. The best way to counteract this tendency is to start with your experiences and let the insights flow from there. Think about your most meaningful experiences and describe them honestly. Often you will find that you don't need to impose conclusions because the personal qualities you're trying to demonstrate will be inherent in the details. If you decide that clarification is necessary, the transition should still be natural.

Summarizing Your Resume

Perhaps the most common personal statement blunder is to write an expository resume of your background and experience. This is not to say that the schools are not interested in your accomplishments. However, other portions of your application will provide this information, and the reader does not want to read your life story in narrative form. Strive for depth, not breadth. An effective personal statement will focus on one or two specific themes, incidents, or points. Trying to cram too much into your essay will end up in nothing meaningful being conveyed.

"A straight autobiography should be avoided, although interesting and pertinent autobiographical facts should be included. But the statement should be more future-oriented than past-oriented. I don't really want the story of a student's life but rather plans for and a vision of the future."
-Graduate English Department, UCLA

Sensitive Topics

Don't get on a soapbox and preach to the reader; while expressing your values and opinions is fine, avoid coming across as fanatical or extreme. Avoid mentioning subjects that are potentially controversial; it is impossible for you to know the biases of members of various admissions committees. Religion and politics normally don't belong in these statements, although there may be exceptions (an applicant who has held an important office on campus or in the community would likely want to include this fact). Personal political views usually are not appropriate for personal statements. Any views that might be interpreted as strange or highly unconventional should also be omitted because you want to avoid the possibility of offending any of the individuals in whose hands the fate of your graduate school application rests.

Gimmicks

Don't use a gimmicky style or format. Your "clever" or "original" idea for style probably isn't, and it may not be appreciated.

"Avoid cuteness; we've had people who have done career statements in the form of a miniplay, for example. You want to sound like a professional."
-The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University

Long-Windedness

Sometimes the same writer who relies too heavily on generalizations will also provide too many irrelevant details. That's why most essays submitted to EssayEdge are returned with significantly reduced word counts and, conversely, suggestions for additions. The problem is that writers often don't consider what is actually necessary to include, or they repeat points freely.

Example of Irrelevant Detail: "After a meeting with my adviser, I returned home to think over the matter more carefully. Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that my interests in physical

properties and mental life would best be explored in a double major of biology and psychology."

In this example, we learn nothing about the applicant from the mention of his meeting with an adviser. What's relevant are his interests and the decision he made based on them. The details about how he arrived at the decision are not illustrative of his character in any way and are therefore superfluous.

Example of Redundancy: "The class taught me a great deal about the value of literature. I learned that literature can both instruct and inspire, and this understanding has changed the way I read every text."

The first sentence is unnecessary because the second sentence makes the same point with more specificity.

In addition to superfluous content, you also have to watch out for wordy writing. Wordiness not only takes up valuable space, but it also can confuse the important ideas you're trying to convey. Short sentences are more forceful because they are direct and to the point.

Before: "My recognition of the fact that the project was finally over was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory."

After: "Completing the project at last gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment."

Certain phrases such as "the fact that" are usually unnecessary. Notice how the revised version focuses on active verbs rather than forms of "to be" and adverbs and adjectives.

Big Words

Using longer, fancier words does not make you sound more intelligent, since anyone can consult a thesaurus. Simpler language is almost always preferable, as it demonstrates your ability to think and express yourself clearly.

Before: "Although I did a plethora of activities in college, my assiduous efforts enabled me to succeed."

After: "Although I juggled many activities in college, I succeeded through persistent work."

✦ Brainstorming

Writing an effective personal statement requires a bit of soul searching and reflection. The schools want to gain from your essay some insight into your character and personality. It's difficult for most people to write about themselves, especially something personal or

introspective. If thoughtfully observed and answered, the following suggestions and questions will yield material from which you can draw upon in writing your essay. Although the questions are presented in categories, your responses will inevitably straddle the various groupings. This is as it should be, since brainstorming is a very lateral process. Most important while completing these questions is that you be sincere and enjoy yourself.

1. Perform a Self-Inventory of Your Unique Experiences, Major Influences, and Abilities

Long- and Short-Term Goals

i. What attracts you to this particular school?

ii. Are there any specific faculty members at this academic institution whose work interests you? With whom would you most like to study?

iii. What specifically do you hope to gain from the academic program to which you are applying?

iv. What are your career aspirations, and how can this academic program help you to reach them?

v. What is your dream job? What would you ideally like to be doing in 5 years? 10? 20?

Skills and Characteristics

vi. What personal characteristics (integrity, compassion, persistence, for example) do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics? This is an area where it is far better to "show" the reader how you embody these qualities, rather than simply "tell" him or her that you possess them. **You need to make strong connections between your experiences and the qualities you wish to convey.** The ideal is to recount personal experiences in such a way that your "compassion" or "persistence" or whatever else is fully evident without your having to mention those qualities by name. Here is a list of the qualities that admissions committees find most desirable in applicants:

- **Seriousness of Purpose** (to pursue graduate education)
- **Intellectual Ability** (to handle graduate study)
- **Intellectual Curiosity** (about the field you wish to enter)
- **Creativity** (as reflected in the way your mind addresses issues in the field of your choice)
- **Open-Mindedness** (to ideas, people, and circumstances different from your own)
- **Maturity** (as demonstrated by being responsible and trustworthy)
- **Concern for Others** (either by devoting time to social service activities such as tutoring or by being considerate and empathetic to others' feelings; the latter is more difficult to pull off in an application essay)

- **Initiative** (as in the ability to start a project or take on a responsibility on your own)
- **Enthusiasm** (as demonstrated by your eagerness to engage in activities)
- **Confidence** (in your ability to handle difficult situations and novel challenges)
- **Being Organized** (as in the ability to stay on top of multiple tasks)
- **Sense of Humor** (as in your ability to find humor in difficult situations; in many ways this is an index of maturity)
- **Diligence/Persistence** (as demonstrated by your ability to stay with a task until you complete it; this is particularly relevant for programs requiring a dissertation)
- **Leadership** (as shown in your ability to inspire others to work together to reach a mutual goal)
- **Risk Taking** (as shown in your ability to deal with uncertainty in order to reach your goal)
- **Insight** (as reflected in your ability to use introspection to understand aspects of yourself, such as your preferences and your motivations)
- **Optimism** (as reflected in your ability to find positive aspects in seemingly negative situations)
- **Compromise** (as in your ability to be flexible in negotiating with others; at a more abstract level this can mean the ability to reconcile ideological opposites or dialectical pairs among others or within yourself)
- **Overcoming Adversity** (as demonstrated by your resourcefulness in dealing with serious problems such as divorce, death, illness, etc.)

vii. What skills (leadership, communicative, analytical, for example) do you possess? As in the previous question, strive to "show" rather than "tell." However, you can invoke these qualities by name with less chance of appearing insincere or conceited than if you attribute to yourself more personal, subjective qualities such as compassion and integrity.

viii. Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school--and more successful and effective in the profession or field--than other applicants?

ix. What do you have to offer the school-to your fellow students, to the faculty, to the broader community?

x. Why do you think you will succeed in this academic program?

xi. What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

xii. Why do you think you will be successful in your chosen career?

Background/Accomplishments: Personal

xiii. What's special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story? What details of your life (personal or family problems/history, any genuinely notable accomplishments, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?

xiv. Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (e.g., economic, familial, physical) in your life?

xv. Have you borne significant care-giving responsibilities for family members? For an ailing parent, a sibling, a disabled or aging relative, a child? How has this impacted your academics? Your professional life? Your goals and values?

xvi. (If you live in U.S. but are not a native-born American) How did you deal with the challenges of moving to the U.S. from your home? Did you experience culture shock? How did you adapt? What was most difficult for you? What aspects of your new home did you enjoy the most?

xvii. If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has the work contributed to your personal growth?

Background/Accomplishments: Academic

xviii. When did you originally become interested in this field? What have you since learned about it-and about yourself-that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?

xix. How have you learned about this field-through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?

xx. Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain? Click here for more on this topic.

xxi. Can you recall a specific incident that convinced you that you had chosen the right career path?

2. Consult Friends, Relatives, Colleagues, or Professors for Ideas

Others see us differently from the way we see ourselves. You may be overlooking some theme, angle, or aspect of your personality that might be obvious to others who know you well. Good ideas are good ideas, whatever their source. Here is a questionnaire that will give these people a structured format in which to help you come up with ideas:

Preparatory Questionnaire

I am applying to _____ and must prepare a personal statement as a part of that process. I want to be sure to include all relevant data about myself and my background, so I am soliciting information from various individuals who know me and whose judgment I value. Thank you for your help.

1. What do you think is most important for the admissions committee to know about me?

2. What do you regard as most unusual, distinctive, unique, and/or impressive about me (based on our association)?

3. Are you aware of any events or experiences in my background that might be of particular interest to those considering my application to graduate school?

4. Are there any special qualities or skills that I possess that tend to make you think I would be successful in graduate school and in the field to which I aspire to become a part?

3. Write An Experimental Creative Essay In Which You Are the Main Character

Pretend that you are enrolled in a creative writing class and that your assignment is to write a moving and inspiring short story (a couple of pages) about some experience in your life and its impact on you. Pretend you will be reading the story aloud during class and that your goal is to have your classmates approach you afterwards with the following sorts of reactions: "I feel as if I know you, even though I've never talked to you before," or "I was really moved; thanks for taking a risk and giving us a glimpse into what makes you tick." Although you will not be submitting your personal statement in the form of a short story, this exercise will help you to achieve a level of sincerity, even vulnerability, in your writing that might prove elusive if you plunge directly into a first draft of your application essay.

You should devote substantial time, at least 4-5 hours, to the questions and exercises above before proceeding to Topic Selection.

Topic Selection

After brainstorming, you should have a lengthy list of potential topics to cover. Some essays that answer specific questions will require only one topic, but for most general personal statements, you will want to discuss two to four subjects. Occasionally, you can discuss a single experience at length if you're confident that the material touches on the entire range of themes you need to convey. If you try to tackle more than four subjects, you are probably treating each one in insufficient depth.

Use the following guide to help narrow down your topics.

Finding the Pattern That Connects

Selecting the topic of your personal statement can be a process akin to reverse engineering: You begin with conclusions and work your way back to a premise and overarching theme. What you are seeking at this point is a pattern that connects the very best of the material generated through brainstorming directly to your chosen field. All those piquant ideas and vividly rendered anecdotes you include in your essay should be entertaining to read but at the same time must make a coherent and compelling case for your admission.

Conveying Something Meaningful

Does your topic convey something meaningful about your personality? Will the reader walk away with an enriched understanding of who you are? If you can't answer "yes" to these questions, then you have probably chosen a topic that's too generic. Search harder to find a subject for which you can take a more personal, original approach.

Painting a Complete Portrait

You can't write a comprehensive essay that discusses everything you've ever done, but you can aim to offer an argument that details the full range of what you have to offer. If you choose only one topic, that topic should be broad enough in scope to allow you to discuss layers of your skills and characteristics. If you choose multiple topics, they should not be redundant, but build on and supplement each other.

Standing Out

Is your topic unique? It's hard to have something entirely new to say, but you should at least have a fresh take on your topic. If you recognize a lack of originality in your ideas, try to be more specific and personal. The more specific you get, the less likely that you will blend in with the essays of your competition.

Keeping Your Reader's Interest

Will your topic be able to sustain your reader's interest for the entire length of the essay? It's true that good writing can make any topic fascinating to read about, but there's no need to start yourself off with a handicap. Choose a topic that will naturally be of interest to any reader. For this criterion, it's necessary to step back and view your topic objectively, or else consult the opinion of others. If someone described the basic idea to you, would you care enough to ask for more details?

Staying Grounded in Detail

You should make sure ahead of time that your topic is fundamentally based on concrete evidence. If you're choosing specific experiences or events, then the relevant details should be clearly available. If your topic is more abstract, then you must be prepared to back up any claims with concrete examples and illustrative details.

Answering the Question

Applicants often overlook the very basic necessity of actually answering the question posed. They think they can get away with a loosely adapted essay from another application, or they simply don't take the time to review the question carefully. Make sure the topic you choose gives you room to address all parts of the question fully. Your readers could perceive an irrelevant response as an indication of your carelessness or lack of interest in their school.

What to Avoid

After you've determined that your topic meets the above criteria, you should check that it also avoids the following pitfalls:

1. Resorting to gimmicks: While creativity is encouraged, there must be substance to make your tactics worthwhile. Don't expect mere novelty to win you any points, and realize that you risk coming across as frivolous. Also, there's a good chance that any gimmicks you come up with-writing a poem, writing in the third person-have been done already.

2. Focusing on the negative: There is a separate section of this course dealing with how to address negative aspects of your application. As far as your topic is concerned, the main idea should be focused on your positive attributes. This does not mean, of course, that you shouldn't mention past weaknesses that you have learned to overcome, as the emphasis there is still on the strength you demonstrated.

3. Repeating information that's listed elsewhere in the application: We have already mentioned this point, but it's worth making abundantly clear. Your topic should not merely be a list of activities or synthesis of your resume. Rather, it should offer the kind of insight that only you can provide in a personal manner.

4. Being too controversial: If you get a sympathetic reader, a controversial topic might help you to stand out, but you risk offending others and severely hurting your chances. You would do better to search for a topic that makes you unique without resorting to cheap shots or obvious cries for attention.

5. Seeking pity: You can describe misfortunes or a disadvantaged background, but do not use them as an excuse for bad performances or to seek pity. Doing so not only could sound manipulative, but also means that you haven't emphasized your strengths sufficiently. Thus, as in the case of weaknesses, you should bring up obstacles in your past only to show how you have overcome them.

Lesson Two: Graduate Statement Themes

The best way to approach your personal statement is to imagine that you have five minutes with someone from the admissions committee. How would you go about making the best case for yourself while holding the listener's interest? What would you include and omit in your story? Figuring out the answer to these questions is critical to successfully preparing an effective statement.

To arrive at these answers, you should begin by asking yourself some more specific questions:

- Why have I chosen to attend graduate school in this specific field, and why did I choose to apply to this particular school's program?
- What are my qualifications for admission?
- What is special, unique, or impressive about my life story?

The answers will not necessarily come easily to you, but this exercise will have great practical benefit in readying you to write an outstanding personal statement. By answering each question thoroughly, you will have given much thought to yourself, your experiences, and your goals, thereby laying the groundwork for formulating an interesting and persuasive presentation of your own personal story.

Select One:

- Why Graduate School?
- Why Qualified?
- Why Unique?
- Explain Blemishes

EssayEdge Extra: The Future Over the Past

"First, they should tell me where they're coming from--what it is in their background that leads them to apply to a program like ours. Second, they should tell me what it is they want to get out of our program. Third, I want to know where they hope our program will eventually take them in their career."

- The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University

"Usually a straight autobiography should be avoided, although interesting and pertinent autobiographical facts should be included. But the statement should be more future-oriented

than past-oriented. I don't really want the story of a student's life (although there are exceptions) but rather plans for and a vision of the future."

- Graduate English Department, UCLA

"Mistakes? Dwelling on past accomplishments as opposed to describing future interests. The recitation of past accomplishments, prizes won and scores gotten--all that kind of stuff--is helpful but at the stage when we're reading the statement, we know all the applicants are highly qualified; that is almost beside the point. What we're looking for at that stage is, again, some insight into how the student thinks, what sort of clarity of purpose he has into one or more research areas."

- Graduate Admissions Committee, Applied Mechanics, Civil Engineering & Mechanical Engineering, California Institute of Technology

Whereas some professional programs, particularly law schools, give applicants more freedom to discuss any past experiences that may help them to stand out, graduate schools are chiefly interested in your past only as it relates to your future. That said, if there are aspects of your background that would make you stand out, you should still try to incorporate them into your discussion. Just be prepared to put in a little more thought and analysis.

Why Graduate School?

Because people do not make career decisions based purely on reason, it can be difficult to explain why you have chosen a particular field of study. What follows are some categories into which your ideas may fall, but your focus should be on your unique, personal details. Also, keep in mind that you are not limited to any one of the following, but should develop multiple reasons as you see fit--so long as your points are focused and coherent.

Early Exposure to Your Field

Graduate school is a serious commitment, and it may have been your goal for a long time. Describing your early exposure to a field can offer effective insight into your core objectives. Watch out, however, for these two potential problems:

1. Avoid offering your point in such a clichéd, prepackaged way as to make your reader cringe. For example, you should not start your essay, "I have always wanted to…." or "I have always known that [X field] was my calling." Instead, you should discuss specific events that led to your interest in the field.
2. Do not rely solely on your initial reason and forget to justify your choice with more recent experiences. Think about what you have learned about your chosen field--and yourself--that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to that course of study.

[This applicant](#) traces his interest in photojournalism to his collection of baseball cards and sports pictures at a young age. The youthful sense of curiosity and passion he conveys is sincere and draws the reader in to his individual mindset. The writer goes on to describe the evolution of his hobby, which becomes a vocation after he earns some publishing credits and enrolls in a BFA program.

★Sample Essay

A tale from your childhood can pique the reader's interest along with underscoring the earnestness of your intended academic pursuits, as this essay illustrates.

My interest in photojournalism began when I was nine years old. After a couple of years of collecting baseball picture-cards and accumulating more than ten-thousand treasured images, my interest in acquiring posed mug shots and static faces decreased, so I liquidated my assets and discovered a new hobby: reading the sports sections of my father's newspapers. I became captivated by the genuine, timely and action-packed pictures of the 1964 Phillies appearing regularly in the Philadelphia Daily News and Inquirer. A short time later, I began a nightly ritual of clipping and collecting the grainy black-and-white photos accompanying detailed descriptions of our home team's performances.

In 1979, I resumed the practice of clipping tear-sheets, when my byline started appearing under photos and short concert reviews published in several South Philadelphia community newspapers. After some success selling articles and pictures to local, small circulation publications, I enrolled in college, determined to pursue a career in photojournalism, and became the only member of my family to graduate from an academic institution of higher education when I received a BFA in documentary photography. Although I am extremely satisfied with my current employment as a photographer for a world-renowned eye hospital and will continue to write articles and to photograph events on a free-lance basis, I would also eventually like to teach. With my previous experience in photojournalism, travel, politics, medicine, sports and entertainment, and as the overseer of our department's medical

photography internship program, I feel that I will make a significant contribution to the learning environment.

Goals

Graduate school is, of course, a means to an end, and admissions committees prefer students who know where they're going and to what use they'll put their education (though the occasional soul-searcher, who may exhibit exceptional raw potential, is welcomed). For many people, the long-term goal is to work in academia, and to differentiate yourself in such cases, you can stress more specific objectives such as your research interests (see the following section).

Other degrees can lead to work outside the academic setting. [This applicant](#) describes his reasons for pursuing a degree in public policy: "Providing health care to 44 million uninsured Americans, while keeping insurance affordable, is one of the most difficult challenges facing policymakers. I want to work in state or local government to resolve this health care crisis and ensure that the disadvantaged get the care they need and deserve." Rather than offering a clichéd sentiment about wanting to "help people" or "change society," he identifies a specific issue and explains the origin and evolution of his interest.

✦ Sample Essay

"To be nobody but yourself--in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else--means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting." When I first read this passage by E.E. Cummings, I realized I have been fighting the same battle my whole life. When choosing the direction for my future, I have often accepted jobs based on a compromise between my own dreams and what others thought my dreams should be. This, of course, has led to an unfulfilling career.

Looking back, I always knew that I wanted to work in public service; but I also knew my staunchly conservative father would not be pleased. To him, the government is too big, too intrusive and too wasteful. I see things differently. And yet, his approval means a lot to me and his opinion has certainly influenced my the direction of my career. But I have finally come to understand that I must pursue my own path. After careful deliberation, I am confident that public service is, without a doubt, the right career for me.

Ever since my childhood I have detected in myself a certain compassion and innate desire to help others. I was the kid that dragged in every stray cat or dog I came across--and I still do. When I was eight years old, I rescued a rat from my sister's psychology lab and brought her home. I even coaxed my father into taking Alice--I called her Alice--to the vet when she became ill. But aside from my humanitarian kindness to animals, as a child I learned first-hand about America's need to reform and improve medical care. I spent years of my childhood on

crutches and in hospitals because of a tumor that hindered the growth of my leg. Without adequate health insurance and proper care, I might still be on crutches, but I was fortunate. Today, as a public servant, I still desire to help others who are not so fortunate. Providing health care to 44 million uninsured Americans, while keeping insurance affordable, is one of the most difficult challenges facing policymakers. I want to work in state or local government to resolve this health care crisis and ensure that the disadvantaged get the care they need and deserve.

In order to succeed in my endeavors toward public service, I now realize that a master's degree in public policy is essential. But when I graduated from college in 1990, I didn't know how to continue my education, only that I should. For a while, I considered such options as law school or international relations, but I always returned to my desire to impact public life. My career in public policy began as a legislative assistant at the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a non-profit educational organization that couples voices from the state legislature and the private sector to work on salient policy issues. My enthusiasm for ALEC's mission was evident, as I quickly moved up from legislative assistant to the director of two task forces. As manager of ALEC's task force on federalism and its tax and fiscal policy task force, I explored these issues thoroughly, never quite satiating my appetite for more information and knowledge. I found my integral role in the legislative process to be the most valuable and worthwhile experience I've had in my career to date.

Following ALEC, I took a position as a junior lobbyist for the Automotive Parts and Accessories Association (APAA). As a lobbyist, I voiced the APAA's concern over regulatory and environmental issues affecting the automotive aftermarket. Although I was able to help small automotive parts manufacturers battle the "Big Three" automakers, I quickly realized that being an advocate for the automotive aftermarket was not my calling in life. I wanted to promote policies which had the potential to improve life for the greater public, for I could not see myself spending a lifetime working within an isolated industry.

With that frame of mind, I accepted employment as a policy analyst in the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) research department in Washington, D.C. Helping small business owners is a cause close to my heart. For nearly 30 years, my family has owned a barbecue restaurant in the Washington, D.C. area. I've worked in the business at several different times, since the age of 14. Because of my involvement in my family's business, I understand the unique problems facing small business owners. At the NFIB, I valued my contributions because I know small businesses have a huge economic impact on our country and they are unquestionably an important constituency. Nevertheless, I felt uncomfortable working for a special interest group--even for one I deeply cared about.

From my experiences at the APAA and the NFIB, I have learned how I want to shape my future. My goals are now clear: I want to develop and advocate policy decisions that will benefit society as a whole, not just a few influential special interest groups. I want to uncover the objective truth of issues and tackle them in the best interests of the nation, not distort the facts for the benefit of a small group. I know I am able to look beyond partisan politics to solve problems for this country. Because of these unbending desires to reveal truth and to remain

committed to fair and equal advancement for all citizens, I think of myself as an ideal candidate for public service.

Additionally, I consider my active interest in politics to aid my pursuit of a career in public policy. I've always found my interest in politics exceptional, ever since my college roommates used to tease me for faithfully watching C-SPAN. However, my faith in the political process began to wane as I witnessed sensible public policy proposals torn apart by partisan conflict. I saw advocacy groups distort facts, and provide extreme, over-blown examples, jeopardizing prudent policy decisions. I observed how powerful elected officials, ensnared in their own partisan rancor, would block fair and balanced legislation which offered the most practical solution for their constituents. But I also encountered many thoughtful and wise people who devote their lives to public service. These devoted individuals inspired me. Like them, I want to be actively involved in the design and delivery of essential government services that improve the lives of the citizens in our society today. I am positive that by avoiding partisanship and urging the private industry, the public sector and non-profit groups to collaborate, many difficult problems can be resolved.

In order to be an effective public servant, I recognize the indispensability of an advanced degree. I've gained a lot of "real world" experience, but I need more training in the fundamentals of economics and statistics, as well as direction in sharpening my analytical and quantitative skills. I also want to devote time to studying the ethical dimensions of policy decisions. In graduate school, I'll have the opportunity to truly understand and appreciate the competing interests surrounding so many complex issues like health care reform, environmental protection and economic policy.

I've chosen Duke's public policy program for several reasons. Duke's program stands out because there is an emphasis on quantitative and analytical skills, which are so critical to policy analysis. As I mentioned, I feel that if I can strengthen my ability to approach problems logically and systematically, I will have succeeded in sharpening skills I consider necessary to succeed in the public realm. And possibly even more importantly, Duke's program bridges the gap between abstract principles and reality. This interdisciplinary approach is essential for responding to today's policy problems. I am excited by the possibility of combining the MPP program with the Health Policy Certificate Program. I am particularly interested in studying the problem of reforming state health to reduce the number of uninsured, and I believe Duke's curriculum will offer me a chance to do just that. From my own research into Duke, I feel confident in my knowledge of the public policy program and its potential to teach me. And after meeting with Helen Ladd, the Director of Graduate Studies, I'm even more convinced that Duke's program is right for me.

On the road "to be nobody but" myself, I've encountered twists and turns, and some detours--it is unquestionably the hardest battle I could fight. However, in the process, I've accumulated a tremendous amount of valuable experience and knowledge. My diversity of experience is my biggest asset. Because I can relate a Duke education to concrete examples from my own past, it is the perfect time for me to join the public policy program. I know that my past can be used

to prepare myself for the promises of the future. At Duke, I hope to synthesize the two and truly learn what it means to become myself.

Research Interests

Read the instructions carefully: Sometimes schools will ask for a statement of purpose describing your specific research interests in lieu of, or in addition to, a personal statement that emphasizes your character and qualities. For these types of essays, you can assume that a faculty member will be reading your statement, but it should still be accessible enough for a non-specialist to understand. Remember that such essays should also still aim to engage the reader, in a way that conveys your own enthusiasm for the subject matter.

[This applicant](#) demonstrates the depth of her knowledge about her subject. To engage the reader, she identifies specific problems that she hopes to investigate: "My junior year and private studies of Anglo-Saxon language and literature have caused me to consider the question of where the divisions between folklore, folk literature, and high literature lie. Should I attend your school, I would like to resume my studies of Anglo-Saxon poetry, with special attention to its folk elements." The essay is not scholarly, but it offers a glimpse of her intellectual character and proves the maturity of her goals.

⭐ Sample Essay

Having majored in literary studies (world literature) as an undergraduate, I would now like to concentrate on English and American literature.

I am especially interested in nineteenth-century literature, women's literature, Anglo-Saxon poetry, and folklore and folk literature. My personal literary projects have involved some combination of these subjects. For the oral section of my comprehensive exams, I specialized in nineteenth-century novels by and about women. The relationship between "high" and folk literature became the subject for my honors essay, which examined Toni Morrison's use of classical, biblical, African, and Afro-American folk tradition in her novel. I plan to work further on this essay, treating Morrison's other novels and perhaps preparing a paper suitable for publication.

In my studies toward a doctoral degree, I hope to examine more closely the relationship between high and folk literature. My junior year and private studies of Anglo-Saxon language and literature have caused me to consider the question of where the divisions between folklore, folk literature, and high literature lie. Should I attend your school, I would like to resume my studies of Anglo-Saxon poetry, with special attention to its folk elements.

Writing poetry also figures prominently in my academic and professional goals. I have just begun submitting to the smaller journals with some success and am gradually building a

working manuscript for a collection. The dominant theme of this collection relies on poems that draw from classical, biblical, and folk traditions, as well as everyday experience, in order to celebrate the process of giving and taking life, whether literal or figurative. My poetry both draws from and influences my academic studies. Much of what I read and study finds a place in my creative work as subject. At the same time, I study the art of literature by taking part in the creative process, experimenting with the tools used by other authors in the past.

In terms of a career, I see myself teaching literature, writing criticism, and going into editing or publishing poetry. Doctoral studies would be valuable to me in several ways. First, your teaching assistantship program would provide me with the practical teaching experience I am eager to acquire. Further, earning a Ph.D. in English and American literature would advance my other two career goals by adding to my skills, both critical and creative, in working with language. Ultimately, however, I see the Ph.D. as an end in itself, as well as a professional stepping-stone; I enjoy studying literature for its own sake and would like to continue my studies on the level demanded by the Ph.D. program.

Addressing the School

While professional schools tend to have similar curricula, the differences between graduate programs abound. The highest ranked institution in your basic subject might not be strong in the particular areas that you want to pursue. Moreover, graduate school involves more direct faculty relationships, so you want to evaluate your potential mentors carefully.

You should do this research for your own sake, of course, but discussing your discoveries in your personal statement can help convince the admissions committee that you are a good fit. Avoid mistakes like discussing the school's rank or prestige, or simply offering generic praise. Instead, mention faculty members by name and indicate some knowledge of their work. Discuss your interest in becoming involved in a particular student organization or activity. Consider contacting faculty members first and discussing their current research projects and your interest in studying under them. Then refer to these contacts in your essay. You may also want to discuss your interest in becoming involved in a particular student organization or activity.

[This applicant](#) demonstrates a carefully considered interest in the school's program in paragraphs 7 and 8. She explains, for example, that this particular university's cross-disciplinary focus holds a specific appeal for her. Additionally, she reveals an in-depth understanding of the work of one of the school's faculty members, mentioning Akhil Gupta by name and expounding upon Dr. Gupta's influence upon her own work.

⭐**Sample Essay**

My freshman year at Harvard, I was sitting in a Postcolonial African Literature class when Professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o (the influential Kenyan author) succeeded in attracting me to the study of African literature through nothing more than a single sentence. He argued that, when a civilization adopts reading and writing as the chief form of social communication, it frees itself to forget its own values, because those values no longer have to be part of a lived reality in order to have significance. I was immediately fascinated by the idea that the written word can alter individual lives, affect one's identity, and perhaps even shape national identity.

Professor Ngugi's proposal forced me to think in a radically new way: I was finally confronted with the notion of literature not as an agent of vital change, but as a potential instrument of stasis and social stagnancy. I began to question the basic assumptions with which I had, until then, approached the field. How does "literature" function away from the written page, in the lives of individuals and societies? What is the significance of the written word in a society where the construction of history is not necessarily recorded or even linear?

I soon discovered that the general scope of comparative literature fell short of my expectations because it didn't allow students to question the inherent integrity or subjectivity of their discourse. We were being told to approach Asian, African, European, and American texts with the same analytical tools, ignoring the fact that, within each culture, literature may function in a different capacity, and with a completely different sense of urgency. Seeking out ways in which literature tangibly impacted societies, I began to explore other fields, including history, philosophy, anthropology, language, and performance studies.

The interdisciplinary nature of my work is best illustrated by my senior thesis ("Time Out of Joint: Issues of Temporality in the Songs of Okot p'Bitek"). In addition to my literary interpretations, the thesis drew heavily on both the Ugandan author's own cultural treatises and other anthropological, psychological, and philosophical texts. By using tools from other disciplines, I was able to interpret the literary works while developing insight into the Ugandan society and popular psychology that gave birth to the horrific Idi Amin regime. In addition, I was able to further understand how people interacted with the works and incorporated (or failed to incorporate) them into their individual, social, and political realities.

On a more practical level, writing the thesis also confirmed my suspicion that I would like to pursue an academic career. When I finished my undergraduate career, I felt that a couple of years of professional work would give me a better perspective of graduate school. I decided to secure a position which would grant me experiences far removed from the academic world, yet which would also permit me to continue developing the research and writing skills I needed to tackle the challenges of graduate school. I have fulfilled this goal by working as a content developer at a Silicon Alley web start-up for two years. The experience has been both enjoyable and invaluable -- to the point where colleagues glance at me with a puzzled look when I tell them I am leaving the job to return to school. In fact, my willingness to leave such a dynamic, high-paying job to pursue my passion for literature only reflects my keen determination to continue along the academic path.

Through a Masters program, I plan to further explore the issues I confronted during my undergraduate years by integrating the study of social, cultural, and linguistic anthropology into the realm of literature. I believe that, by adopting tools used in such disciplines, methods of inquiry can be formulated that allow for the interpretation of works that are both technically sound and sociologically insightful. Thus far, my studies have concentrated largely on African and Caribbean literatures, and I am particularly interested in studying these geographic areas in more specific historical and cultural contexts. I also seek to increase my knowledge of African languages, which will allow me to study the lingering cultural impact of colonialism in modern-day African literature. Eventually, I would like to secure an academic post in a Comparative Literature department, devoting myself to both research and teaching at the college level.

I believe the Modern Thought and Literature program at NAME is uniquely equipped to guide me toward these objectives. While searching for a graduate school that would accommodate my interdisciplinary approach, I was thrilled to find a program that approaches world literature with a cross-disciplinary focus, recognizing that the written word has the potential to be an entry point for social and cultural inquiry.

The level of scholarly research produced by the department also attracts me. Akhil Gupta's "Culture, Power, Place", for instance, was one of my first and most influential experiences with the field of cultural anthropology. Professor Gupta's analysis of the local, national, and foreign realms, achieved through a discussion of post-colonial displacement and mixed identifications, has led me to believe that -- given the complexity of modern societies -- comparative literature's focus on borders (national and linguistic) has been excessively arbitrary. Even more significant is the accurate rendering of individually-lived realities that may then be synthesized with other experiences. I believe that I could greatly benefit from Professor Gupta's teaching and guidance in applying these ideas to the literary arena, and I believe that his work is representative of the rigorous yet creative approach I would pursue upon joining the department.

Similarly, this applicant, after describing how her laboratory experience has led to a heightened interest in neurological diseases and their underlying causes, demonstrates in detail how Mt. Sinai's Ph.D. program is an excellent fit for her. She is clearly familiar with Mt. Sinai's faculty, which includes many experts in her field of interest, several of whom she mentions by name. Note, however, that mentioning several professors is not as effective as describing one in further depth. The previous applicant left no doubt that she knew Dr. Gupta's work well, while it's not clear that this applicant did anything more than superficially research the areas of specialization of four professors.

Sample Essay

My long-term goal is to dedicate myself to the research field of neuroscience. In order to achieve this goal, I hope to acquire my Ph.D. at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine starting in the fall of 2000.

In 1992, I obtained my MA degree in Molecular Microbiology from Indiana University, Bloomington. At I.U., I received intensive training by Dr. Roger Innes in experimental design, logical thinking, and molecular genetics techniques. After I graduated from I.U., I became a lab supervisor in the clinical cytogenetic laboratory at Tzu Chi College of Medicine, Taiwan. The lab is part of TCCM's newly established genetic research team directed by Dr. Ming-Liang Lee. My responsibilities at the lab included training lab technicians, improving testing accuracy by consistently improving technical skills and knowledge, and managing the lab's day-to-day operations. At TCCM, I also taught several fundamental biology courses, including general biology, cell biology, and medical genetics laboratory.

After five years of working, I decided to pursue more advanced research training in the latest techniques of microbiology. Since the fall of 1998, I have been taking several Ph.D.-level courses at New York University. I have performed very well in my studies there, which have been supported by a fellowship from Taiwan's National Science Council. My courses at NYU are Biochemistry I and II, Molecular Principles of Evolution, Cell Biology, Molecular Controls of Organism Form and Function, Neuroimmunology Journal Club, and Physiology Basis of Behavior. I am also researching in Dr. Joseph LeDoux's lab for credit. At this lab, I have been using immunohistochemistry to detect the activation of track receptors in rat brains after fear conditioning. One of the tracks, trkB, responds to BDNF, which is related to synaptogenesis and LTP induction in the processes of learning and memory. My results have shown that the phosphorylation peak of trk appears in the hippocampal CA1 area 24 hours after fear conditioning. Further blocking experiments using trk antagonist need to be performed in order to confirm this result.

My laboratory experience has triggered my strong interest in studying cellular and molecular mechanisms underlying neurological diseases. The majority of patients with these diseases have chromosomal and genetic abnormalities. Most genetic diseases lead to neurological symptoms, and several neurological diseases are associated with strong genetic predispositions. The genetic defects associated with Alzheimer's Disease, alcoholism, Fragile-X Syndrome, Neurofibrmatosis, and Parkinson's Disease have already been mapped. However, the links between genes, gene products, neuronal circuits, brain functions, and diseases are still unclear. I am eager to help uncover these links.

I think that Mt. Sinai's Ph.D. program perfectly suits my interests. The faculty includes experts in several divisions of neuroscience. There is an especially large group studying neurological diseases. The group uses various approaches, animal models, and behavioral paradigms to search for the causes of diseases on the molecular, cellular, physiological, and system levels. I am particularly interested in working in Dr. John Morrison's lab, which studies cortical organizations, glutamate receptors, and neurodegenerative disorders; Dr. Patrick Hof's lab, which uses comparative neuroanatomy to study aging; Dr. Giulio Pasinetti's lab, which studies cyclooxygenase and inflammation in Alzheimer's Disease; and Dr. Charles Mobbs's lab, which

uses molecular, histological, behavioral, and electrophysiological methods to study basic mechanisms underlying metabolic diseases and aging.

Mt. Sinai School of Medicine also attracts me because of its location in an extremely nice area of Manhattan. In addition, the strong collaboration between its neuroscience program and its other departments, its affiliated hospital, and many other outstanding New York laboratories will enable me to receive much technical and academic support.

In order to sponsor my Ph.D. education, I have obtained a competitive Ph.D. fellowship from the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation, the largest nonprofit organization in Taiwan. The foundation is dedicated to helping needy all over the world, regardless of age, sex, race, and religion. Over the past decades, it has provided worldwide relief and assistance. Its missions focus on charity, medical care, education, and international relief. The founder, Master Chang Yang, was once nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The foundation will support my Ph.D. education for at least four years.

After completing my Ph.D. education, I plan to continue my research and teaching in neuroscience. Thus far, most of the detailed work in studying neurological disease has of necessity been performed in experimental animal systems. However, the progress of human genome mapping might eventually make it possible to test whether the disease mechanisms discovered in animals function in comparable ways in humans. Consequently, in the future, I hope to apply my knowledge of the genes and proteins involved in neurological diseases to develop pharmacological treatment or genetic therapies. I am confident that one day we will have effective drugs to prevent memory loss or aging. We may even be able to cure currently intractable neurological diseases through gene therapies, either in utero or in live humans.

I am confident that Mount Sinai School of Medicine's graduate program will enable me to successfully meet my goals. I also believe that if I am accepted to your Ph.D. program, I will contribute greatly to Mount Sinai's learning environment.

Why Qualified?

Your academic performance will play the most significant role in exhibiting to the admissions committee your qualification for admission. However, the personal statement gives you the opportunity to analyze your background and offer the insight and interpretation that you want your readers to take away from your application.

The best way to prove your qualification is to discuss concrete experiences that show your abilities and qualities. **Details about the process are paramount.** What we mean by the "process" is the path to achievement. The rest of the application has already summarized your accomplishments and activities. Show the reader what you did in concrete terms, and most importantly, **highlight your active roles**.

The experiences that demonstrate your qualification are not necessarily distinct from those that explain your motivation. You shouldn't plan on dividing the essay into two separate sections for each, but rather organize the structure by topic and extrapolate insights as they develop. We will cover structure in greater depth in its own section, but it is important that you begin thinking in terms of an integrated essay.

Research Experience

The best way to demonstrate your qualification for graduate school is to focus on research experience, since research will be your main job for the duration of your studies. Be specific about what you did. If you worked for a year under a professor, you might consider emphasizing one particular project and exploring that in depth. The experience does not have to have been a major undertaking: Any practical experience can be used as long as you demonstrate your enthusiasm and aptitude for the field of study.

Remember to keep the discussion personal. Do not become bogged down in minute details and jargon. Ultimately, the focus of the story should remain on you and your growth or success.

[This applicant](#) cites specific projects to demonstrate both the growth of his interest in psychology research and the skills he has honed in the process. Note, in the third paragraph, that he does not jump to the end result of presenting his paper at a conference. Rather, he shows the work he did--the active role he played--to make that accomplishment possible. Moreover, he concludes this paragraph not with a final word about his research, but with an explanation of what he has gained: "Again, I was involved in all aspects of the experiment, from typing the protocol and administering it to the subjects, to analyzing the data and finally presenting my results."

Sample Essay

Ever since my first psychology lecture, I have been fascinated by the nature of human memory. Indeed, human memory is one of the most tenacious and enigmatic problems ever faced by philosophers and psychologists. The discussion of memory dates back to the early Greeks when Plato and Aristotle originally likened it to a "wax tablet." In 1890, pioneer William James adopted the metaphorical framework and equated memory to a "house" to which thirty years later Sigmund Freud chimed that memory was closer to "rooms in a house." In 1968, Atkinson and Shrifren retained the metaphorical framework but referred to memory as "stores". The fact that the controversy surrounding human memory has been marked more by analogy than definition suggests, however, that memory is a far more complex phenomenon than has been uncovered thus far. I intend to spend the rest of my professional life researching the nature of human memory and solving the riddle posed yet cunningly dodged by generations of philosophers and psychologists.

When I first came to psychology, however, I wanted to be a clinical psychologist. Only upon enrolling in Dr. Helga Noice's Cognitive Psychology course, did I discover the excitement of doing research. The course required us to test our own autobiographical memory by conducting an experiment similar to the one run in 1986 by W. Wagenaar. Over the course of the term, I recorded events from my personal life on event cards and set them aside without reviewing them. After studying the effect serial position on the recollection of autobiographical memories, I hypothesized that events that, when I sat down at the end of therm to recall those same events I had described on the event cards, that events that had occurred later in the term would be recalled with greater frequency than events that had occurred earlier. Although the experiment was of simple design and predictable results, I found the processes incredibly exciting. Autobiographical memory in particular fascinated me because I realized how crucial, yet fragile, memory is. Why was my memory of even ten weeks so imperfect? What factors contributed to that imperfection? Could such factors be controlled?

I had ignited my passion for experimental psychology. Suddenly, I had many pressing questions about memory that I wanted to research. Under the guidance of Dr. Noice, I continued to study human memory. I worked closely with Dr. Noice on several research experiments involving expert memory, specifically the memory of professional actors. Dr. Noice would select a scene from a play and then a professional actor would score it for beats, that is, go through the scene grouping sections of dialogue together according to the intent of the character. Some actors use this method to learn dialogue rather than rote memorization. After they were finished, I would type up the scene and the cued recall test. Next, I would moderate the experimental sessions by scoring the actor's cued recall for accuracy and then helping with the statistical analysis. My work culminated with my paper, "Teaching Students to Remember Complex Material Through the Use of Professional Actors' Learning Strategies." My paper accompanied a poster presentation at the Third Annual Tri-State Undergraduate Psychology

Conference. In addition, I presented a related paper entitled "Type of Learning Strategy and Verbatim Retention of Complex Material" at the ILLOWA (Illinois-Iowa) Conference the following year. Again, I was involved in all aspects of the experiment, from typing the protocol and administering it to the subjects, to analyzing the data and finally presenting my results.

The opportunity to perform this research was invaluable, particularly as I began taking independent research seminars in my senior year. For the seminars, I was required to write an extensive review of the literature and then design a research proposal on any topic of my choice. Although I had participated in all aspects of research previously, this was my first opportunity to select my own topic. I was immediately certain that I wanted to explore at human memory. But I spent a long time considering what aspect of memory I found most intriguing and possible to tackle within the confines of the research seminar. I had always been interested in the legal implications of memory, so I to investigate eyewitness memory.

In retrospect, my choice was also informed by my recollection about an experiment I had read about several years earlier. In the experiment, subjects read about Helen Keller. Later they were given a recall test. Still later they were given an additional test to determine the source of

their knowledge about Helen Keller. The authors discovered that subjects could not determine the source of their knowledge, that is, they could not distinguish whether specific details of their knowledge about Helen Keller came from the information provided by the experimenters or if the details came from another source at an earlier time. Once their new knowledge about Helen Keller had been assimilated into their previous knowledge about Helen Keller, there was no way to separate the information according to the source it came from.

I wondered what the implications of that conclusion would be for eyewitnesses. I wondered if an eyewitness account could be corrupted by misleading post-event information. My research proposal was entitled "The Rate of Memory Trace Decay and its Effect on Eyewitness Accuracy." While I was not able to complete the experiment in its entirety, I was excited by the fact that I created a possible research protocol. Immediately, I knew I wanted to pursue the field of experimental psychology. My success in course work and my passion for research demonstrated to me that I had both the interest and ability to enter this challenging and rewording field.

I have dedicated my undergraduate years to preparing myself for graduate work in experimental psychology. Once receive my doctorate, I intend to pursue research on human memory while teaching psychology to undergraduates at a small, liberal arts college, similar to the one I attended. It was, after all, my undergraduate research experience that gave me the opportunity to come to psychology with an interest in counseling people, but to leave with a passion for investigating the nature of human thinking. Undergraduates at smaller liberal arts colleges are often left out of research, which makes my desire to provide such experiences that much stronger. In the years ahead, I look forward to teaching as well as continuing my research. In the company of such greats as Aristotle, James, and Freud, I endeavor to leave behind my own contribution on the nature of human memory.

Field Experience

If the program you're applying to is more practice-oriented, then demonstrating real-world experience can be just as important as academic pursuits.

[This applicant](#) is applying to a computer science program, and he has a couple years of work experience. He explains one specific achievement as follows: "As an MS student at DePaul University, I worked as a network support technician and project manager for Information Services. My most significant accomplishment in this capacity involved the re-wiring of over a thousand dormitory rooms to enable the students to have Internet access with a link to the other four campuses. In doing so, I had to investigate the existing needs of a high-speed Internet network, as well as the transport of bandwidth to support future demands, which are almost impossible to determine." He starts by describing the end result, which in this case is acceptable because he poses it almost as a challenge that he faced, and then he proceeds to explain the concrete tasks he had to perform. In this applicant's case, it's clear that citing

academic work could not prove the same level of skill that he has done by drawing on real-world experiences.

✦ Sample Essay

For the past two and a half years, I have been a professional in the technology field, but now I am preparing to become a professional corporate information officer. Although my work has introduced me to specific areas of information technology, (including telecommunications, network wiring and databases) I have recently become intrigued with the field of information security. I am concerned about the vulnerability of the company I work for, particularly with regard to employee and client information. The specialty phase of your Professional program appears to be well endowed with the resources needed to address such concerns.

While my undergraduate and MS curriculum exposed me to a wide variety of computer science topics, I have gained extensive knowledge in the area of network infrastructure development. As an MS student at DePaul University, I worked as a network support technician and project manager for Information Services. My most significant accomplishment in this capacity involved the re-wiring of over a thousand dormitory rooms to enable the students to have Internet access with a link to the other four campuses. In doing so, I had to investigate the existing needs of a high-speed Internet network, as well as the transport of bandwidth to support future demands, which are almost impossible to determine.

As a result of my experiences in the dormitory project, I was well prepared for the challenges that awaited me as the manager of Information Services at the Transportation Center at Northwestern University. My primary task was to build a state-of-the-art network infrastructure that would support a leading graduate research center in the transportation field. In a succinct and convincing manner, I had to demonstrate my vision in building the foundation and developing the budget, as well as managing the project, purchasing, installation and finally, deployment of my plan. My success in leading this project and utilizing the newly installed technical tools to empower the Center's goals led to the realization of similar goals and projects in a corporate environment.

Currently, I am the manager of Information Systems at Active Screw and Fastener, where I am responsible for the entire IT unit. Although my strengths are concentrated in the area of Information Technology, I do not want to limit myself to building and maintaining data networks. Through a focused program of study, my goal is to develop expertise in information security, an area that is becoming more and more critical to all information systems managers. As my company grows, I must also be capable of providing the necessary growth in its IT functions to enable people to share information with confidence. It is imperative that sensitive data assets, be it personal or corporate, will not be vulnerable to Cybercrime or compromised by unauthorized users.

The key to becoming a successful Tech manager and future CIO is the ability to demonstrate that a company's secret information resources are in alignment with corporate priorities. The

Chicago Professional Programs in Computer Science will give me extensive exposure to information security, and will allow me to take a step toward securing the infrastructures that I have already built. With its strong cadre of experienced faculty, Chicago will prepare me to become a solid senior technical manager and partner with an enlightened vision towards the new directions manifesting in the information security field.

Unrelated Work Experience

The skill sets needed to thrive in various fields often overlap, and some qualities are essential everywhere. If you have a strong record in an unrelated field, you should not hesitate to discuss this, though the more you can tie the discussion in with your current objectives, the better.

[This applicant](#) is applying to a graduate program in geology, but he devotes some space to his work experience in computers: "During the past 18 months I have had firsthand experience with computers in a wide array of business applications. This has stimulated me to think about ways in which computers could be used for scientific research. One idea that particularly fascinates me is mathematical modeling of natural systems, and I think those kinds of techniques could be put to good use in geological science." This particular link is not only relevant, but also offers a unique angle, since few geology students would think to emphasize computers and mathematical modeling. Note, however, that the applicant could have described his work in computers in further depth before returning to geology. You should explore experiences on their own terms before trying to force connections.

Sample Essay

I have been planning a career in geological sciences for several years, but as an undergraduate I concentrated on getting a solid background in math and science. After graduation, I took a job to allow myself time to thoroughly think through my plans and to expose myself to a variety of work situations. This strategy has been very valuable to me in rounding out my career plans.

During the past 18 months I have had firsthand experience with computers in a wide array of business applications. This has stimulated me to think about ways in which computers could be used for scientific research. One idea that particularly fascinates me is mathematical modeling of natural systems, and I think those kinds of techniques could be put to good use in geological science. I have always enjoyed and been strong in areas that require logical, analytical thought, and I am anxious to combine my interest in earth science with my knowledge of, and aptitude for, computer-related work. There are several specific areas that I have already studied that I think would lend themselves to research based on computing techniques, including mineral phase relations in igneous petrology and several topics in structural geology.

I have had both lecture/lab and field courses in structural geology, as well as a short module dealing with plate tectonics, and I am very interested in the whole area. I would like to explore structural geology and tectonics further at the graduate level. I am also interested in learning more about geophysics. I plan to focus on all these areas in graduate school while at the same time continuing to build up my overall knowledge of geology.

My ultimate academic goal is to earn a Ph.D., but enrolling first in a master's program will enable me to explore my various interests and make a more informed decision about which specific discipline I will want to study in depth.

As far as long-term plans, I hope to get a position at a university or other institution where I can indulge my primary impulse, which is to be involved in scientific research, and also try my hand at teaching.

The links provided by this applicant are far broader, but still effective. Though she is applying to a Master of Library Service program, she discusses volunteer experience in a nonprofit organization: "My work for the organization has taken a number of forms over the years, but can be summed up as gathering information, both practical and technical, and using human relations skills to make it accessible to others." Basic qualities such as "human relations skills" could have a wide variety of applications, but that fact doesn't diminish their relevance to the applicant's future in library service.

✦Sample Essay

Notice how this successful applicant avoids the expository-resume approach by focusing on two or three particular experiences and evaluating them in terms of her current outlook and educational goals. Also notice how the discussion about her children's activities, while seemingly unnecessary to make her central point, helps to bring the essay down to a more personal level.

My first employment in a library was in a work-study project during college. My duties included some shelving and a lot of typing of catalog cards. I remember the sturdy metal stacks, with so many captivating books tempting me as I tried to reshelve all that were on the carts. Mostly I remember the typing; agonizingly laborious since I was not a skilled typist, and formatting was so important. I came to understand much about the way the cataloguing system worked, and was grateful in the years to come when I needed to locate things for my own studies . . . or for my children.

For more than fifteen years now I have been working as a volunteer for La Leche League International, a grass roots, non-profit, self-help organization supporting and promoting breastfeeding. My work for the organization has taken a number of forms over the years, but can be summed up as gathering information, both practical and technical, and using human

relations skills to make it accessible to others. My experience helping women access breast-feeding information and empowering them to use that information has convinced me that information alone is not nearly as useful as information plus a skilled guide.

One of my greatest pleasures in recent years has been writing a regular column-"Keeping Up-to-Date"-for La Leche League's bimonthly international newsletter. Through this experience I have seen a vivid contrast between the substantive quality of information formally prepared-with the discipline and rigor of a traditional publishing and review schedule and with clear authorship-and the casual unstructured nature of electronic bulletin board postings, faxes, e-mail, and other products of newer technologies. I am practically, though peripherally, aware of some of the problems our society faces in an era when intellectual property suddenly has so many new forms. I am eager to be a well-informed participant in the discussion of intellectual participation.

This week I found myself intrigued again by cataloguing when I needed to outfit my youngest son, now twelve, with a juggler's outfit for the school play. An initial subject search for "costumes" in the OPAC system at our township library was fruitless. Only when I thought to enter "costume" without the plural "s" did the system yield all the information I needed. What frustration! This confluence of technology and information, especially as it affects accessibility, fascinates me.

The degree to which your School of Communication, Information and Library Studies openly accepts the challenge to explore and lead in the information revolution is seductive. What a serendipity that this school is practically in my backyard! The strengths and attributes I bring to your school are a caring and careful nature, proven academic excellence, experience in writing and speaking for a variety of audiences, and a practical knowledge of working with volunteers and professionals. The durability of my enthusiasm for libraries and the people who work in and love them convinces me that the Master of Library Service program is indeed the right way for me to continue my formal education.

Extracurricular Activities

It is very possible to demonstrate the relevant qualities you possess for graduate school through extracurricular activities. The approaches you take will essentially be the same as those we discussed in the above two sections, Field Experience and Unrelated Work Experience, depending on whether the activity is related or not. In the Library Service case cited above, for example, the applicant was drawing on volunteer rather than work experiences, but the purposes were the same.

✦Why Unique?

You cannot rely on uniqueness to outweigh a mediocre academic record, but it can often give you an edge. Admissions officers are interested in assembling a diverse class of unique perspectives, so you should highlight rather than downplay your differences. To an extent, all types of diversity will help, but you should aim to focus on how unique aspects of your background will enable you to contribute to the academic community.

The purpose of this lesson is to show you examples of how other people capitalized on their unique qualities. When it comes to your own essay, only you can identify the optimal strategy for making yourself stand out. One way to start is to look over your answers to the brainstorming questions and try to find aspects of your background that separate you from your peers. Ultimately, however, what will make the difference is your ability to assess yourself honestly and thoughtfully.

The examples that follow are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they represent the efforts of particular individuals to recognize the unique elements of their background and use them to their advantage. You should notice that these unique elements are often directly related to their academic interests, but can still be tied effectively to the applicants' goals or integrated with their character and background.

[This applicant](#) starts by noting the diversity of his ethnic and religious background. When mentioning such points, you should not assume that such diversity is an end in itself. Rather, you should show how your background and culture have shaped your perspective and given you something unique to offer. This applicant does a good job of noting how Zoroastrianism has given him guiding principles, but he never follows through to discuss concrete examples. This essay would have benefited from more details to show his diversity in more tangible terms.

⭐Sample Essay

In responding to a question that asked the applicant to describe experiences, events, or persons that have been important in his or her development, this applicant successfully correlated his influences to his current outlook on life.

Perhaps the most important influence that has shaped the person I am today is my upbringing in a traditional family-oriented Persian and Zoroastrian culture. My family has been an important source of support in all of the decisions I have made, and Zoroastrianism's three basic tenets-good words, good deeds, and good thoughts-have been my guiding principles in life. Not only do I try to do things for others, but I always push myself to be the best that I can be in all aspects of my life. I saw early the doors and opportunities that a good education can open up; thus, I particularly tried hard to do well in school.

Another important experience that has had a large influence on me the past few years has been college. Going from high school to college was a significant change. College required a major overhaul of my time-management techniques as the number of things to do

mushroomed. In high school, I was in the honors program, with the same cohort of students in all my classes. Thus, I was exposed little to people very different from myself. College, on the other hand, is full of diversity. I have people of all backgrounds and abilities in my classes, and I have been fortunate enough to meet quite a few of them. This experience has made me more tolerant of differences. Furthermore, a variety of classes such as the Humanities Core Course, in which we specifically studied differences in race, gender, and belief systems, have liberalized my world view.

My undergraduate research has occupied a large portion of my time in college. Along with this experience have come knowledge and skills that could never be gained in the classroom. I have gained a better appreciation for the medical discoverers and discoveries of the past and the years of frustration endured and satisfaction enjoyed by scientists. I have also learned to deal better with the disappointments and frustrations that result when things do not always go as one expects them to. My research experience was also important to me in that it broadened my view of the medical field. Research permitted me to meet a few medical doctors who have clinical practices and yet are able to conduct research at the university. This has made me seriously consider combining research with a clinical practice in my own career.

From my earliest memories, I can always remember being interested in meteorology. I believe that this interest sparked my love for the outdoors, while my interest in medicine molded my desire for healthy living. As a result of these two influences, I try to follow an active exercise routine taking place mostly in the outdoors. I enjoy running and mountain biking in the local hills and mountains, along with hiking and backpacking. All of these activities have made me concerned about the environment and my place in it.

[This applicant's](#) story is fascinating, at times harrowing, and ultimately triumphant. From committed social activism to drug and alcohol addiction to a reengagement with the world, the author pulls no punches in telling his unique tale. While he does not whitewash his experience with drugs and alcohol, notice how he situates it in a larger context, showing both how it made him oblivious to the things he really cared about (Third World injustices) and how his reintroduction to those things helped him pull himself out of his downward spiral. In doing so, he demonstrates both a strong social conscience and a dedication to his beliefs. Additionally, his story makes him very hard for an admissions committee to forget. Just be careful that any discussion of past mistakes or difficulties leads to an indubitably positive conclusion.

✦ Sample Essay

My longtime fascination with politics and international affairs is reflected in my participation, starting in high school, in activities such as student council, school board meetings, Vietnam war protests, the McCarthy campaign, and the grape boycott. As each new cause came along, I was always ready to go to Washington or the state capital to wave a sign or chant slogans. Although I look back on these activities today with some chagrin, I realize they did help me to

develop, at an early age, a sense of concern for social and political issues and a genuine desire to play a role.

As an undergraduate, I was more interested in social than academic development. During my last two years, I became involved with drugs and alcohol and devoted little time to my studies, doing only as much as was necessary to maintain a B average. After graduation my drug use became progressively worse; without the motivation or ability to look for a career job, I worked for a time in a factory and then, for three years, as a cab driver in New York City.

In 1980 I finally "hit bottom" and became willing to accept help. I joined both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and for the next several years the primary business of my life was recovery. Although I had several "slips" in the beginning, I have now enjoyed nearly seven years of complete freedom from drug and alcohol use. I mention my bout with addiction because I think it is important in answering two issues that presumably will be of concern to the admissions committee: my lackluster undergraduate record and the fact that I have waited until the age of 34 to begin preparing academically for a career in public policy. It would be an oversimplification to call addiction the cause for either of these things; rather I would say it was the most obvious manifestation of an underlying immaturity that characterized my post adolescent years. More importantly, the discipline of recovery has had a significant impact on my overall emotional growth.

During the last years of my addiction I was completely oblivious to the world around me. Until 1983 I didn't even realize that there had been a revolution in Nicaragua or that one was going on in El Salvador. Then I rejoined the Quaker Meeting, in which I had been raised as a child, and quickly gravitated to its Peace and Social Order Committee. They were just then initiating a project to help refugees from Central America, and I joined enthusiastically in the work. I began reading about Central America and, later, teaching myself Spanish. I got to know refugees who were victims of poverty and oppression, became more grateful for my own economic and educational advantages, and developed a strong desire to give something back by working to provide opportunities to those who have not been so lucky.

In 1986 I went to Nicaragua to pick coffee for two weeks. This trip changed my whole outlook on both the United States and the underdeveloped world. The combination of living for two weeks amid poverty and engaging in long political discussions with my fellow coffee pickers, including several well-educated professionals who held views significantly to the left of mine, profoundly shook my world view. I came back humbled, aware of how little I knew about the world and eager to learn more. I began raiding the public library for everything I could find on the Third World and started subscribing to a wide variety of periodicals, from scholarly journals such as Foreign Affairs and Asian Survey to obscure newsletters such as Through Our Eyes (published by U.S. citizens living in Nicaragua).

Over the intervening two years, my interest has gradually focused on economics. I have come to realize that economic development (including equitable distribution of wealth) is the key to peace and social justice, both at home and in the Third World. I didn't study economics in college and have found it difficult to understand the economic issues that are at the heart of

many policy decisions. At the same time, though, I am fascinated by the subject. Given my belief that basic economic needs are among the most fundamental of human rights, how can society best go about providing for them? Although I call myself an idealist, I'm convinced that true idealism must be pragmatic. I am not impressed, for example, by simplistic formulations that require people to be better than they are. As a Quaker I believe that the means are inseparable from the end; as an American I believe that democracy and freedom of expression are essential elements of a just society, though I'm not wedded to the idea that our version of democracy is the only legitimate one.

Although I have carved out a comfortable niche in my present job, with a responsible position and a good salary, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the prospect of a career in business applications programming. More and more of my time and energy is now being absorbed by community activities. After getting my master's in public administration, I would like to work in the area of economic development in the Third World, particularly Latin America. The setting might be a private (possibly church-based) development agency, the UN, the OAS, one of the multilateral development banks, or a government agency. What I need from graduate school is the academic foundation for such a career. What I offer in return is a perspective that comes from significant involvement in policy issues at the grass roots level, where they originate and ultimately must be resolved.

[This applicant](#) shows that you do not need to be a true one-of-a-kind to demonstrate uniqueness in the admissions process. In fact, what sets him apart is a rather typical job in the computer industry. What makes his application unique, however, is that he is applying to a geological sciences program. His interest in mathematical modeling gives him a novel area of specialization to offer to the intellectual diversity of the program.

✦ Sample Essay

I have been planning a career in geological sciences for several years, but as an undergraduate I concentrated on getting a solid background in math and science. After graduation, I took a job to allow myself time to thoroughly think through my plans and to expose myself to a variety of work situations. This strategy has been very valuable to me in rounding out my career plans.

During the past 18 months I have had firsthand experience with computers in a wide array of business applications. This has stimulated me to think about ways in which computers could be used for scientific research. One idea that particularly fascinates me is mathematical modeling of natural systems, and I think those kinds of techniques could be put to good use in geological science. I have always enjoyed and been strong in areas that require logical, analytical thought, and I am anxious to combine my interest in earth science with my knowledge of, and aptitude for, computer-related work. There are several specific areas that I have already studied that I think would lend themselves to research based on computing

techniques, including mineral phase relations in igneous petrology and several topics in structural geology.

I have had both lecture/lab and field courses in structural geology, as well as a short module dealing with plate tectonics, and I am very interested in the whole area. I would like to explore structural geology and tectonics further at the graduate level. I am also interested in learning more about geophysics. I plan to focus on all these areas in graduate school while at the same time continuing to build up my overall knowledge of geology.

My ultimate academic goal is to earn a Ph.D., but enrolling first in a master's program will enable me to explore my various interests and make a more informed decision about which specific discipline I will want to study in depth.

As far as long-term plans, I hope to get a position at a university or other institution where I can indulge my primary impulse, which is to be involved in scientific research, and also try my hand at teaching.

Finally, [this applicant] shows that a personal, revealing story can be enough to set someone apart. By recounting a particular episode that sparked her epiphany as a writer, she gives us an in-depth look at her unique approach to her craft. Again, this essay does not discuss exotic experiences, but instead succeeds by painting a detailed, deeply personal portrait that no one else could have written.

Sample Essay

This applicant recounts a particular incident that gives the reader real insight into what makes her "tick." Notice, by the way, that the discussion of religion is handled in a way that is not likely to offend any reader.

Two years ago, when I was a junior in college, I wrote a story entitled "It Came from Catholic School." My friends, fellow veterans of plaid uniforms and daily masses, liked it and encouraged me to submit it when the English department magazine made its annual call for stories. They published the story and asked me to read from it at a reading primarily devoted to student poetry. Well, I was pretty nervous about this. The only readings I'd done before a crowd were Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the occasional Responsorial Psalm-and that wasn't my writing on the line. I grew more nervous as I sat there that night, listening to poem after poem on angst and ennui. I couldn't imagine how the students and faculty around me, who were all listening intently with properly contorted faces, would respond to my grotesque little girl. But I stood up and read a passage, a little shaky at first. Then I heard laughs, where I'd hoped I would, and also in places that surprised me. After the reading, people wanted to shake my hand. One woman thanked me for injecting a little levity into the proceedings. I felt satisfaction in my work as never before.

At that reading, I realized I could write things that made people laugh-not just friends who felt obligated, but complete strangers. I really liked that feeling, and it's the promise of that laughter that motivates me to continue writing. I also realized that my work wasn't frivolous, that I could influence a reader, that my characters seemed real. For the first time, I felt that I could do what I really wanted to do-write.

I look forward to progressing through a series of intimate workshops en route to an MFA degree at your school. The interdisciplinary nature of the program appeals to me. Although I want to concentrate on Fiction, I would like to take screenwriting electives as well. I think my humor translates well to teleplays, and I would like to explore that avenue through the comedy writing courses your school offers. I aim to develop my natural strengths- humor, voice, and dialogue, while experimenting with the genres.

Because I'm generally at the mercy of my characters, I can't outline a specific writing goal. I do envision myself producing a collection of short stories featuring female protagonists. Women's issues are implicit in my writing, and I would welcome the chance to study with [faculty name]. My stories feature a range of women-from the precocious heroine of the aforementioned story to a "white trash" cashier, and I plan to cover a still broader scope. Mainly, I'm looking to devote myself to the work. And I hope to make some people laugh along the way.

✦ Explain Blemishes

Certain parts of your application may call for an explanation. Such aspects might include any of the following:

- Undergraduate grades
- Entrance exam scores
- Deficiency in the number of letters of recommendation submitted
- Lack of work experience
- Lack of extracurricular activities
- Why you are applying again after being denied previously
- Gaps in the chronological account of your education or employment
- Disciplinary action by an institution of higher education
- Criminal record

Under what circumstances should you use your personal statement to explain a particular deficiency, weakness, or other blemish? First of all, the application might explicitly invite you to explain deficiencies, weaknesses, aberrations, or any other aspect of the application that might not accurately reflect your abilities or potential and fitness for graduate study. Schools almost without exception ask specifically about the last two items above (see Disclosing Skeletons in Your Closet below). Although most applications do not explicitly provide room for such explanations of the other items, the schools nevertheless permit and generally

encourage applicants to provide brief explanations. Most schools suggest that you attach an addendum to your personal statement for this purpose while reserving the personal statement itself for positive information about yourself. If you are in doubt about the policy and preferred procedure of a particular school, contact the school directly.

Another point you should keep in mind is whether you have a valid reason. Staying up late the night before the GRE is not a legitimate reason for a bad performance, while documented sickness could be. A particularly bad semester could be explained by a death or illness in the family. If you lack research experience, you might point out the number of hours you had to work to make college more affordable for you and your family.

There are many more gray areas. For example, is it worth noting that you simply have a bad history of standardized testing? Doing so tactfully (in other words, don't rail against the arbitrariness of tests or demand the right to be considered for your grades alone) can help the schools understand your exact situation, but it most likely won't have a substantial effect on their perspective, since they know to take into account the imprecision of standardized tests. What about the class for which you simply did not grasp the material, or a sub-par GPA during your freshman year? Again, what you have to say won't constitute an extenuating circumstance, since everyone has weaknesses and faces the same challenge of adjusting to college. Your best approach might be to try to transform such blemishes into something positive by pointing out particular courses in which you performed well, especially those that were more advanced, more relevant to your intended career path, or more recent.

Finally, make sure that you do not take a contentious tone. Don't accuse your teachers of unfair grading standards or complain about lack of extracurricular opportunities at your school. Be clear that you're not trying to excuse yourself of responsibility, but emphasize that you simply want the schools to have the complete picture.

[This applicant](#) clarifies one aberrant semester by explaining his decision to switch majors. Everyone recognizes the rigors of the pre-med curriculum, so his justification seems legitimate. Although it's not essential to include a positive statement when explaining blemishes, notice that the following sentence helps to ensure that the reader will not conclude that the applicant is making excuses or protesting too much: "The difficulty I faced in that advanced history course and in maintaining my status in chemistry and ecology courses affected my grades for the semester, but was a crucible out of which emerged a renewed love for and pursuit of the study of history throughout the rest of my college education." Moreover, it's important that he can point to an upward trend--"I proceeded to improve my cumulative grade point average in each successive semester"--as evidence that this poor semester was indeed an aberration.

✦Sample Essay

This applicant's cumulative GPA suffered a bit due largely to one difficult semester. He wisely addressed this issue rather than ignoring it, recounting that semester's events in a way that would win over any school's admissions committee.

My grades during the second semester of my freshman year of college declined because of several factors. I had been pursuing a premedical major in biology up to that time, and the spring saw me taking my first college history course which began quickly to erode my interest in pursuing a biology major. I had enjoyed and excelled in history during high school, but upon entry into college decided to take a different direction in my studies. I made the decision to change majors after several more history courses during the following semesters, as I reconciled head and heart. That first history course-a formidable "intellectual history" oriented seminar on the French Enlightenment-was comprised of juniors, seniors and myself, the one lowly freshman. The difficulty I faced in that advanced history course and in maintaining my status in severe and involved chemistry and ecology courses affected my grades for the semester, but was a crucible out of which emerged a renewed love for and pursuit of the study of history throughout the rest of my college education.

Tackling an intellectual history seminar so early made it much easier for me to successfully complete an Honors Thesis in a later Military History seminar. My educational base is, as well, much broader because of my exploration of several different disciplines during college, including the natural sciences, archaeology, art, art history, psychology, and history. Without a tough semester to make me weigh my possibilities, I might not have continued to explore the educational options available and might have remained narrowly focused on medicine. Having temporarily performed below the expectations I had of myself, I proceeded to improve my cumulative grade point average in each successive semester.

I

✦ Lesson Three: Essay Structures

Now that you have seen the complex themes with which you must engage the reader and have begun thinking about the personal details you will use, it's time to begin the daunting task of structuring your essay.

Your first concern should be **clarity**. If your essay is haphazardly structured, the reader simply will not be able to follow your ideas, and your whole purpose will be lost.

Your second concern is focus. An essay could be clear on the sentence or paragraph level, but still lack overall coherence. Perhaps you have written three paragraphs each clearly devoted to one topic, but you haven't shown how each topic contributes to some larger point. The basic focus of every essay is why you should be admitted to the school, but a more specific theme can be helpful. You want your reader to take a clear point away as he or she puts your essay down.

Your third concern is **impact**. Even a clear and coherent essay can fail to achieve the optimal structure that would maximize the essay's overall impact. For example, the overarching theme of an essay might be your desire to help people. After outlining this clear focus in your first paragraph, you go on to write three clear paragraphs each independently offering evidence of your desire to help people. What's lacking is a sense of progression: the reader sees not growth but repetition. To maximize impact, your structure must allow each point to build upon previous points, thereby improving not only your essay's flow, but also the overall force of your argument.

It's important to remember that these three areas overlap. You don't achieve the optimal structure by treating each one as an isolated step, but must keep each one in mind as you plan out your essay.

The first subtopic, **Overarching Themes**, explains how to identify and incorporate the underlying principles or fundamental ideas that will give your essay focus. The second subtopic, **Organization**, details specific approaches to integrating your content in a clear and logical way. The third subtopic, **Narratives**, deals with the tricky issue of incorporating stories and anecdotes in an admissions essay and getting the most out of your details. The final subtopic, **Paragraphs**, explains how to structure individual paragraphs for maximum effectiveness and how to write the important transitions that affect your essay's coherence and impact.

🖱️ Select One:

- Overarching Themes
- Organization
- Narratives

- [Paragraphs](#)

Overarching Themes

The reason we start with themes is the same reason we suggested you start your brainstorming by thinking about your long-term vision. The overarching theme you decide on

will inform the manner in which you organize the rest of your content. This theme is analogous to the thesis of an academic essay, though it's often less explicitly stated.

When we use the term "theme," we mean something that usually has multiple layers. A strong essay will never boil down to a statement as simple as the following: "My reason for pursuing a graduate degree is X." That kind of theme would invite a repetitive structure that merely includes a series of paragraphs offering evidence for a single point. Instead, your theme should introduce complexities, as in the following: "While Experience A demonstrates my commitment to B Aspect of my chosen field, Experience C drives me toward Objective D."

There are essentially two ways to set forth your theme. The first is to bring it up in the introduction, usually at the end of the first paragraph. At this stage, since you haven't explored your concrete evidence, the theme should subtly indicate the direction the essay will take rather than try to tell the whole story.

The second approach is to ensure a strong flow between paragraphs, connecting each point with previous ones so the underlying theme gradually emerges. Then the conclusion wraps these individual themes together and includes some kind of encapsulation of the material that preceded it. Below we will use examples to illustrate these two tactics:

The Upfront Approach

The theme of this essay comes at the end of the first paragraph: "Although I look back on these activities today with some chagrin, I realize they did help me to develop, at an early age, a sense of concern for social and political issues and a genuine desire to play a role." At this point, he is referring to specific activities that he somewhat regrets, but this sets the tone for a running contrast between internal struggles and outward concerns.

⭐Sample Essay

My longtime fascination with politics and international affairs is reflected in my participation, starting in high school, in activities such as student council, school board meetings, Vietnam war protests, the McCarthy campaign, and the grape boycott. As each new cause came along, I was always ready to go to Washington or the state capital to wave a sign or chant slogans. Although I look back on these activities today with some chagrin, I realize they did help me to develop, at an early age, a sense of concern for social and political issues and a genuine desire to play a role.

As an undergraduate, I was more interested in social than academic development. During my last two years, I became involved with drugs and alcohol and devoted little time to my studies, doing only as much as was necessary to maintain a B average. After graduation my drug use became progressively worse; without the motivation or ability to look for a career job, I worked for a time in a factory and then, for three years, as a cab driver in New York City.

In 1980 I finally "hit bottom" and became willing to accept help. I joined both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and for the next several years the primary business of my life was recovery. Although I had several "slips" in the beginning, I have now enjoyed nearly seven years of complete freedom from drug and alcohol use. I mention my bout with addiction because I think it is important in answering two issues that presumably will be of concern to the admissions committee: my lackluster undergraduate record and the fact that I have waited until the age of 34 to begin preparing academically for a career in public policy. It would be an oversimplification to call addiction the cause for either of these things; rather I would say it was the most obvious manifestation of an underlying immaturity that characterized my post adolescent years. More importantly, the discipline of recovery has had a significant impact on my overall emotional growth.

During the last years of my addiction I was completely oblivious to the world around me. Until 1983 I didn't even realize that there had been a revolution in Nicaragua or that one was going on in El Salvador. Then I rejoined the Quaker Meeting, in which I had been raised as a child, and quickly gravitated to its Peace and Social Order Committee. They were just then initiating a project to help refugees from Central America, and I joined enthusiastically in the work. I began reading about Central America and, later, teaching myself Spanish. I got to know refugees who were victims of poverty and oppression, became more grateful for my own economic and educational advantages, and developed a strong desire to give something back by working to provide opportunities to those who have not been so lucky.

In 1986 I went to Nicaragua to pick coffee for two weeks. This trip changed my whole outlook on both the United States and the underdeveloped world. The combination of living for two weeks amid poverty and engaging in long political discussions with my fellow coffee pickers, including several well-educated professionals who held views significantly to the left of mine, profoundly shook my world view. I came back humbled, aware of how little I knew about the world and eager to learn more. I began raiding the public library for everything I could find on the Third World and started subscribing to a wide variety of periodicals, from scholarly journals such as Foreign Affairs and Asian Survey to obscure newsletters such as Through Our Eyes (published by U.S. citizens living in Nicaragua).

Over the intervening two years, my interest has gradually focused on economics. I have come to realize that economic development (including equitable distribution of wealth) is the key to peace and social justice, both at home and in the Third World. I didn't study economics in college and have found it difficult to understand the economic issues that are at the heart of many policy decisions. At the same time, though, I am fascinated by the subject. Given my belief that basic economic needs are among the most fundamental of human rights, how can society best go about providing for them? Although I call myself an idealist, I'm convinced that true idealism must be pragmatic. I am not impressed, for example, by simplistic formulations that require people to be better than they are. As a Quaker I believe that the means are inseparable from the end; as an American I believe that democracy and freedom of expression are essential elements of a just society, though I'm not wedded to the idea that our version of democracy is the only legitimate one.

Although I have carved out a comfortable niche in my present job, with a responsible position and a good salary, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the prospect of a career in business applications programming. More and more of my time and energy is now being absorbed by community activities. After getting my master's in public administration, I would like to work in the area of economic development in the Third World, particularly Latin America. The setting might be a private (possibly church-based) development agency, the UN, the OAS, one of the multilateral development banks, or a government agency. What I need from graduate school is the academic foundation for such a career. What I offer in return is a perspective that comes from significant involvement in policy issues at the grass roots level, where they originate and ultimately must be resolved.

The next two paragraphs discuss the writer's battles with addiction. Then the applicant shows how his emotional recovery coincides with a growing awareness of political issues: "During the last years of my addiction I was completely oblivious to the world around me. Until 1983 I didn't even realize that there had been a revolution in Nicaragua or that one was going on in El Salvador. Then I rejoined the Quaker Meeting, in which I had been raised as a child, and quickly gravitated to its Peace and Social Order Committee. They were just then initiating a project to help refugees from Central America, and I joined enthusiastically in the work."

What makes this theme sophisticated is that it does not merely state, "I am concerned about Third World economic development." Rather, it ties social concerns to issues of personal development and creates a coherent portrait of a multifaceted individual. The Upfront Approach is effective in this case because it helps us to see where the writer is going when he delves into his history of addiction and prevents an overly negative undertone.

The Gradual Approach

This essay does not give away much in the opening paragraph. His first paragraph serves as a distinct point rather than establishing a framework for the rest of the essay. The next three paragraphs each also have independent points: the intersection of computers and geology; his coursework experience; and his career goals. Effective topic sentences help to ensure a strong underlying flow. For example, in the third paragraph, he identifies structural geology as an area of interest and an area in which he has some background, after describing in the second paragraph how he would apply his computer expertise to that field.

✦Sample Essay

I have been planning a career in geological sciences for several years, but as an undergraduate I concentrated on getting a solid background in math and science. After graduation, I took a job to allow myself time to thoroughly think through my plans and to expose myself to a variety of work situations. This strategy has been very valuable to me in rounding out my career plans.

During the past 18 months I have had firsthand experience with computers in a wide array of business applications. This has stimulated me to think about ways in which computers could be used for scientific research. One idea that particularly fascinates me is mathematical modeling of natural systems, and I think those kinds of techniques could be put to good use in geological science. I have always enjoyed and been strong in areas that require logical, analytical thought, and I am anxious to combine my interest in earth science with my knowledge of, and aptitude for, computer-related work. There are several specific areas that I have already studied that I think would lend themselves to research based on computing techniques, including mineral phase relations in igneous petrology and several topics in structural geology.

I have had both lecture/lab and field courses in structural geology, as well as a short module dealing with plate tectonics, and I am very interested in the whole area. I would like to explore structural geology and tectonics further at the graduate level. I am also interested in learning more about geophysics. I plan to focus on all these areas in graduate school while at the same time continuing to build up my overall knowledge of geology.

My ultimate academic goal is to earn a Ph.D., but enrolling first in a master's program will enable me to explore my various interests and make a more informed decision about which specific discipline I will want to study in depth.

As far as long-term plans, I hope to get a position at a university or other institution where I can indulge my primary impulse, which is to be involved in scientific research, and also try my hand at teaching.

Although there is an implicit overarching theme emerging, the writer waits until the conclusion to make that explicit: "My decision to focus on math and science as an undergraduate and to explore the computer industry after college has equipped me with a unique set of strengths to offer this program. The depth of my interest in geology has only grown in my time away from academia, and although I have identified several possible areas of specialization through prior studies, I look forward to contributing my fresh perspective on all subjects." As you can see, this theme does not lend itself to a one-sentence synthesis because the various points are broader. Nevertheless, this conclusion helps to connect these points for the reader, so she can walk away with a clear formulation of what she has just learned.

Whether you choose the Upfront or Gradual approach depends on the nature of your overarching theme and the substance it encompasses. When, as in the first example, there is a more defined framework that lends itself to succinct expression, you can provide more direction at the beginning and make a more focused point. But if your topic is broader and your ideas need to be developed before being tied together, then you should let them unfold naturally and save the integration for a nice, forceful ending. Whichever route you choose, make sure your theme is multi-layered and sophisticated. Any oversimplification would not do justice to your candidacy.

✦ Organization

The purpose of this section is not to delineate one structural approach that will work for everyone's individual essays, but rather to discuss principles of organization that should guide you in constructing your argument. In previous sections, we have cautioned that the criteria we set forth could not be used as steps to be followed, because there was so much overlap and interdependence. Here your task grows even more challenging, because some of the principles can be mutually exclusive, and you may have to decide between them to determine which approach best suits your material.

Hierarchy of Evidence

Because your reader will be reading quickly and looking for the main points, it is often a good idea to start with your strongest evidence. You may even highlight your most interesting experience in the introduction.

[This applicant]() decides to open with some comments on her ethnic and religious background. Although this is neither an accomplishment nor directly related to her intended field, the writer correctly recognizes that it is a unique element that will distinguish her from other candidates. By establishing this point early on, she immediately has the reader interested in learning more about her. Unfortunately, as we noted in another section, the applicant does not go on to illustrate how her diverse background has influenced her life through more concrete examples.

✦ Sample Essay

In responding to a question that asked the applicant to describe experiences, events, or persons that have been important in his or her development, this applicant successfully correlated his influences to his current outlook on life.

Perhaps the most important influence that has shaped the person I am today is my upbringing in a traditional family-oriented Persian and Zoroastrian culture. My family has been an important source of support in all of the decisions I have made, and Zoroastrianism's three basic tenets-good words, good deeds, and good thoughts-have been my guiding principles in life. Not only do I try to do things for others, but I always push myself to be the best that I can be in all aspects of my life. I saw early the doors and opportunities that a good education can open up; thus, I particularly tried hard to do well in school.

Another important experience that has had a large influence on me the past few years has been college. Going from high school to college was a significant change. College required a major overhaul of my time-management techniques as the number of things to do mushroomed. In high school, I was in the honors program, with the same cohort of students in all my classes. Thus, I was exposed little to people very different from myself. College, on the other hand, is full of diversity. I have people of all backgrounds and abilities in my classes, and

I have been fortunate enough to meet quite a few of them. This experience has made me more tolerant of differences. Furthermore, a variety of classes such as the Humanities Core Course, in which we specifically studied differences in race, gender, and belief systems, have liberalized my world view.

My undergraduate research has occupied a large portion of my time in college. Along with this experience have come knowledge and skills that could never be gained in the classroom. I have gained a better appreciation for the medical discoverers and discoveries of the past and the years of frustration endured and satisfaction enjoyed by scientists. I have also learned to deal better with the disappointments and frustrations that result when things do not always go as one expects them to. My research experience was also important to me in that it broadened my view of the medical field. Research permitted me to meet a few medical doctors who have clinical practices and yet are able to conduct research at the university. This has made me seriously consider combining research with a clinical practice in my own career.

From my earliest memories, I can always remember being interested in meteorology. I believe that this interest sparked my love for the outdoors, while my interest in medicine molded my desire for healthy living. As a result of these two influences, I try to follow an active exercise routine taking place mostly in the outdoors. I enjoy running and mountain biking in the local hills and mountains, along with hiking and backpacking. All of these activities have made me concerned about the environment and my place in it.

Showing Progress

This approach might invite a chronological order, but we maintain that chronology should not be reason in itself (as explained in the sidebar of the Essay Structures introduction) to organize material in a particular manner. The guiding principle here is to structure your evidence in a way that demonstrates your growth, from a general initial curiosity to a current definite passion, or from an early aptitude to a refined set of skills. It differs from the Hierarchy of Evidence approach because your strongest point might come at the end, but its strength lies precisely in the sense of culmination that it creates. Chronology might not apply if you choose to show progress within a number of self-contained areas, thereby combining this approach with the Juxtaposing Themes approach described later.

[This applicant](#) chronicles the evolution of her interest in library service. The progress she describes is not merely a matter of accumulating one experience after another, but rather a process of enrichment by which she learns from fresh perspectives, adding new layers each time. In the second paragraph she discusses her work for a nonprofit organization, emphasizing her interest in "gathering information" and "using human relations skills" to show how this experience is relevant to her current goals. The following paragraph discusses her role as a column writer for that same organization, at which point she states a more defined issue that has caught her attention: "Through this experience I have seen a vivid contrast between the substantive quality of information formally prepared-with the discipline and rigor of

a traditional publishing and review schedule and with clear authorship-and the casual unstructured nature of electronic bulletin board postings, faxes, e-mail, and other products of newer technologies." As a result, we see the level of depth that she has reached in her peripheral investigation of the dynamics of information.

Sample Essay

Notice how this successful applicant avoids the expository-resume approach by focusing on two or three particular experiences and evaluating them in terms of her current outlook and educational goals. Also notice how the discussion about her children's activities, while seemingly unnecessary to make her central point, helps to bring the essay down to a more personal level.

My first employment in a library was in a work-study project during college. My duties included some shelving and a lot of typing of catalog cards. I remember the sturdy metal stacks, with so many captivating books tempting me as I tried to reshelve all that were on the carts. Mostly I remember the typing; agonizingly laborious since I was not a skilled typist, and formatting was so important. I came to understand much about the way the cataloguing system worked, and was grateful in the years to come when I needed to locate things for my own studies . . . or for my children.

For more than fifteen years now I have been working as a volunteer for La Leche League International, a grass roots, non-profit, self-help organization supporting and promoting breastfeeding. My work for the organization has taken a number of forms over the years, but can be summed up as gathering information, both practical and technical, and using human relations skills to make it accessible to others. My experience helping women access breast-feeding information and empowering them to use that information has convinced me that information alone is not nearly as useful as information plus a skilled guide.

One of my greatest pleasures in recent years has been writing a regular column-"Keeping Up-to-Date"-for La Leche League's bimonthly international newsletter. Through this experience I have seen a vivid contrast between the substantive quality of information formally prepared-with the discipline and rigor of a traditional publishing and review schedule and with clear authorship-and the casual unstructured nature of electronic bulletin board postings, faxes, e-mail, and other products of newer technologies. I am practically, though peripherally, aware of some of the problems our society faces in an era when intellectual property suddenly has so many new forms. I am eager to be a well-informed participant in the discussion of intellectual participation.

This week I found myself intrigued again by cataloguing when I needed to outfit my youngest son, now twelve, with a juggler's outfit for the school play. An initial subject search for "costumes" in the OPAC system at our township library was fruitless. Only when I thought to enter "costume" without the plural "s" did the system yield all the information I needed. What

frustration! This confluence of technology and information, especially as it affects accessibility, fascinates me.

The degree to which your School of Communication, Information and Library Studies openly accepts the challenge to explore and lead in the information revolution is seductive. What a serendipity that this school is practically in my backyard! The strengths and attributes I bring to your school are a caring and careful nature, proven academic excellence, experience in writing and speaking for a variety of audiences, and a practical knowledge of working with volunteers and professionals. The durability of my enthusiasm for libraries and the people who work in and love them convinces me that the Master of Library Service program is indeed the right way for me to continue my formal education.

In writing this essay, the writer moves effectively from experience to experience; the result does not feel like a list or a haphazard construction, but rather a logically flowing piece. Moreover, the applicant's points in the final two paragraphs have more force because we have witnessed a process of growth. Her individual ideas combine to have a synergistic effect.

Juxtaposing Themes

The strongest argument against a straight chronological order is the value of juxtaposing related themes and ideas. If two experiences are closely related but occurred years apart, it makes more sense to develop them as one set of ideas than to interrupt them with unrelated points.

[This applicant](#) uses the first three paragraphs to establish his goals in public service. In the third paragraph, he offers some childhood anecdotes, then jumps to present career interests. What unites these two chronologically separated points is the connection between his early "humanitarian kindness to animals" and his desire to provide "health care to 44 million uninsured Americans."

✦Sample Essay

"To be nobody but yourself--in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else--means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting." When I first read this passage by E.E. Cummings, I realized I have been fighting the same battle my whole life. When choosing the direction for my future, I have often accepted jobs based on a compromise between my own dreams and what others thought my dreams should be. This, of course, has led to an unfulfilling career.

Looking back, I always knew that I wanted to work in public service; but I also knew my staunchly conservative father would not be pleased. To him, the government is too big, too intrusive and too wasteful. I see things differently. And yet, his approval means a lot to me and

his opinion has certainly influenced my the direction of my career. But I have finally come to understand that I must pursue my own path. After careful deliberation, I am confident that public service is, without a doubt, the right career for me.

Ever since my childhood I have detected in myself a certain compassion and innate desire to help others. I was the kid that dragged in every stray cat or dog I came across--and I still do. When I was eight years old, I rescued a rat from my sister's psychology lab and brought her home. I even coaxed my father into taking Alice--I called her Alice--to the vet when she became ill. But aside from my humanitarian kindness to animals, as a child I learned first-hand about America's need to reform and improve medical care. I spent years of my childhood on crutches and in hospitals because of a tumor that hindered the growth of my leg. Without adequate health insurance and proper care, I might still be on crutches, but I was fortunate. Today, as a public servant, I still desire to help others who are not so fortunate. Providing health care to 44 million uninsured Americans, while keeping insurance affordable, is one of the most difficult challenges facing policymakers. I want to work in state or local government to resolve this health care crisis and ensure that the disadvantaged get the care they need and deserve.

In order to succeed in my endeavors toward public service, I now realize that a master's degree in public policy is essential. But when I graduated from college in 1990, I didn't know how to continue my education, only that I should. For a while, I considered such options as law school or international relations, but I always returned to my desire to impact public life. My career in public policy began as a legislative assistant at the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a non-profit educational organization that couples voices from the state legislature and the private sector to work on salient policy issues. My enthusiasm for ALEC's mission was evident, as I quickly moved up from legislative assistant to the director of two task forces. As manager of ALEC's task force on federalism and its tax and fiscal policy task force, I explored these issues thoroughly, never quite satiating my appetite for more information and knowledge. I found my integral role in the legislative process to be the most valuable and worthwhile experience I've had in my career to date.

Following ALEC, I took a position as a junior lobbyist for the Automotive Parts and Accessories Association (APAA). As a lobbyist, I voiced the APAA's concern over regulatory and environmental issues affecting the automotive aftermarket. Although I was able to help small automotive parts manufacturers battle the "Big Three" automakers, I quickly realized that being an advocate for the automotive aftermarket was not my calling in life. I wanted to promote policies which had the potential to improve life for the greater public, for I could not see myself spending a lifetime working within an isolated industry.

With that frame of mind, I accepted employment as a policy analyst in the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) research department in Washington, D.C. Helping small business owners is a cause close to my heart. For nearly 30 years, my family has owned a barbecue restaurant in the Washington, D.C. area. I've worked in the business at several different times, since the age of 14. Because of my involvement in my family's business, I understand the unique problems facing small business owners. At the NFIB, I valued my

contributions because I know small businesses have a huge economic impact on our country and they are unquestionably an important constituency. Nevertheless, I felt uncomfortable working for a special interest group--even for one I deeply cared about.

From my experiences at the APAA and the NFIB, I have learned how I want to shape my future. My goals are now clear: I want to develop and advocate policy decisions that will benefit society as a whole, not just a few influential special interest groups. I want to uncover the objective truth of issues and tackle them in the best interests of the nation, not distort the facts for the benefit of a small group. I know I am able to look beyond partisan politics to solve problems for this country. Because of these unbending desires to reveal truth and to remain committed to fair and equal advancement for all citizens, I think of myself as an ideal candidate for public service.

Additionally, I consider my active interest in politics to aid my pursuit of a career in public policy. I've always found my interest in politics exceptional, ever since my college roommates used to tease me for faithfully watching C-SPAN. However, my faith in the political process began to wane as I witnessed sensible public policy proposals torn apart by partisan conflict. I saw advocacy groups distort facts, and provide extreme, over-blown examples, jeopardizing prudent policy decisions. I observed how powerful elected officials, ensnared in their own partisan rancor, would block fair and balanced legislation which offered the most practical solution for their constituents. But I also encountered many thoughtful and wise people who devote their lives to public service. These devoted individuals inspired me. Like them, I want to be actively involved in the design and delivery of essential government services that improve the lives of the citizens in our society today. I am positive that by avoiding partisanship and urging the private industry, the public sector and non-profit groups to collaborate, many difficult problems can be resolved.

In order to be an effective public servant, I recognize the indispensability of an advanced degree. I've gained a lot of "real world" experience, but I need more training in the fundamentals of economics and statistics, as well as direction in sharpening my analytical and quantitative skills. I also want to devote time to studying the ethical dimensions of policy decisions. In graduate school, I'll have the opportunity to truly understand and appreciate the competing interests surrounding so many complex issues like health care reform, environmental protection and economic policy.

I've chosen Duke's public policy program for several reasons. Duke's program stands out because there is an emphasis on quantitative and analytical skills, which are so critical to policy analysis. As I mentioned, I feel that if I can strengthen my ability to approach problems logically and systematically, I will have succeeded in sharpening skills I consider necessary to succeed in the public realm. And possibly even more importantly, Duke's program bridges the gap between abstract principles and reality. This interdisciplinary approach is essential for responding to today's policy problems. I am excited by the possibility of combining the MPP program with the Health Policy Certificate Program. I am particularly interested in studying the problem of reforming state health to reduce the number of uninsured, and I believe Duke's curriculum will offer me a chance to do just that. From my own research into Duke, I feel

confident in my knowledge of the public policy program and its potential to teach me. And after meeting with Helen Ladd, the Director of Graduate Studies, I'm even more convinced that Duke's program is right for me.

On the road "to be nobody but" myself, I've encountered twists and turns, and some detours—it is unquestionably the hardest battle I could fight. However, in the process, I've accumulated a tremendous amount of valuable experience and knowledge. My diversity of experience is my biggest asset. Because I can relate a Duke education to concrete examples from my own past, it is the perfect time for me to join the public policy program. I know that my past can be used to prepare myself for the promises of the future. At Duke, I hope to synthesize the two and truly learn what it means to become myself.

The four subsequent paragraphs cover all the ground in between these two points, describing his practical experience in politics. Thus, the opening three paragraphs form a self-contained unit, and although the essay as a whole is not linear, there is a definite logic to grouping his ideas in the way that he did.

Dramatic Appeal

Not all essays will have potential in this area, but if you've undergone dramatic experiences, then you should by all means set your essay up to reflect that. The most effective way to accomplish this is to use the introduction to sketch some kind of problem or question, and then use each subsequent paragraph to engage with that problem until a resolution is gradually reached.

In his opening paragraph, this applicant sets the reader up for a compelling tale that we immediately understand will entail a good bit of hardship and difficulty. It is clear that at the beginning of his story, the writer is preparing to head down the wrong path. As readers, we are interested to see where he goes and how he rediscovers his proper direction. Through use of specific detail, he effectively conveys both the attraction of a musician's lifestyle and its more unpleasant side. While he takes us step by step through his progress as a musician (and his parallel failure as a student), notice how he has already planted the seeds of his ultimate rejection of this lifestyle in the first paragraph with his description of the older musicians who populate the scene. He returns to this image at his point of transition, saying, "I came to realize that I was well on my way to becoming one of those bitter old burnouts that I used to play with when I was in high school." He has built the tension nicely, and then offered a resolution that brings a sense of closure to that period of his life. In his final paragraph, it is clear that he is ready to make a fresh start.

✦**Sample Essay**

This applicant knew better than to hide his "misspent youth." His unique background provided just what the admissions committee welcomed-a lively story that reveals an engaging and interesting person.

One of my biggest aspirations as a child was to become a rock star. At age 14 my band performed at my school's Valentine's Day dance. I went from being the smartest kid in the school to being the coolest. By the age of 17, I was spending my weekends in bars playing with much older musicians. At the time it didn't bother me that these older musicians all led lives that were anything but glamorous. In fact, they always seemed to be broke and were usually under the influence of drugs or alcohol (a great way of escaping reality).

It was always understood by my parents that I would attend college immediately after graduating high school. College provided me with the perfect opportunity to leave San Antonio in pursuit of stardom. Austin is well known for its music scene and just happens to have a university-the perfect choice. I was awarded a generous endowment from a private foundation that I could use at any Texas university. Within two months after starting college, I was well on my way to becoming a star. I joined a top-40 cover band and spent my weekends performing at fraternity parties and night clubs all over Texas. The band soon began performing an average of four nights a week and was earning average gross revenues in excess of $125,000. My rigorous traveling left little time for school, not that I really minded, and by the end of my second semester the University kindly informed me that I was no longer welcome as a student. Needless to say, the Foundation decided that if I wasn't going to school then I wouldn't need their money.

I spent two years as a member of the band, and during that time I lived a life that exceeded even my wildest dreams. However, the dreams of a 14-year-old boy are far different than the harsh realities of a 21-year-old adult. I came to realize that I was well on my way to becoming one of those bitter old burnouts that I used to play with when I was in high school.

I left the band and moved back to San Antonio. I began working full-time and enrolled at a junior college the following January. For the next two-and-a-half years, I worked more than forty hours per week while enrolled in nine to twelve hours per semester. Not only did my grades dramatically improve, but I also mastered the art of time management. In the past two-and-a-half years, I have learned more than just how to calculate a corporation's alternative minimum- tax liability and how to assess control risk in an EDP environment. I have learned to appreciate the rewards of hard work and the power that comes with possessing knowledge.

✦ Narratives

Stories can be the heart of your essay--if you handle them effectively. Below are some tips on how to maximize their value.

How to Incorporate a Narrative

Integrating your story effectively ensures that it flows well within the essay and has a strong impact. Failing to do so could lead to choppiness or confusion on the reader's part. Here are some possible approaches, but what you ultimately use depends on your content:

1. The Origin: The most common approach is to start from the beginning. Many people have a story to tell about their early interests in their particular field. This tactic can be an effective way to grab the reader's attention and offer insight into your fundamental attraction to your area of interest. You should be aware, however, of two concerns: a) It has been done many times before, and if you don't offer any unique or personal insights, you won't stand out; b) Most early stories revolve around passive observation and therefore offer limited insight into your character and abilities. Despite these concerns, there is still much potential in this approach if you have a compelling, original story to tell.

2. The Flash Forward: Sometimes your essay's main focus will be showing the progression or growth of your interests and abilities. That doesn't mean, however, that your essay must start from the beginning. Often it can be effective to open with a more recent episode to accomplish three purposes: a) establishing a clear context for the rest of the material; b) demonstrating a strong interest in your particular field from the beginning; c) bringing to the forefront a significant experience with depth you could not have achieved in an earlier stage. It's the last point that distinguishes this approach from the previous one. Using a Flash Forward opening enables you to highlight your strongest points, as in the Hierarchy of Evidence structure, but then move backward to show your growth process.

3. The Bookend: Like the first two, this approach involves using a story in the introduction, but it leaves that story unfinished until the conclusion. For example, you might stop within the story to reflect on how you found yourself in that position. The body of the essay would then be a flashback to the experiences that led you to the place of the introduction, and the conclusion would return to complete the story. Another possibility would be a story that involved two distinct phases; the body of such an essay might discuss what you learned between the phases, and the conclusion would show how you applied what you learned to the second phase. Again, the precise approach depends on your content, but the Bookend method can be a very effective way to create a flowing, coherent piece.

4. Within the Body: Regardless of whether you choose to open with a narrative, you may find opportunities and reasons to insert a story within the body of the essay. This is the approach for which you have to worry most about integration. Unlike introductory anecdotes, you should not jump right into these stories without preface. You will need at least one sentence to make the transition from the previous paragraph and briefly hint at what themes your story will illustrate. Actually beginning your story will usually require some introductory phrase, such as the following: "One memorable incident involved…"

After the story, you should have some significant insight with which to conclude in order to justify the story's inclusion. This line should not be a mere repetition of the transition from the

beginning of the paragraph, because you now should have more concrete details from which to draw more in-depth conclusions.

What to Include

The basic rule here is the same as always: **include specific details**. The purpose of using stories is to illustrate your points with concrete evidence, thereby giving your ideas force and context. Telling one specific story enables you to achieve depth and convey personality beyond what you could achieve in brief, isolated descriptions. It's not enough, however, merely to decide to include a story. Some writers will start on the right track but end up conveying nothing meaningful. For example, they might name a specific personal incident and then jump to generic conclusions without demonstrating anything substantive about their character. Here are some more specific tips that have come up in other contexts but are especially important for stories:

1. Show Active Contribution: Many people tell stories in which the payoff is a lesson learned. While this can have some value, it does not say as much about your character because you are only responding passively.

2. Emphasize the Process: Don't set up a problem and jump to the solution. Show us the process of reaching that solution. Give details about your approach and your reasoning.

3. Paint a Vivid Picture: Try to draw the reader into your story by including details that bring the story alive. One effective way to accomplish this is to think visually. Of course, you should not get carried away and go down tangents or become monotonous. For example, if you're recalling a conversation, don't bother recounting all the pleasantries with which it began.

Gleaning Insights

Anecdotes should serve some clear purpose, but you have to be careful about sounding contrived. One common mistake is to start citing lessons before you've finished the story. This kind of interruption adulterates the force of the story itself. Be careful that your insights flow naturally from the details of your anecdote: stay close to your personal story and avoid making grand pronouncements based on a minor episode.

An Example

To put the above suggestions in more concrete terms, we will analyze one actual essay from a critical perspective. First, this applicant tells an anecdote that's relatively recent, but still serves to illustrate the origin of her interest in creative writing. Note that the anecdote is largely concerned with the past, and even in her reminiscences, she uses vivid, concrete details. For example, she invokes the past she shared with her peers, "fellow veterans of plaid uniforms and daily masses." To demonstrate her inexperience, she reflects, "The only readings I'd done before a crowd were Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the occasional Responsorial Psalm--and that wasn't my writing on the line."

✴ Sample Essay

This applicant recounts a particular incident that gives the reader real insight into what makes her "tick." Notice, by the way, that the discussion of religion is handled in a way that is not likely to offend any reader.

Two years ago, when I was a junior in college, I wrote a story entitled "It Came from Catholic School." My friends, fellow veterans of plaid uniforms and daily masses, liked it and encouraged me to submit it when the English department magazine made its annual call for stories. They published the story and asked me to read from it at a reading primarily devoted to student poetry. Well, I was pretty nervous about this. The only readings I'd done before a crowd were Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the occasional Responsorial Psalm-and that wasn't my writing on the line. I grew more nervous as I sat there that night, listening to poem after poem on angst and ennui. I couldn't imagine how the students and faculty around me, who were all listening intently with properly contorted faces, would respond to my grotesque little girl. But I stood up and read a passage, a little shaky at first. Then I heard laughs, where I'd hoped I would, and also in places that surprised me. After the reading, people wanted to shake my hand. One woman thanked me for injecting a little levity into the proceedings. I felt satisfaction in my work as never before.

At that reading, I realized I could write things that made people laugh-not just friends who felt obligated, but complete strangers. I really liked that feeling, and it's the promise of that laughter that motivates me to continue writing. I also realized that my work wasn't frivolous, that I could influence a reader, that my characters seemed real. For the first time, I felt that I could do what I really wanted to do-write.

I look forward to progressing through a series of intimate workshops en route to an MFA degree at your school. The interdisciplinary nature of the program appeals to me. Although I want to concentrate on Fiction, I would like to take screenwriting electives as well. I think my humor translates well to teleplays, and I would like to explore that avenue through the comedy writing courses your school offers. I aim to develop my natural strengths- humor, voice, and dialogue, while experimenting with the genres.

Because I'm generally at the mercy of my characters, I can't outline a specific writing goal. I do envision myself producing a collection of short stories featuring female protagonists. Women's issues are implicit in my writing, and I would welcome the chance to study with [faculty name]. My stories feature a range of women-from the precocious heroine of the aforementioned story to a "white trash" cashier, and I plan to cover a still broader scope. Mainly, I'm looking to devote myself to the work. And I hope to make some people laugh along the way.

There's no real place for emphasizing contribution, per se, since this isn't a project or accomplishment. On the other hand, the writer does do an effective job of showing the process:

"I grew more nervous as I sat there that night, listening to poem after poem on angst and ennui. I couldn't imagine how the students and faculty around me, who were all listening intently with properly contorted faces, would respond to my grotesque little girl. But I stood up and read a passage, a little shaky at first." Thus she does not simply jump to the point of receiving congratulations. Instead, she provides specific details that not only help us to empathize with her, but also make the results seem more meaningful.

She allows the story to develop on its own terms, instead of interrupting its flow with forced interpretations. The insight she draws comes only in the next paragraph: "At that reading, I realized I could write things that made people laugh--not just friends who felt obligated, but complete strangers. I really liked that feeling, and it's the promise of that laughter that motivates me to continue writing." The flow from story to insights is natural and fitting.

✳Paragraphs

As in the case of those that include narratives, most of your paragraphs will have the same underlying structure. You begin with a transition, you offer supporting evidence, and you offer a resolution. Supporting evidence for the most part affects the strength of individual paragraphs, but transitions and resolutions are even more crucial because they affect the coherence and impact of the essay as a whole. The beginnings and endings of each paragraph are the places to draw connections between experiences, demonstrate progression, and highlight your key themes.

Not every paragraph you write will have these three distinct parts, but it's worthwhile to look at how typical paragraphs are structured so you know how to evaluate your essay on this level.

Transitions

The basic purpose of a transition is to serve as a topic sentence; it should give enough direction so the reader knows what to expect. When your essay is following not only a chronological order but also a single train of thought, the paragraphs may flow smoothly anyway. For example, in this essay, note the ways in which paragraphs 3-5 begin: with clear references to time, continuing the account of his the writer's recovery from addiction. The step-by-step process is therefore logical and easy to follow.

✳Sample Essay

My longtime fascination with politics and international affairs is reflected in my participation, starting in high school, in activities such as student council, school board meetings, Vietnam war protests, the McCarthy campaign, and the grape boycott. As each new cause came along, I was always ready to go to Washington or the state capital to wave a sign or chant slogans.

Although I look back on these activities today with some chagrin, I realize they did help me to develop, at an early age, a sense of concern for social and political issues and a genuine desire to play a role.

As an undergraduate, I was more interested in social than academic development. During my last two years, I became involved with drugs and alcohol and devoted little time to my studies, doing only as much as was necessary to maintain a B average. After graduation my drug use became progressively worse; without the motivation or ability to look for a career job, I worked for a time in a factory and then, for three years, as a cab driver in New York City.

In 1980 I finally "hit bottom" and became willing to accept help. I joined both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and for the next several years the primary business of my life was recovery. Although I had several "slips" in the beginning, I have now enjoyed nearly seven years of complete freedom from drug and alcohol use. I mention my bout with addiction because I think it is important in answering two issues that presumably will be of concern to the admissions committee: my lackluster undergraduate record and the fact that I have waited until the age of 34 to begin preparing academically for a career in public policy. It would be an oversimplification to call addiction the cause for either of these things; rather I would say it was the most obvious manifestation of an underlying immaturity that characterized my post adolescent years. More importantly, the discipline of recovery has had a significant impact on my overall emotional growth.

During the last years of my addiction I was completely oblivious to the world around me. Until 1983 I didn't even realize that there had been a revolution in Nicaragua or that one was going on in El Salvador. Then I rejoined the Quaker Meeting, in which I had been raised as a child, and quickly gravitated to its Peace and Social Order Committee. They were just then initiating a project to help refugees from Central America, and I joined enthusiastically in the work. I began reading about Central America and, later, teaching myself Spanish. I got to know refugees who were victims of poverty and oppression, became more grateful for my own economic and educational advantages, and developed a strong desire to give something back by working to provide opportunities to those who have not been so lucky.

In 1986 I went to Nicaragua to pick coffee for two weeks. This trip changed my whole outlook on both the United States and the underdeveloped world. The combination of living for two weeks amid poverty and engaging in long political discussions with my fellow coffee pickers, including several well-educated professionals who held views significantly to the left of mine, profoundly shook my world view. I came back humbled, aware of how little I knew about the world and eager to learn more. I began raiding the public library for everything I could find on the Third World and started subscribing to a wide variety of periodicals, from scholarly journals such as Foreign Affairs and Asian Survey to obscure newsletters such as Through Our Eyes (published by U.S. citizens living in Nicaragua).

Over the intervening two years, my interest has gradually focused on economics. I have come to realize that economic development (including equitable distribution of wealth) is the key to peace and social justice, both at home and in the Third World. I didn't study economics in

college and have found it difficult to understand the economic issues that are at the heart of many policy decisions. At the same time, though, I am fascinated by the subject. Given my belief that basic economic needs are among the most fundamental of human rights, how can society best go about providing for them? Although I call myself an idealist, I'm convinced that true idealism must be pragmatic. I am not impressed, for example, by simplistic formulations that require people to be better than they are. As a Quaker I believe that the means are inseparable from the end; as an American I believe that democracy and freedom of expression are essential elements of a just society, though I'm not wedded to the idea that our version of democracy is the only legitimate one.

Although I have carved out a comfortable niche in my present job, with a responsible position and a good salary, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the prospect of a career in business applications programming. More and more of my time and energy is now being absorbed by community activities. After getting my master's in public administration, I would like to work in the area of economic development in the Third World, particularly Latin America. The setting might be a private (possibly church-based) development agency, the UN, the OAS, one of the multilateral development banks, or a government agency. What I need from graduate school is the academic foundation for such a career. What I offer in return is a perspective that comes from significant involvement in policy issues at the grass roots level, where they originate and ultimately must be resolved.

The topic sentence has more work to do when you move from theme to theme or experience to experience. The reader has to know where you're going next. [This applicant](#) prefaces her fifth paragraph as follows: "I also gained valuable research experience during my sophomore year by working twenty hours a week as a behavior therapist with autistic pre-school-aged children at the Children's Behavior Therapy Unit (CBTU)." The sentence sounds natural, a distinct idea in itself but also one that intimates what is to follow. Note that the transition is smooth because it takes a step back and makes a somewhat general point. If she had skipped the first half of the sentence and instead jumped to saying, "I worked twenty hours a week," we would not know that the topic of the paragraph was her research experience. Jumping too abruptly to a new point leaves the reader lost in the gap.

✦ Sample Essay

A. Describe the three most significant professional experiences you have had.

I have had three particularly significant professional experiences: my participation as mentor and supervisor in a supplemental Instruction program; my work and research as a behavior therapist with autistic children through the Psychology Senior Thesis Program; and serving as a Service-Learning Teaching Assistant.

For the past two and a half years, I have been involved with the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, a project founded to provide assistance for students in freshman level classes who need help with study skills. I am, at the moment, the SI Leader for Psychology 101. As an SI Leader, I attend class every day, which means that I have in effect attended the Psychology 101 class daily for two and a half years. By now I know the lectures by heart, which is essential because my job involves teaching the material three times a week in one-hour sessions.

Through the SI program, I have gained far more than accumulated academic knowledge: I have developed insight into how to teach psychology to groups of three to fifty people. I have learned that, in order to teach, one must first understand how someone approaches a subject, and then adapt the teaching to that approach. More specifically, I have noticed that students learn best by relating a concept to their own lives. Thus, not only do I give examples that relate directly to the material, I also teach students how to apply the concepts to their own lives.

I have become an integral part of the SI program and, as a result of my hard work, this year I was promoted to the position of SI Supervisor. In that capacity, I attend supervisor meetings to assist in organizing the program, and I help conduct hiring and training for new SI Leaders. One of my most rewarding responsibilities as supervisor is to attend sessions conducted by SI Leaders and, based upon my observations, to assist them with their teaching, interaction, and group discussion skills.

I also gained valuable research experience during my sophomore year by working twenty hours a week as a behavior therapist with autistic pre-school-aged children at the Children's Behavior Therapy Unit (CBTU). Because CBTU possesses an extensive data-based assessment system, I had the opportunity to acquire practical research-related experience. As a behavior therapist, I focused on basic "learning to learn" skills, such as attention to the environment. I accomplished this using the classical conditioning techniques of positive and negative reinforcement, as well as punishment.
As a researcher, I was required to record each child's range of responses until that child developed a certain success rate with a behavior. One such success was shaping a child's behavior to the point where the child felt comfortable with direct eye contact.

As a behavior therapist, I presented bi-monthly progress reports to the CBTU staff. The purpose of the reports was to inform the parents, doctors, and teachers about whether a particular child was ready to move to a higher level in the "learning to learn" program. More specifically, I reported on the progress of children's behavior over time, which allowed me to trace development and compare individual responses.

CBTU provided me with an introduction to research, which led me to pursue further research opportunities through the Psychology Senior Thesis Program. I spent a year and a half experiencing the entire process: designing my research project, formulating hypotheses, conducting the research, and writing it up.

While serving as research assistant to Dr. John Kircher, who was conducting polygraph research, I began to wonder whether individuals with lower skin conductance readings would

also score higher on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES). My interest stemmed from the fact that individuals with higher DES scores, even when lying, are able to pass polygraph tests more easily than individuals who have lower DES scores. I wanted to explore whether they had this ability because their skin conductance readings were less reactive.

Through extensive study, I learned a great deal about the research process.
I researched dissociation, skin conductance, and how the two are related. This knowledge enabled me to develop my hypothesis. It was expected that high scores on the DES would be associated with low levels of electrodermal activity, resulting in a negative correlation. The results did not provide support for the idea that dissociative individuals have diminished skin conductance readings while experiencing a stressful situation.

Analysis of variance became the focus of the statistical analysis. This score was tested via a t-test. Through this process of compiling data and through statistical analysis, I came to recognize the importance of accuracy and attention to detail. Overall, through conducting research and writing a thesis, I strengthened my research and writing skills.

The greatest supplement to my academic experience has been the opportunity to be part of service-learning. This is the concept of students volunteering in the community, accumulating responsibilities that allow them to acquire hands-on experience in course materials. My first experience with service-learning happened a year and a half ago, when I was offered the job of Service-Learning Teaching Assistant (TA) in Psychology 101. After rigorous evaluation of several agencies, we chose ones that would best suit the students' needs. We also developed a lesson plan that would enhance the learning experience, and we created contracts by which the agencies and students would abide. We gained valuable experience the first semester, including how to successfully conduct the Service-Learning class.

By the next semester, we had developed a system for keeping the students motivated. Our method involved asking students to keep reflective journals and conducting reflective sessions, which not only allowed students to tell about their Service-Learning experiences, but also to think critically about their experiences at their agency. We discovered that, in order for students and agencies to have a fulfilling experience in Service-Learning class, the program had to involve students in community service that addresses local needs and that allowed them to develop their academic skills, sense of civil responsibility, and commitment to the community. We also kept the students motivated by compiling the total number of hours in which they served in the community. These hours reached into the thousands, and keeping a record allowed students to see how their combined efforts made a difference.

This year, I am the Service-Learning TA in a Nurse-Practitioners graduate class. This has given me the opportunity to show the instructor what I have learned about Service-Learning, specifically how to successfully implement a service-learning course without the aid of a Service-Learning TA. Next semester, I will be a Service-Learning TA in an Environmental Ethics class, in which students will serve at activist-centered agencies. These agencies, whose purpose is to make a difference in the community, demonstrate a high need for service-learning students who can assist them in the effort.

The strongest transitions will not only introduce the ensuing material but will also draw connections to prior paragraphs. These connections can note both similarities and differences. The link does not even have to be intrinsic to the subjects themselves. For example, this applicant compares the breadth of his interests to the concentration of his strengths: "Although my strengths are concentrated in these areas, my curiosity is by no means limited to these topics." Thus, after discussing specific research areas, he makes a transition to other topics by noting the broader scope of his curiosity. This is one of the most basic transitions you can use when there's no obvious link between the two topics.

✈ Sample Essay

In this Statement of Purpose, the applicant communicated clear focus and direction while remaining flexible in terms of academic pursuits and long-term career plans. The essay's technical nature is perfectly appropriate for application to a graduate program in the natural sciences.

While my undergraduate and Master's curriculum have provided exposure to a wide variety of environmental engineering topics, I have gained extensive knowledge in relatively few areas. I have, however, found an area in which my curiosity and my ability are suitably paired. As an M.S. student I have held a research assistantship position for the last year and a half, working both at the university and at a national laboratory. The strengths of the Civil (Environmental) Engineering Department at the university, as well as those of the group at the laboratory, lie in the investigation of the fate and transport of subsurface contaminants, along with general groundwater quality and flow characteristics, and it is also within these areas that my research interests reside.

[Here the applicant describes his specific research experience.]

Although my strengths are concentrated in these areas, my curiosity is by no means limited to these topics. I believe that I have a solid foundation, but through a program of graduate study and research I hope to develop expertise in these and other related areas. One such area of interest is the remediation of contaminated groundwater and contaminant plumes by incorporating microbial processes with in situ treatment techniques. I also find the interdisciplinary relationship between environmental engineering and ecology to be of great personal interest. One particular example is the growing trend toward identifying and controlling diffuse source contamination from areas of heavy agricultural activity. The processes involved in this contamination, as well as the resultant heavy down-gradient nutrient loadings, play an extensive role in the ecological development of receiving waters and need to be understood more comprehensively. The curriculum in the Environmental Engineering Program, particularly through interactions involving the Studies in Physical & Chemical Hydrogeology program, provides an opportunity to expand my knowledge in these areas while pursuing my ambitions in the area of subterranean contaminant transport processes. Further,

your graduate program would permit me to incorporate my areas of interest into an applied research project under the mentorship of the faculty in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

Ultimately, I aim to gain a faculty position at a university and to continue my involvement in innovative research in the field while directly encouraging the development of aspiring engineers, both in the classroom and laboratory. In this manner I believe I can make a significant and purposeful contribution to the scientific community while gaining a great deal of personal satisfaction.

Of course, you should seek more in-depth transitions to strengthen the forcefulness of your points. [This applicant](#) uses this transition to show how the experience he's about to describe builds on previous points: "As a result of the in-depth exposure to networks I gained in the dormitory project, I was well prepared for the challenges that awaited me as the manager of Information Services at the Transportation Center at Northwestern University." Now we are reminded that the previous paragraph demonstrated the "in-depth exposure to networks" he had gained, and we see that the ensuing paragraph will continue to describe the progress he has made.

✦Sample Essay

For the past two and a half years, I have been a professional in the technology field, but now I am preparing to become a professional corporate information officer. Although my work has introduced me to specific areas of information technology, (including telecommunications, network wiring and databases) I have recently become intrigued with the field of information security. I am concerned about the vulnerability of the company I work for, particularly with regard to employee and client information. The specialty phase of your Professional program appears to be well endowed with the resources needed to address such concerns.

While my undergraduate and MS curriculum exposed me to a wide variety of computer science topics, I have gained extensive knowledge in the area of network infrastructure development. As an MS student at DePaul University, I worked as a network support technician and project manager for Information Services. My most significant accomplishment in this capacity involved the re-wiring of over a thousand dormitory rooms to enable the students to have Internet access with a link to the other four campuses. In doing so, I had to investigate the existing needs of a high-speed Internet network, as well as the transport of bandwidth to support future demands, which are almost impossible to determine.

As a result of my experiences in the dormitory project, I was well prepared for the challenges that awaited me as the manager of Information Services at the Transportation Center at Northwestern University. My primary task was to build a state-of-the-art network infrastructure that would support a leading graduate research center in the transportation field. In a succinct

and convincing manner, I had to demonstrate my vision in building the foundation and developing the budget, as well as managing the project, purchasing, installation and finally, deployment of my plan. My success in leading this project and utilizing the newly installed technical tools to empower the Center's goals led to the realization of similar goals and projects in a corporate environment.

Currently, I am the manager of Information Systems at Active Screw and Fastener, where I am responsible for the entire IT unit. Although my strengths are concentrated in the area of Information Technology, I do not want to limit myself to building and maintaining data networks. Through a focused program of study, my goal is to develop expertise in information security, an area that is becoming more and more critical to all information systems managers. As my company grows, I must also be capable of providing the necessary growth in its IT functions to enable people to share information with confidence. It is imperative that sensitive data assets, be it personal or corporate, will not be vulnerable to Cybercrime or compromised by unauthorized users.

The key to becoming a successful Tech manager and future CIO is the ability to demonstrate that a company's secret information resources are in alignment with corporate priorities. The Chicago Professional Programs in Computer Science will give me extensive exposure to information security, and will allow me to take a step toward securing the infrastructures that I have already built. With its strong cadre of experienced faculty, Chicago will prepare me to become a solid senior technical manager and partner with an enlightened vision towards the new directions manifesting in the information security field.

What Not to Do

The most common mistake - other than not including transitions at all - is to rely on words like "also" or "further," which don't provide any thematic link. Using such substance-less transitions makes your essay sound like a list instead of a logical argument. For example:

Bad: "Doing research for my departmental adviser also provided a great deal of useful experience."

Good: "Although classroom debates sparked my interest in this obscure area, the chance to do hands-on research for my departmental adviser exposed me to the detail-oriented nature of academic inquiry."

Whenever possible, you should aim to create transitions with as much depth as this one has. When you can make a substantive statement both about what's to follow and what preceded, then you not only ensure a smooth flow, but you also reiterate and highlight your key themes.

Supporting Evidence

While the transition statement can be general to orient the reader, your very next sentence should be specific. The movement within each paragraph should be from specific to general, rather than vice versa. There are two main reasons for this approach: 1) The reader will be more interested in the specifics of your situation than in generic, broad themes; 2) You can draw much more interesting, in-depth insights after you have laid out the evidence out. The principles here are therefore the same as for stories.

Consider the following paragraph, taken from this essay:

"As a result of my experiences in the dormitory project, I was well prepared for the challenges that awaited me as the manager of Information Services at the Transportation Center at Northwestern University. My primary task was to build a state-of-the-art network infrastructure that would support a leading graduate research center in the transportation field. In a succinct and convincing manner, I had to demonstrate my vision in building the foundation and developing the budget, as well as managing the project, purchasing, installation and finally, deployment of my plan. My success in leading this project and utilizing the newly installed technical tools to empower the Center's goals led to the realization of similar goals and projects in a corporate environment."

✦Sample Essay

For the past two and a half years, I have been a professional in the technology field, but now I am preparing to become a professional corporate information officer. Although my work has introduced me to specific areas of information technology, (including telecommunications, network wiring and databases) I have recently become intrigued with the field of information security. I am concerned about the vulnerability of the company I work for, particularly with regard to employee and client information. The specialty phase of your Professional program appears to be well endowed with the resources needed to address such concerns.

While my undergraduate and MS curriculum exposed me to a wide variety of computer science topics, I have gained extensive knowledge in the area of network infrastructure development. As an MS student at DePaul University, I worked as a network support technician and project manager for Information Services. My most significant accomplishment in this capacity involved the re-wiring of over a thousand dormitory rooms to enable the students to have Internet access with a link to the other four campuses. In doing so, I had to investigate the existing needs of a high-speed Internet network, as well as the transport of bandwidth to support future demands, which are almost impossible to determine.

As a result of my experiences in the dormitory project, I was well prepared for the challenges that awaited me as the manager of Information Services at the Transportation Center at Northwestern University. My primary task was to build a state-of-the-art network infrastructure that would support a leading graduate research center in the transportation field. In a succinct and convincing manner, I had to demonstrate my vision in building the foundation and developing the budget, as well as managing the project, purchasing, installation and finally,

deployment of my plan. My success in leading this project and utilizing the newly installed technical tools to empower the Center's goals led to the realization of similar goals and projects in a corporate environment.

Currently, I am the manager of Information Systems at Active Screw and Fastener, where I am responsible for the entire IT unit. Although my strengths are concentrated in the area of Information Technology, I do not want to limit myself to building and maintaining data networks. Through a focused program of study, my goal is to develop expertise in information security, an area that is becoming more and more critical to all information systems managers. As my company grows, I must also be capable of providing the necessary growth in its IT functions to enable people to share information with confidence. It is imperative that sensitive data assets, be it personal or corporate, will not be vulnerable to Cybercrime or compromised by unauthorized users.

The key to becoming a successful Tech manager and future CIO is the ability to demonstrate that a company's secret information resources are in alignment with corporate priorities. The Chicago Professional Programs in Computer Science will give me extensive exposure to information security, and will allow me to take a step toward securing the infrastructures that I have already built. With its strong cadre of experienced faculty, Chicago will prepare me to become a solid senior technical manager and partner with an enlightened vision towards the new directions manifesting in the information security field.

The reader-friendly orientation comes in the first sentence, but immediately after, the writer focuses on the details of his experience: the nature of his task and the roles he fulfilled. Only in the final sentence does he begin to expand to the broader lesson. Looking at this example, you might think that this is the natural, obvious approach, and it seems that way because it works so seamlessly. But writers who aren't conscious of what they're doing will often go the exact opposite route. Their paragraph might include something like the following as the second sentence: "In this position, I learned many valuable skills while refining my career vision."

Writers who make this mistake will be wise enough to keep the resolution at the end, but they'll state a general point closer to the top. Their reasoning is that the big lesson needs to be highlighted, but they don't realize that bringing it up prematurely gives it less weight and in turn downplays the uniqueness of their personal details.

Resolutions

It's a shame to see a paragraph with vivid, powerful details end on a flat note, but that's precisely what happens even in otherwise strong essays. The challenge is to say something both meaningful and personal. Most resolutions are too broad and superficial.

The other mistake that writers tend to make is just to state the obvious. For example, every paragraph will end with some form of the following: "This experience reaffirmed my passion for

history." Such a poor attempt not only hurts the impact of the paragraph but also makes the writer appear simple-minded and superficial.

[This applicant](#) concludes a paragraph on her experience with a nonprofit organization as follows: "My experience helping women access breast-feeding information and empowering them to use that information has convinced me that information alone is not nearly as useful as information plus a skilled guide." What makes this resolution effective is that it makes a clear, meaningful point that is closely tied to the evidence presented within the paragraph.

✦ Sample Essay

Notice how this successful applicant avoids the expository-resume approach by focusing on two or three particular experiences and evaluating them in terms of her current outlook and educational goals. Also notice how the discussion about her children's activities, while seemingly unnecessary to make her central point, helps to bring the essay down to a more personal level.

My first employment in a library was in a work-study project during college. My duties included some shelving and a lot of typing of catalog cards. I remember the sturdy metal stacks, with so many captivating books tempting me as I tried to reshelve all that were on the carts. Mostly I remember the typing; agonizingly laborious since I was not a skilled typist, and formatting was so important. I came to understand much about the way the cataloguing system worked, and was grateful in the years to come when I needed to locate things for my own studies . . . or for my children.

For more than fifteen years now I have been working as a volunteer for La Leche League International, a grass roots, non-profit, self-help organization supporting and promoting breastfeeding. My work for the organization has taken a number of forms over the years, but can be summed up as gathering information, both practical and technical, and using human relations skills to make it accessible to others. My experience helping women access breast-feeding information and empowering them to use that information has convinced me that information alone is not nearly as useful as information plus a skilled guide.

One of my greatest pleasures in recent years has been writing a regular column-"Keeping Up-to-Date"-for La Leche League's bimonthly international newsletter. Through this experience I have seen a vivid contrast between the substantive quality of information formally prepared-with the discipline and rigor of a traditional publishing and review schedule and with clear authorship-and the casual unstructured nature of electronic bulletin board postings, faxes, e-mail, and other products of newer technologies. I am practically, though peripherally, aware of some of the problems our society faces in an era when intellectual property suddenly has so many new forms. I am eager to be a well-informed participant in the discussion of intellectual participation.

This week I found myself intrigued again by cataloguing when I needed to outfit my youngest son, now twelve, with a juggler's outfit for the school play. An initial subject search for "costumes" in the OPAC system at our township library was fruitless. Only when I thought to enter "costume" without the plural "s" did the system yield all the information I needed. What frustration! This confluence of technology and information, especially as it affects accessibility, fascinates me.

The degree to which your School of Communication, Information and Library Studies openly accepts the challenge to explore and lead in the information revolution is seductive. What a serendipity that this school is practically in my backyard! The strengths and attributes I bring to your school are a caring and careful nature, proven academic excellence, experience in writing and speaking for a variety of audiences, and a practical knowledge of working with volunteers and professionals. The durability of my enthusiasm for libraries and the people who work in and love them convinces me that the Master of Library Service program is indeed the right way for me to continue my formal education.

Ultimately, your approach to writing resolutions should follow the same basic principles you use for other areas: be detailed, personal, specific, and concrete. The additional challenge arises from the fact that you also must speak to some broader significance, and it's tempting either to get carried away and write too generically, or to take the easy way out and conclude with something superficial.

✦ Lesson Four: Style and Tone

While the structure of your essay affects the clarity, coherence, and impact of your content, writing style affects presentation in an even more fundamental way: it determines how engaged your reader is from sentence to sentence. Poor writing can make fascinating experiences a dull read, while strong writing can transform mundane details into an exciting tale.

The best advice we can give is to be **simple and straightforward**. Occasionally, an essay will sound choppy or unsophisticated because of too many short sentences, but usually the problem is the opposite scenario. Applicants think that flowery prose and large words will make them sound more intelligent, when in reality their expression ends up being muddled and tedious. A direct style is not only more efficient to read, but it's also more enjoyable because it allows a steadily moving pace.

The tone you use should be **conversational, not too formal or informal**. The sentences you write should be sentences that you would actually say. This is not to suggest that you shouldn't spend time refining your writing carefully, but the ultimate goal should be a natural voice.

In this section of the course, we will cover the major weaknesses and mistakes most applicants are guilty of and show you how to turn them into strengths.

📌 Select One:

- [Sentence Variety](#)
- [Word Choice](#)
- [Verb Tense](#)
- [Tone](#)
- [Essay Clichés](#)

EssayEdge Extra: Achieving Genuine Style

In a sense, the advice covered in this section is remedial. We're trying to teach you to avoid the common mistakes of bad writing. The goal is to achieve a clean, readable, and enjoyable piece of writing. Very few writers in the entire applicant pool will have the kind of style that will make them stand out on the strength of writing alone.

Developing such a style requires time and investment, and some may argue that it can't be taught. If you want to undertake a more long-term investment in your writing aptitude, here are some tips:

1. Immerse Yourself in Good Writing: Read publications like The New Yorker and Atlantic Monthly. Even without conscious effort, your writing will improve because you will begin to think in more vivid language.

2. Imitate Good Writers: Try a broad range of styles, from Faulkner to Hemingway. This will get you thinking about writing on a higher level and prepare you to forge your own voice as you begin to master the nuances of language.

3. Keep a Journal: No matter what you choose to write about, your writing will improve simply because you're practicing the craft. Keep to a steady schedule.

4. Become a Good Editor: Whether you're rewriting your own piece or someone else's, the process of editing will help you learn to pay attention to subtleties and keep an eye on the big picture.

5. Have Your Work Critiqued by Professionals: Using a service such as EssayEdge's will not only help you improve the essay you submit, but will also teach you to recognize your general strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

★ Sentence Variety

Inexperienced writers tend to use longer, more complex sentences because they think they demonstrate intelligence. In contrast, strong writers know that a point is most forceful when it is conveyed concisely and directly. Although the purpose of this section is to teach you to improve on sentence variety, we also want you to be aware that simplicity should be your ultimate goal. Sophisticated thoughts will require complex sentences, but you should never complicate a simple idea for the sake of creating more intricate sentences.

Does this mean that the best essay will consist of all simple sentences? No. We stress this point only because most people have a tendency to start with sentences that are more complex than necessary, because ideas don't formulate themselves in our minds in the clearest, most direct structure. The best-written essays will feature steady variation in sentence length--but with no sentences forced into a more complex mode.

Simplifying

The first step in simplifying is to identify what needs to be fixed. Usually the problem comes from trying to cram too many points into one sentence and using too many auxiliary clauses. Consider the following two sets of examples:

Before: To this program I will bring a determined spirit, coupled with a strong background in research and volunteer work, which I pursued with energy and a focus on the future that grows ever closer to being within reach.

After: I have pursued all my research and volunteer work with relentless energy and clear focus. To this program I will bring the same sense of determination that has made my once distant goals now close within my reach.

The total word count remains the same, but the ideas are now much clearer and more fully fleshed out.

Before: Having long been interested in a career in law, which will allow me to combine my analytical thinking skills with the pursuit of social justice, I now feel that I have accumulated the necessary experience and education to begin a formal pursuit in this field, with X school offering the best curriculum for my needs.

After: A career in law will allow me to combine my analytical thinking skills with the pursuit of social justice. Having accumulated the necessary experience and education, I now look forward to pursuing my long-held interest in law at X school, which offers the best curriculum for my needs.

Oversimplified: A career in law will allow me to combine my analytical thinking skills with the pursuit of social justice. I have accumulated the necessary experience and education. I now

look forward to pursuing my long-held interest in law at X school. X school offers the best curriculum for my needs.

As you can see, the second version still includes a complex sentence, but separating one clause makes the ideas much clearer. We are not by any means advocating the extreme simplicity of the third version. It is oversimplified not only because it sounds choppy, but because it has removed certain textual relationships that were in the original--most importantly, "Having accumulated --> I now look forward."

Varying Constructions

Sentence variety is not just a matter of length; a well-paced piece of writing will vary its sentence constructions as well. Everyone can recognize what's wrong with the following:

"I walked into the room. The patient looked up at me. I greeted him with a smile. His eyes brightened."

Most people, however, would write something like the following without realizing their error:

"Having entered the room, I saw the patient look up at me. Sensing his discomfort, I tried to ease his concerns by greeting him with a smile. Appreciating my gesture, he responded with glowing eyes."

Every sentence starts with a present participle (a verb + "ing" --> adjective), states the subject, and gives the predicate. The following is a revision:

"I saw the patient look up as I entered the room. Sensing his discomfort, I tried to ease his concerns by greeting him with a smile. Although his brightening eyes showed that he appreciated my gesture, pain prevented him from responding any further."

The first sentence now starts with the subject, and the third sentence introduces a new kind of dependent clause with the conjunction "although."

If you have trouble finding ways to vary your sentence constructions, try some of the following basic ideas:

1. Combine two short sentences into one compound sentence:

"The game had just started, and our seats gave us a perfect view."

2. Use prepositional phrases, and vary their location:

"With only an hour left to finish, I knew I had to focus."
"I knew I had to focus, with only an hour left to finish."

3. Use the many conjunctions available to you--however, when, while, as, because, for, since, although, though--and vary their location:

"When we arrived, I knew we were too late to stop the fight."
"We watched in disbelief, though we longed to intervene in some way."

4. Use participles and gerunds (a verb + "ing" --> noun):

"Facing great risks, he nevertheless accepted the challenge without hesitation."
"Working at an immigration law firm has given me firsthand knowledge of the struggles people face in settling in the United States."

Using these basic tools, you can create a powerful and engaging piece of writing. The key is to keep changing your constructions so that each sentence sounds fresh and new.

Word Choice

Whenever Possible, Use the Shorter, Simpler Word.

You can use a thesaurus to jog your memory when you're trying to come up with a better synonym, but never use a word with which you aren't already familiar. Words often have connotations and nuances of meaning that you can appreciate only after having seen them in context, so you're taking a great risk if you use a word that you don't know well.

Even if you do feel comfortable with more advanced vocabulary, you should use the simpler synonym if that captures your meaning just as well. For example, instead of "ameliorated the situation," you could just as easily say "improved the situation." On the other hand, a word like "exasperated" is more intense than a synonym like "frustrated," and so you should use it if that's the sense you're trying to convey.

Use precise language.

Choose words that capture your experience fully and accurately. For example:

Vague: When we first started the business, I performed a range of duties to get the company going.

Precise: When we first started the business, I took the initiative to contact potential partners, evaluate the services of our competitors, and tailor our plan to local markets.

Use Nouns and Verbs Rather than Adverbs and Adjectives.

Inexperienced writers think that using fancy adverbs and adjectives will make their writing look more eloquent, but in fact, they just bog down your rhythm and usually sound like fluff. They also tend to make your writing sound abstract because they are not actual physical substances. Good writers stick to concrete nouns that the reader can grasp and, even more importantly, vivid verbs that are the lifeblood of active, engaging language.

Before: I ran quickly to the board where the results would be posted, with many curious people standing around waiting anxiously to see their scores.

After: I rushed to the board to find people crowded around muttering prayers to themselves as they awaited the dean's arrival with their score results.

The phrase "ran quickly" has become the more succinct and punchy "rushed." Instead of "many curious people standing around," we have substituted "people crowded around muttering prayers to themselves." Thus, we gain a more vivid verb in "crowded" and a concrete image of people muttering prayers instead of the abstract adjective "curious" and the clunky adverb "anxiously." In focusing on nouns and verbs, we have succeeded in showing instead of telling.

Avoid Repetition.

Don't use words twice in close proximity, and don't use the same words regularly throughout an essay. The problem usually comes in overusing the same noun that's central to your topic. Although we emphasized the importance of precision when you're describing the details of experiences, you can get away with synonyms when writing more broadly about themes and topics.

For example, if your essay is about your skills in interpersonal interaction, you could use such similar phrases as "communication strengths" and "building trusting relationships."

✦Verb Tense

The reason we are devoting nearly an entire section to tips on removing the passive voice from your writing is that it's both a very common flaw and very easily correctable. Within this section we also will explain how to choose more active language even when the passive voice is not involved.

Defining Passive Voice

Passive voice occurs when the subject and object of an action are inverted, so the subject is the recipient of the act instead of its performer. For example:

Passive: The man was bitten by the dog.
Active: The dog bit the man.

Passive: I was told by my teacher to come at noon.
Active: My teacher told me to come at noon.

Note that the word "by" is present in these two examples. A sentence can be passive without the word "by," but it is always at least implied. For example: "I was given bad directions [by my friend]."

Passive voice always involves a *to be* verb. *To be* verbs include *am, are, been, being, is, was, were*. On the other hand, a sentence can include a *to be* verb without being passive. For example:

"I have been involved in this organization for several years."
"He is leaving in five minutes."

Later we will discuss ways to avoid *to be* verbs even when they are not in passive-voice constructions.

When Passive Voice is Acceptable

There are generally two cases when passive voice is acceptable: 1) when there is no defined or tangible subject; 2) when the emphasis really should be on the object of the action. In these cases, the alternative is often awkward and less natural sounding.

Case 1: He is referred to as "the great one."
Awkward Alternative: The general public refers to him as "the great one."

Case 2: For the fifth time this year, Johnson was hit by a pitch.
Awkward Alternative: For the fifth time this year, a pitch hit Johnson.

Avoiding Passive Voice

As we've already shown, the basic approach to avoiding passive voice is quite simple. Identify the subject of the action (the noun that follows "by" or is otherwise implied) and bring that to the front of the clause. Remove the to be verb. Adjust any other word-order issues as needed. Try these five examples as an exercise:

1. He was given too many chances to start over by his friends.
2. She was instructed to remain seated by her teacher.
3. Their efforts were obstructed by brilliant defensive strategy.
4. The machine was started by the operator on time.
5. The door was shut by the angry mother.

Answers:

1. His friends gave him too many chances to start over.
2. Her teacher instructed her to remain seated.
3. Brilliant defensive strategy obstructed their efforts.
4. The operator started the machine on time.
5. The angry mother shut the door.

Achieving Active Writing

Active language comes not just from avoiding passive voice but further requires the use of strong action verbs. In addition to avoiding *to be* verbs, you should try to replace helping verbs such as *have, had, has, do, does, did* and other vague verbs like *got* and *get.*

Before: I **had** opportunities to develop my skills.
After: I **sought** opportunities to develop my skills.

Before: I **got** the promotion through hard work.
After: I **earned** the promotion through hard work.

Before: She **did** well in this competitive environment.
After: She **thrived** in this competitive environment.

Before: My mother **didn't want** to show up without a gift.
After: My mother **hesitated** to show up without a gift.

Before: The salesman **told** the audience about his products.
After: The salesman **promoted** his products to the audience.

The last two examples demonstrate the lack of clear distinction between strong and weak verbs. There's nothing in the dictionary that will tell you that *promoted* sounds stronger than *told.* It's largely a matter of how much meaning the word contains. *Promoted* has a more precise and nuanced meaning than *told.*

You can certainly develop a strong eye for these subtle issues, but active writing is an area where professional editing can make a substantial difference.

Tone

Tone is broadly described as the author's attitude toward his or her subject. It can be passionate, distant, angry, and lighthearted, among many other possibilities. Unfortunately, there are too many possibilities for us to cover, and without knowing your subject, we cannot

give the most specific advice possible. The obvious pitfalls include sounding condescending or frivolous, while sounding energetic and enthusiastic is a definite positive.

Although we cannot be more detailed about these specific approaches, there are still important general lessons to convey. In this section we will teach you how to strike a balance between sounding too casual and too formal. Then we will discuss ways to achieve the confident, energetic tone for which all writers should strive.

Too Casual

The danger in writing too casually is that you might come across as someone who doesn't take the application process seriously enough. When we say that you should be conversational, you should think in terms of an interview conversation. In other words, the situation is serious, but your words sound natural and not overwrought. Writing that's too informal would be the language you use when chatting with friends.

Some examples include the use of colloquialisms, sentence fragments, or slang. The following should illustrate a clear problem:

"The way I look at it, someone needs to start doing something about disease. What's the big deal? People are dying. But the average person doesn't think twice about it until it affects them. Or someone they know."

Too Formal / Detached

More people err on the side of being too formal, because they take the quality of being professional to an extreme. They forget that this is a personal and not an academic essay. For example, some people even try to write about themselves without using the first person, because they were taught in high school English that "I" is anathema.

Generally, the problem of sounding too formal goes along with detaching oneself from one's subject. Some writers will try to write too objectively or as though they were trying to provide logical evidence for a thesis. Consider this before-and-after example:

Before: There was a delay in the start of the project, attributable to circumstances beyond the control of all relevant parties. Progress came to a standstill, and no one was prepared to undertake the assessment of the problem and determination of the solution. An unexpected shift in roles placed this duty on myself.

After: The project got off to a late start due to circumstances beyond our control. We could not move forward, and no one stepped forward to take the lead in figuring out what went wrong. Despite my junior status, I decided to undertake this challenge.

The second version clearly sounds more natural, and the uses of "our," "we," and "I" make the reader sense that the writer has a more personal stake in the problem. There are several differences worth noting.

1. The second version is shorter. Writing in excessively formal language often requires more words, such as "beyond the control of all relevant parties" versus "beyond our control."

2. The second version avoids two *to be* verbs and replaces them with more active ones.

3. The first version turns words that are usually verbs into nouns: "determination" and "assessment." This adds a definite stiffness to the writing.

4. The second version uses phrases that sound conversational but not informal: "got off to a late start" and "figuring out what went wrong." The line is fuzzy, but again, ask yourself if you would use these phrases in an interview. The answer here should be yes, while "What's the big deal?" is a clear mistake.

5. Another example of the first version depersonalizing the issue is in the last sentence, which is ambiguous. The new version does not rely on the vague phrase "an unexpected shift in roles" and has the further benefit of making the writer sound more active in assuming leadership.

Sounding Confident

Within this category, we will also cover how to sound enthusiastic, positive, and passionate-in other words, the basic qualities every essay should have regardless of its subject. We will go through some general guidelines and offer before-and-after examples when appropriate:

1. Avoid phrases like "I believe," "I feel," and "I think." Even worse are phrases that add an adverb, such as "I strongly believe." Your tone will be much more confident if you just make the statement without preface.

2. There's little value that can come from being negative, whether you're writing about a weakness or a negative external situation. Downplay the negative aspects and emphasize the positive.

Before: Our business has struggled since the whole market started its downturn, but we are staying strong.

After: Despite a slowdown that has coincided with the market struggles, we have taken measures to remain competitive and are beginning to reverse the downturn.

3. When you're trying to convey your enthusiasm about a subject, the language you use should parallel your feelings. Stiff, deadened, and passive writing will contradict the passion you're claiming to possess. Use action verbs to inject vigor into your writing, and of course, show rather than tell whenever possible.

Before: Civil rights is an issue I feel strongly about. The legal field is closely related to this issue, and I would like to use it as an avenue to effect change.

After: I have marched, demonstrated, and campaigned for the civil rights of all people. Now I hope to tackle the systemic roots of the problem through a career in law.

4. Emphasize your active role. This point has come up so many times because it affects so many aspects of your writing. Highlight the ways in which you actively contributed to a situation or to your own progress. For example, if you were assigned an important project, you should point out that your consistent quality of work earned you higher responsibilities.

Before: I was not sure what job to take next, but a great opportunity in health care administration came up.

After: I explored a wide range of career possibilities and discovered an opportunity in health care administration that intrigued me most.

A Note on Humor

Being funny in writing is very difficult, because the voice and exact context depend on the reader and are in a sense beyond the writer's control. You could be a very funny person and nevertheless be unable to show that side of you in writing. If you see potential for using humor, you should aim small. Don't expect big laughs by being outrageous. Instead, aim to bring a smile to the reader's face by including a clever witticism.

Be careful that your tone does not come across as flippant or overly sarcastic. Slight irony is good, and self-deprecating humor can be effective because it shows that you don't take yourself too seriously.

✦Essay Clichés

In everyday language, clichés are simply common expressions that are an easy way to get one's point across. For example, saying, "He really put his foot in his mouth" is a convenient way to make the point that "He said something that he should now regret saying."

What's acceptable in spoken language can be offensive in writing. Good writing must be original: you should always aim instead to state your ideas through engaging language and from a fresh perspective.

In addition to the general clichés of the English language, you have to watch out for those that are more specific to the application essay. The challenge here is that these themes have become clichés precisely because they are valuable and significant, so you don't want to ignore them. You simply have to find fresh ways to convey hackneyed ideas. The best advice

is to be as specific and personal as possible, thereby emphasizing your uniqueness. The following is a list of some of the most egregious clichés, within the context of a bland statement:

"As I finished the race, I realized I had learned **the value of hard work** and appreciated the fact that I could accomplish anything **if I set my mind to it**."

"Working in this atmosphere made me appreciate **the value of diversity**."

"With each member contributing something valuable to our purpose, I soon recognized the **importance of teamwork**."

"As the young child embraced me in gratitude, I discovered the **true value of making a difference in people's lives**."

"That summer in New York truly **broadened my horizons**."

There's no way to reword the above sentences to make them significantly stronger. The problem lies in the very approach the hypothetical writer of those statements has taken. A reliance on clichés is usually indicative of superficial ideas and telling instead of showing. The only way to improve upon the above sentiments would be to enrich them with concrete details and add depth using a more personal perspective.

Lesson Five: Intros and Conclusions

In the Graduate Statement Themes section, we touched on some of the purposes of the introduction and conclusion. Specifically, we discussed how an introduction can orient the reader to the ideas the essay will undertake, and, more briefly, how the conclusion can be useful in synthesizing those ideas. At that point, we were most concerned about the coherence of your essay's structure.

In this section, our focus is slightly narrower for the introduction and broader for the conclusion. That is, having covered one of the two major aspects of the introduction already, we will now focus on the other: how to draw in the reader. Conversely, since we have not yet covered the conclusion in depth, we will focus here on defining its purpose and offering tips on how to achieve that purpose.

Select One:

- Introductions
- Conclusions

EssayEdge Extra: Opening With a Quotation

There is no approach more hackneyed than opening with a quotation. The ones we see at EssayEdge are almost always just marginally clever expressions of the most obvious lessons about hard work, persistence, and fulfilling one's dreams--often barely relevant to the rest of the essay. Occasionally, someone will find a quote that's worth a pause, but even then the reader will not be impressed. The very sight of quotation marks at the beginning of your essay may very well elicit a cringe or a sigh.

The admissions committee is far more interested in hearing what you have to say. If you happen upon a fascinating or pithy quotation by another person, using it will not make your case for admission any more compelling. In fact, an impatient reader might simply write you off as unoriginal. Additionally, quoting a philosopher or Shakespeare will not make you appear well-read, because anyone can open *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* to find something that appears intelligent and insightful.

Finally, even quoting your grandmother or some other wise relative has been overdone. This is not to say that you shouldn't use dialogue if you're describing a particular episode, but anything that sounds like an aphorism will only make your essay seem trite, no matter how perfectly it sums up your theme.

Introductions

The introduction is the most important part of your essay, and its one purpose above all others is to draw in the reader. Ideally, your introduction should grab the reader's attention right from the first sentence. If the introduction can proceed to orient the reader to the focus of the essay, that can be very helpful. But orientation is not an essential purpose because that can be achieved gradually throughout the course of the essay.

Many students make the mistake of over-explaining in the introductory paragraph what they will be talking about in the rest of the essay. Such paragraphs may include something similar to the following: "My journey toward graduate school has been shaped by a variety of experiences, including academic studies, volunteer work, and extracurricular activities." This is quite simply a waste of time and space. The reader already knows that you will be addressing these things and is most likely thinking, "Get to the point."

If your essay opens with a paragraph such as this, the best move would be to delete it. Often, your second paragraph, which begins to discuss a specific experience, will work much better as an introduction. You may also find that a later paragraph works even better. In general, you should bring your most compelling experience to the forefront and then structure your essay around it.

The following is a list of possible approaches to the introduction, with an emphasis on the opening sentence itself.

Jump Right In

Some people will start with a compelling experience but will insist on prefacing that experience with a very generic statement such as: "From the first time I looked through a microscope, I knew that science was my calling." Often, the reason people will open with such as statement is that they feel compelled to restate the question in some way. This is unnecessary and more than likely to bore your reader right out of the gate. You should be able to demonstrate your reasons without relying on such a bland summary sentence.

If, on the other hand, you are tempted to use the first sentence to explain context, you should respect the reader's intelligence enough to save that context for later, once you have grabbed the reader's attention. Consider the following example, taken from this essay:

"Perhaps the most important influence that has shaped the person I am today is my upbringing in a traditional family-oriented Persian and Zoroastrian culture. My family has been an important source of support in all of the decisions I have made, and Zoroastrianism's three basic tenets-good words, good deeds, and good thoughts-have been my guiding principles in life."

Although the question asks the applicant to describe his influences, he need not restate that line. Moreover, he can delay explaining the context of his upbringing. Review the following restructure, which grabs the reader's attention more immediately and conveys the necessary context in time:

"Good words, good deeds, and good thoughts--these are the three basic Zoroastrian tenets that have shaped my guiding principles. Indeed, my upbringing in a traditional Persian and Zoroastrian culture and all the family support that entails have come to define me more than any other influence."

The advice to jump right in also applies to anecdotes. Rather than set the stage for a story with boring exposition, beginning your essay with some interesting action is often an effective way to draw in your reader.

✈Sample Essay

In responding to a question that asked the applicant to describe experiences, events, or persons that have been important in his or her development, this applicant successfully correlated his influences to his current outlook on life.

Perhaps the most important influence that has shaped the person I am today is my upbringing in a traditional family-oriented Persian and Zoroastrian culture. My family has been an important source of support in all of the decisions I have made, and Zoroastrianism's three basic tenets-good words, good deeds, and good thoughts-have been my guiding principles in life. Not only do I try to do things for others, but I always push myself to be the best that I can be in all aspects of my life. I saw early the doors and opportunities that a good education can open up; thus, I particularly tried hard to do well in school.

Another important experience that has had a large influence on me the past few years has been college. Going from high school to college was a significant change. College required a major overhaul of my time-management techniques as the number of things to do mushroomed. In high school, I was in the honors program, with the same cohort of students in all my classes. Thus, I was exposed little to people very different from myself. College, on the other hand, is full of diversity. I have people of all backgrounds and abilities in my classes, and

I have been fortunate enough to meet quite a few of them. This experience has made me more tolerant of differences. Furthermore, a variety of classes such as the Humanities Core Course, in which we specifically studied differences in race, gender, and belief systems, have liberalized my world view.

My undergraduate research has occupied a large portion of my time in college. Along with this experience have come knowledge and skills that could never be gained in the classroom. I have gained a better appreciation for the medical discoverers and discoveries of the past and the years of frustration endured and satisfaction enjoyed by scientists. I have also learned to deal better with the disappointments and frustrations that result when things do not always go as one expects them to. My research experience was also important to me in that it broadened my view of the medical field. Research permitted me to meet a few medical doctors who have clinical practices and yet are able to conduct research at the university. This has made me seriously consider combining research with a clinical practice in my own career.

From my earliest memories, I can always remember being interested in meteorology. I believe that this interest sparked my love for the outdoors, while my interest in medicine molded my desire for healthy living. As a result of these two influences, I try to follow an active exercise routine taking place mostly in the outdoors. I enjoy running and mountain biking in the local hills and mountains, along with hiking and backpacking. All of these activities have made me concerned about the environment and my place in it.

Show Your Originality

If you can make yourself stand out right from the first sentence, then you will have significantly improved your chances for admission. You should not, of course, just throw out random facts about yourself. The inclusion of such statements should fall within the larger context of your essay. But if you are going to emphasize a unique aspect of your life, then, by all means, it should come up right away.

State a problem

By stating a problem, you create instant curiosity because the reader will want to see how you address it. [This applicant](#) actually opens with a rhetorical question, wasting no time. The remainder of the essay explores the concept of "middleware" and its relevance to the applicant's career.

✦Sample Essay

Please state your purpose in applying for graduate study, your particular area of specialization within the major field, and any additional information that may aid the selection committee in evaluating your preparation and potential for graduate study at UCSD.

What, exactly, is middleware? According to Level8 Systems, the term refers to any programming which serves to "glue together" two separate programs - localized or distributed. I like to think that the word also embodies my abilities as a software "glue" engineer in the field of embedded systems, and illustrates my capacity to tackle two fields at once.

For many people, imagining their career and contributions five to ten years from college is a daunting task. I have never hesitated to make projections, yet -- since graduating from Cal Poly with a BSEE degree -- my path has taken an interesting, and somewhat unexpected, direction: from hardware to software. Because of my background in electronic engineering and my participation in both the Cal Poly Pomona Solar Energy Team racecar project and the development of simulation software, I was offered a position as system test engineer by the U.S. Naval Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation command. The position introduced me to various engineering disciplines, including modeling and simulation, software systems engineering, real-time performance analysis, and communication (LAN, WAN, wireless) systems.

After a few years, the exposure strengthened my resolve to specialize in embedded software development. Initially, the transition to software engineer was challenging. Despite my lack of formal training in computer science, I enrolled in courses at UCSD Extension to study languages like C and C++. With the skills I acquired from the courses and self-teaching materials, I accepted a position as software engineer on a project called the Battle Force Tactical Training (BFTT) System. The project's main goal was to provide a common synthetic environment to the various ships' on-board trainer (OBT) systems and shore site training centers using the Distributive Interactive Simulation (DIS) protocol (IEEE 1278.1). Since our prime directive was to use commercial off-the-shelf technology, we selected the VMEbus architecture and the VxWorks real-time operating system. My task was to develop software on a VME board, which interfaced with each OBT system and the synthetic environment network - LAN and WAN. The software provided the following functions:

1) It received real-time high fidelity track information from each different OBT,
2) It translated the data into the DIS Protocol Data Units (PDUs),
3) It distributed the PDUs to all nodes on the networks,
4) It synchronized and modeled the PDUs at each site in a course database, and
5) It translated the PDU information into OBT specific data messages.

With the successful deployment of the distributive training system, BFTT, I am currently involved with a new project, the Distributive Engineering Plant (DEP). DEP is in the process of connecting Command, Control, Communication, and Intelligence (C4I) land base test sites from around the country for total ship test events - T&E and Verification, Validation, and Accreditation (VV&A). My responsibility lies in the design and development of the Common Scenario Common Environment (CSCE) simulation, which will stimulate the whole spectrum of a ship's C4I systems in a coordinated synthetic environment. One aspect of the design is the use of TAO, Real-Time CORBA from University of Washington at St. Louis, as the communication infrastructure for object distribution between the embedded computers.

This type of middleware, as well as other technologies unheard of in embedded systems just a few years ago, will become more prevalent in the future. As an engineer catching a glimpse of the future and its technological possibilities, I am eager to continue my involvement in this field.

Specializing in distributive simulation and real-time embedded systems, I have come to realize that working with embedded systems demands comprehensive knowledge of both hardware and software. Designing drivers and application software requires attention to detail with respect to the hardware devices (DSP, PLD, Flash Memory), buses (VME, PCI), and network interfaces (Ethernet, FDDI, ATM). The current trend in embedded systems is system-on-a-chip (SOC) implementations, which can incorporate microprocessor cores (ARM, MIPS), memory (DRAM, SRAM), peripherals (USB), DSP cores, communication protocol stacks (TCP/IP), and applications (MPEG).

Thinking about hardware and software as mutually exclusive is a thing of the past. The convergence of these two aspects will present both opportunities and challenges for embedded software engineers to "glue" together new technologies, and only those willing to educate themselves and to use this cutting-edge technology will benefit from it. I believe that my ability to learn quickly and to switch fields -- evident from my transition to software engineering -- will allow me to approach these developments with creative and rigorous thinking. I plan to focus my graduate studies in Electronic Circuits and Systems, but I will also be taking courses in Communication and Signal Analysis as part of the breath requirements. UCSD's Master of Engineering program will provide me with the perfect chance to study new concepts and remain in a working environment, while participating in the university's vibrant community. I can think of no better way to build on my professional and academic experiences than pursuing the program's demanding and innovative course of studies.

This applicant, on the other hand, deals with a more urgent social issue that has affected her personally. The remainder of the essay does not purport to solve the problem, but rather to demonstrate her in-depth understanding of it and the level of her commitment to her cause.

Instead of dealing with external issues, you can also discuss personal difficulties and how you have struggled through them. There are many possibilities here, but what unites them is the element of drama, and you should use that to your advantage in creating a strong lead.

✦ Sample Essay

Despite our advances in science, technology, and living standards, I have learnt first-hand that many women are denied the opportunities arising from such progress. Some are denied even the most fundamental rights, imprisoned by a religion whose tenets call for their protection.

I have long been concerned with the terrible plight of Afghani women, who have been subjected to inhumane conditions by their "liberators," the Taleban. Women in Afghanistan are refused an education, banned from working, and denied freedom of movement. As a woman, I find such treatment unacceptable. As a Muslim, I have always been taught that Islam preaches equality, not the humiliation and torture of women. Unfortunately, the Taleban's treatment of women is not entirely foreign to me. In my native Pakistan, women are often said to live "sheltered" lives; the term is nothing more than a euphemism for "living in a prison" -- a gilded prison, perhaps, but a prison nonetheless.

Yet my situation could have been a lot worse had I been born on the other side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. I have heard several Afghani refugee women describe the brutalities which they endured at home. Last year, I volunteered at a camp on the outskirts of Karachi. The camp was a fly-infested, rubbish-strewn hellhole. Dirty, unkempt children played in the dust, and emaciated women sat starting into the distance. There I met a refugee called Ferooza, and I asked her why they put up with these depressing, unsanitary conditions instead of trying to improve their surroundings. Ferooza's answer shocked me, but in retrospect I realize that to her, life after Afghanistan held no meaning. Her words still ring in my ears:

"After the Soviets left, we thought we could finally be a free people. How wrong we were!" She laughed bitterly. "The Soviets were nothing compared to the Taleban. I had a job then, a family then, a life then. Under the Taleban I have nothing. They stoned my son in front of me -- for listening to music! My daughter--" she started sobbing, and I held her. "They raped her in front of me," she continued. "She was just fifteen. The local Mullah said that his men were not at fault. He claimed my daughter had acted promiscuous by not wearing a veil and had gotten what she deserved." At this point, Ferooza broke down, and I found myself unable to hold back my own tears.

I didn't go back to the camp for a long time after I meet Ferooza -- I couldn't face the horrors. When I finally regained the courage and returned to the camp, I was told that Ferooza had died just a few weeks earlier; the other women whispered that she simply lost the will to live.

My sadness is accompanied by a fear that such brutalities will become matter-of-fact. But I have developed a firm conviction: I want to do something to help these women -- not hide from them, as I did with Ferooza. I am determined to make a difference, and now I know that even individual effort makes a world of difference.

Being Offbeat

This type of approach is risky, but because it has the potential to be so effective, it is worth considering. The same warnings apply here that we enumerated for humor in the Tone section. Try to be subtly and creatively clever rather than outrageous.

This applicant begins with a joke about his prospective institution: "You'd think I would have had my fill of Indiana winters. But, here I am, applying to go back, ready to dig my parka out of storage. It's not like I've been gone long enough to forget the cold, either. In some ways, I feel as if that permacloud is still hanging over me." The introduction goes on to make some jokes about the applicant's potential concerns. These musings don't serve much of a substantive purpose except to establish the writer's familiarity with the school. On the other hand, they do make the reader more comfortable with the writer's style as he goes on to make more serious points.

✦ Sample Essay

This applicant immediately engaged the reader with a witty and almost conversational style, then segued gracefully into a Statement of Purpose.

You'd think I would have had my fill of Indiana winters. But, here I am, applying to go back, ready to dig my parka out of storage. It's not like I've been gone long enough to forget the cold, either. In some ways, I feel as if that permacloud is still hanging over me. I graduated this past May, and I think my toes just stopped tingling a couple of weeks ago. But I can deal with the winters. I can handle the Hoosiers. I don't mind if the football team loses even more games next year.

So, why come back to my alma mater? To be honest, I'll never fit the profile of the plaid-clad, legacy-bred alum who looks back on his/her undergrad experience as "da best four years of my life." I do, however, feel very grateful for the education. I majored in English and Communication, programs which complemented each other well. The time I spent in writing workshops was productive and rewarding. Also, the validation I received-the stories accepted for RE:VISIONS, the laughter and compliments at Juggler readings- inspired me to keep writing.

I feel that your program provides a nurturing and challenging environment. I aim to develop my talent, to take more risks, and to let my characters lead me, and I know I can work toward these goals in a graduate workshop setting with fewer distractions and a more committed community. I learned quite a bit from [faculty name]. He made me question certain decisions but resisted the temptation to lecture or exert too strong an influence. I regret that I didn't get to study with [faculty name]. I think we have similar styles and concerns, Catholicism for one. A survivor of seventeen years of Catholic school, I find a wealth of material in confessionals, virgin births, and splinters of the true cross. I know I can write funny stuff, but I want to focus my wit as pointedly as she does.

Mainly, I'm looking for two years to devote to the work. I expect to be inspired by other members of the writing community and to form closer working relationships with the faculty. I'm looking forward to criticism, camaraderie, and even the cold. It builds character, so they say.

✦ Conclusions

The second most important part of your essay, behind only the introduction, is the conclusion. Just as the introduction had the purpose of drawing in the reader, the conclusion's foremost function should be to leave the reader with a lasting impression. This section offers guidelines on ways you can maximize the impact of that impression. These guidelines can be grouped into three categories, each of which encompasses a lesson on what not to do.

Synthesize, Don't Summarize

The chief difference between these two tactics is that the former deals with themes while the latter deals with facts/experiences, though there is some overlap. You do not need to recap the essay paragraph-by-paragraph. You do not need to remind the reader of the experiences you have discussed (except as individual experiences might be tied to certain themes you want to synthesize).

You do want to reiterate key themes, but preferably not in a way that merely repeats them. Instead, in synthesizing these key themes in your conclusion, you should ideally be adding a fresh perspective. Try to tie themes together and demonstrate how they complement each other. In doing so, you should always avoid trite and clichéd generalizations.

In this essay, this applicant uses the conclusion to synthesize the second half of the essay. It's worth noting that he does not mention the content about recovering from addiction, because he could have tied this in with his renewed interest in public policy. Nevertheless, the concluding sentences do an effective job of linking his past experiences with his career goals: "After getting my master's in public administration, I would like to work in the area of economic development in the Third World, particularly Latin America. The setting might be a private (possibly church-based) development agency, the UN, the OAS, one of the multilateral development banks, or a government agency. What I need from graduate school is the academic foundation for such a career. What I offer in return is a perspective that comes from significant involvement in policy issues at the grassroots level, where they originate and ultimately must be resolved."

✦ Sample Essay

My longtime fascination with politics and international affairs is reflected in my participation, starting in high school, in activities such as student council, school board meetings, Vietnam war protests, the McCarthy campaign, and the grape boycott. As each new cause came along, I was always ready to go to Washington or the state capital to wave a sign or chant slogans. Although I look back on these activities today with some chagrin, I realize they did help me to develop, at an early age, a sense of concern for social and political issues and a genuine desire to play a role.

As an undergraduate, I was more interested in social than academic development. During my last two years, I became involved with drugs and alcohol and devoted little time to my studies, doing only as much as was necessary to maintain a B average. After graduation my drug use became progressively worse; without the motivation or ability to look for a career job, I worked for a time in a factory and then, for three years, as a cab driver in New York City.

In 1980 I finally "hit bottom" and became willing to accept help. I joined both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and for the next several years the primary business of my life was recovery. Although I had several "slips" in the beginning, I have now enjoyed nearly seven years of complete freedom from drug and alcohol use. I mention my bout with addiction because I think it is important in answering two issues that presumably will be of concern to the admissions committee: my lackluster undergraduate record and the fact that I have waited until the age of 34 to begin preparing academically for a career in public policy. It would be an oversimplification to call addiction the cause for either of these things; rather I would say it was the most obvious manifestation of an underlying immaturity that characterized my post adolescent years. More importantly, the discipline of recovery has had a significant impact on my overall emotional growth.

During the last years of my addiction I was completely oblivious to the world around me. Until 1983 I didn't even realize that there had been a revolution in Nicaragua or that one was going on in El Salvador. Then I rejoined the Quaker Meeting, in which I had been raised as a child, and quickly gravitated to its Peace and Social Order Committee. They were just then initiating a project to help refugees from Central America, and I joined enthusiastically in the work. I began reading about Central America and, later, teaching myself Spanish. I got to know refugees who were victims of poverty and oppression, became more grateful for my own economic and educational advantages, and developed a strong desire to give something back by working to provide opportunities to those who have not been so lucky.

In 1986 I went to Nicaragua to pick coffee for two weeks. This trip changed my whole outlook on both the United States and the underdeveloped world. The combination of living for two weeks amid poverty and engaging in long political discussions with my fellow coffee pickers, including several well-educated professionals who held views significantly to the left of mine, profoundly shook my world view. I came back humbled, aware of how little I knew about the world and eager to learn more. I began raiding the public library for everything I could find on the Third World and started subscribing to a wide variety of periodicals, from scholarly journals such as Foreign Affairs and Asian Survey to obscure newsletters such as Through Our Eyes (published by U.S. citizens living in Nicaragua).

Over the intervening two years, my interest has gradually focused on economics. I have come to realize that economic development (including equitable distribution of wealth) is the key to peace and social justice, both at home and in the Third World. I didn't study economics in college and have found it difficult to understand the economic issues that are at the heart of many policy decisions. At the same time, though, I am fascinated by the subject. Given my belief that basic economic needs are among the most fundamental of human rights, how can society best go about providing for them? Although I call myself an idealist, I'm convinced that

true idealism must be pragmatic. I am not impressed, for example, by simplistic formulations that require people to be better than they are. As a Quaker I believe that the means are inseparable from the end; as an American I believe that democracy and freedom of expression are essential elements of a just society, though I'm not wedded to the idea that our version of democracy is the only legitimate one.

Although I have carved out a comfortable niche in my present job, with a responsible position and a good salary, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the prospect of a career in business applications programming. More and more of my time and energy is now being absorbed by community activities. After getting my master's in public administration, I would like to work in the area of economic development in the Third World, particularly Latin America. The setting might be a private (possibly church-based) development agency, the UN, the OAS, one of the multilateral development banks, or a government agency. What I need from graduate school is the academic foundation for such a career. What I offer in return is a perspective that comes from significant involvement in policy issues at the grass roots level, where they originate and ultimately must be resolved.

Seeing how the pieces fit together leaves us with a clear point to take away. Moreover, the last sentence is key to the lasting impression he creates, as it provides a fresh interpretation of the significance of his work at the grassroots level.

If in the process of synthesizing you are able to invoke your introduction, you will add to your essay a further sense of cohesion and closure. There are a number of different ways this can be accomplished. For example, you might complete a story you started in the introduction, as in [this essay](#), or you might show how something has changed in your present since the timeframe of the introduction.

✦ Sample Essay

This applicant successfully told about overcoming cultural disadvantage by creating an interesting short story for the reader.

The spring quarter had just ended in my second year of college. As I sat in the airplane, waiting for it to take off, I was terrified. If man was meant to fly he would have been given wings, and since I did not have a pair of wings, flying was very uncomfortable for me. Although the excitement of backpacking through Europe slowly began to dissipate this feeling of flight anxiety, the roar of the engines and the sluggish movement towards the runway sent my fear sky high. With death impending, my thoughts turned retrospective, reviewing moments of my past and how they would affect the future that I would not have.

This was not my first flight on an airplane, so I could not explain this deathly fear of flying. My initial introduction to flying came when I was four, traveling half way across the world from

South Korea to meet my new family in America. Although I was flying alone, I soon met several passengers who were happy to keep an eye on me and help me pass the time. When the flight was over, I was introduced to my new family; there were Thomas and Penny, a.k.a. Dad and Mom, and two boys and two girls, who I am proud to call brothers and sisters.

I don't know about reincarnation or anything like that, but I felt that I had known this group of people forever. It was as if I was a piece of a jigsaw puzzle; I was a piece, and combined with others, we made a nice "picture." From the first day, I gave them as much love as a person could give, and received it back tenfold. There were the usual family problems-fighting siblings and parental confrontations- but we were a great family. I never really thought that I or my family was different until we moved to a small town on the coast.

The town was predominantly filled with white, middle class people. When I arrived I was 12 and the only Asian in the entire school. It never occurred to me that I was different, but as people started to harass me about my looks, I was devastated that I did not fit in. My family gave me a lot of support, and with a lot of determination, I was soon accepted as one of the guys. These initial experiences, however, imprinted an image about the naiveté of people, and how quick people are to judge a person without getting to know him first. However bad the experience was, it did make me a better person, making me more prone to give people a chance before passing judgment on them.

All I had to do was survive the airplane flight. After a few moments of turbulence and very dangerous levels of anxiety, the plane began to fly smoothly. I finally settled down as I began reviewing my makeshift plan of attack to see Europe. My life was in order, unlike the points of Europe I wanted to see, but then, who wants to follow a set plan when there is so much to see!

Expand on Broader Significance-Within Reason

One way to ensure that your closing paragraph is effective is to tie your ideas to some broader implications, whether about yourself or your field. However, do not get carried away. Some applicants feel they must make reference to changing the world or derive some grand philosophical truths from their experiences. Remember to stay grounded and focused on your personal details.

[This applicant's](#) conclusion ties his goals in teaching to a broader issue about research limitations at smaller liberal arts colleges. He does not express the goal of revolutionizing education, but instead simply wants to make a contribution that has personal significance to him. The final sentence invokes the tradition of scholars before him. Such a tactic is not usually advisable, because it can sound forced and generic, but in this case, the applicant has established his focus on a specific intellectual topic-human memory-so it's not as vaguely trite as invoking Plato, Descartes, and Kant in the search for truth.

★Sample Essay

Note: This essay appears unedited for instructional purposes. Essays edited by EssayEdge are dramatically improved. For samples of EssayEdge editing, please [click here](#).

Ever since my first psychology lecture, I have been fascinated by the nature of human memory. Indeed, human memory is one of the most tenacious and enigmatic problems ever faced by philosophers and psychologists. The discussion of memory dates back to the early Greeks when Plato and Aristotle originally likened it to a "wax tablet." In 1890, pioneer William James adopted the metaphorical framework and equated memory to a "house" to which thirty years later Sigmund Freud chimed that memory was closer to "rooms in a house." In 1968, Atkinson and Shrifren retained the metaphorical framework but referred to memory as "stores". The fact that the controversy surrounding human memory has been marked more by analogy than definition suggests, however, that memory is a far more complex phenomenon than has been uncovered thus far. I intend to spend the rest of my professional life researching the nature of human memory and solving the riddle posed yet cunningly dodged by generations of philosophers and psychologists.

When I first came to psychology, however, I wanted to be a clinical psychologist. Only upon enrolling in Dr. Helga Noice's Cognitive Psychology course, did I discover the excitement of doing research. The course required us to test our own autobiographical memory by conducting an experiment similar to the one run in 1986 by W. Wagenaar. Over the course of the term, I recorded events from my personal life on event cards and set them aside without reviewing them. After studying the effect serial position on the recollection of autobiographical memories, I hypothesized that events that, when I sat down at the end of therm to recall those same events I had described on the event cards, that events that had occurred later in the term would be recalled with greater frequency than events that had occurred earlier. Although the experiment was of simple design and predictable results, I found the processes incredibly exciting. Autobiographical memory in particular fascinated me because I realized how crucial, yet fragile, memory is. Why was my memory of even ten weeks so imperfect? What factors contributed to that imperfection? Could such factors be controlled?

I had ignited my passion for experimental psychology. Suddenly, I had many pressing questions about memory that I wanted to research. Under the guidance of Dr. Noice, I continued to study human memory. I worked closely with Dr. Noice on several research experiments involving expert memory, specifically the memory of professional actors. Dr. Noice would select a scene from a play and then a professional actor would score it for beats, that is, go through the scene grouping sections of dialogue together according to the intent of the character. Some actors use this method to learn dialogue rather than rote memorization. After they were finished, I would type up the scene and the cued recall test. Next, I would moderate the experimental sessions by scoring the actor's cued recall for accuracy and then helping with the statistical analysis. My work culminated with my paper, "Teaching Students to Remember Complex Material Through the Use of Professional Actors' Learning Strategies."

My paper accompanied a poster presentation at the Third Annual Tri-State Undergraduate Psychology

Conference. In addition, I presented a related paper entitled "Type of Learning Strategy and Verbatim Retention of Complex Material" at the ILLOWA (Illinois-Iowa) Conference the following year. Again, I was involved in all aspects of the experiment, from typing the protocol and administering it to the subjects, to analyzing the data and finally presenting my results.

The opportunity to perform this research was invaluable, particularly as I began taking independent research seminars in my senior year. For the seminars, I was required to write an extensive review of the literature and then design a research proposal on any topic of my choice. Although I had participated in all aspects of research previously, this was my first opportunity to select my own topic. I was immediately certain that I wanted to explore at human memory. But I spent a long time considering what aspect of memory I found most intriguing and possible to tackle within the confines of the research seminar. I had always been interested in the legal implications of memory, so I to investigate eyewitness memory.

In retrospect, my choice was also informed by my recollection about an experiment I had read about several years earlier. In the experiment, subjects read about Helen Keller. Later they were given a recall test. Still later they were given an additional test to determine the source of their knowledge about Helen Keller. The authors discovered that subjects could not determine the source of their knowledge, that is, they could not distinguish whether specific details of their knowledge about Helen Keller came from the information provided by the experimenters or if the details came from another source at an earlier time. Once their new knowledge about Helen Keller had been assimilated into their previous knowledge about Helen Keller, there was no way to separate the information according to the source it came from.

I wondered what the implications of that conclusion would be for eyewitnesses. I wondered if an eyewitness account could be corrupted by misleading post-event information. My research proposal was entitled "The Rate of Memory Trace Decay and its Effect on Eyewitness Accuracy." While I was not able to complete the experiment in its entirety, I was excited by the fact that I created a possible research protocol. Immediately, I knew I wanted to pursue the field of experimental psychology. My success in course work and my passion for research demonstrated to me that I had both the interest and ability to enter this challenging and rewording field.

I have dedicated my undergraduate years to preparing myself for graduate work in experimental psychology. Once receive my doctorate, I intend to pursue research on human memory while teaching psychology to undergraduates at a small, liberal arts college, similar to the one I attended. It was, after all, my undergraduate research experience that gave me the opportunity to come to psychology with an interest in counseling people, but to leave with a passion for investigating the nature of human thinking. Undergraduates at smaller liberal arts colleges are often left out of research, which makes my desire to provide such experiences that much stronger. In the years ahead, I look forward to teaching as well as continuing my

research. In the company of such greats as Aristotle, James, and Freud, I endeavor to leave behind my own contribution on the nature of human memory.

Don't Add Entirely New Information-Except to Look Ahead

We have used the word "fresh" here several times, and what we're mainly talking about is perspectives and ideas. You should avoid adding entirely new information about your experiences. In shorter essays, you may have to pack details everywhere, but in general, if it's an important experience, it should come earlier.

That said, writing about your future goals is a strong way to end. After you have established your background and qualifications in the previous paragraphs, delineating your goals can help synthesize these topics, because you are tying your themes together in the context of where you will go next.

[This applicant's](#) conclusion is a straightforward, well thought out description of her professional goals. Such an ending demonstrates to the reader that she has given much consideration to her future and the role a Ph.D. in literature can play in it. Moreover, she makes clear that while she has definite career goals in mind, she also appreciates literature for its own sake. This kind of natural affinity for her subject of study serves to make her a dedicated and genuinely engaged student, and, therefore, a more attractive candidate to the admissions committee.

✦Sample Essay

Having majored in literary studies (world literature) as an undergraduate, I would now like to concentrate on English and American literature.

I am especially interested in nineteenth-century literature, women's literature, Anglo-Saxon poetry, and folklore and folk literature. My personal literary projects have involved some combination of these subjects. For the oral section of my comprehensive exams, I specialized in nineteenth-century novels by and about women. The relationship between "high" and folk literature became the subject for my honors essay, which examined Toni Morrison's use of classical, biblical, African, and Afro-American folk tradition in her novel. I plan to work further on this essay, treating Morrison's other novels and perhaps preparing a paper suitable for publication.

In my studies toward a doctoral degree, I hope to examine more closely the relationship between high and folk literature. My junior year and private studies of Anglo-Saxon language and literature have caused me to consider the question of where the divisions between folklore, folk literature, and high literature lie. Should I attend your school, I would like to resume my studies of Anglo-Saxon poetry, with special attention to its folk elements.

Writing poetry also figures prominently in my academic and professional goals. I have just begun submitting to the smaller journals with some success and am gradually building a working manuscript for a collection. The dominant theme of this collection relies on poems that draw from classical, biblical, and folk traditions, as well as everyday experience, in order to celebrate the process of giving and taking life, whether literal or figurative. My poetry both draws from and influences my academic studies. Much of what I read and study finds a place in my creative work as subject. At the same time, I study the art of literature by taking part in the creative process, experimenting with the tools used by other authors in the past.

In terms of a career, I see myself teaching literature, writing criticism, and going into editing or publishing poetry. Doctoral studies would be valuable to me in several ways. First, your teaching assistantship program would provide me with the practical teaching experience I am eager to acquire. Further, earning a Ph.D. in English and American literature would advance my other two career goals by adding to my skills, both critical and creative, in working with language. Ultimately, however, I see the Ph.D. as an end in itself, as well as a professional stepping-stone; I enjoy studying literature for its own sake and would like to continue my studies on the level demanded by the Ph.D. program.

✦ Lesson Six: Editing and Revising

Even the best writers need to edit their work. Their first drafts might be very strong already, but they can always get better. You too will find aspects to improve during the editing process, from broad content issues down to basic word choice.

Try to write a complete first draft before you worry too much about editing. Otherwise you might find your creativity hampered by your analytical side. Once you have a first draft finished, set it aside for a few days or more if you have that luxury. When you return to it with a fresh perspective, you will probably notice many problems that did not occur to you before and recognize better ways of handling various points.

Do not hesitate to edit at all levels, even if it means you'll be doing a lot of rewriting. Throw out entire paragraphs if you can't recall what purpose they were serving. Replace boring passages with vivid details, banal generalizations with sharp insights. Cut and paste until you've achieved the optimal structure. Fine-tune every sentence until it is clear, concise, and graceful.

Is there such a thing as over-editing? If you begin to lose sight of your goals and can no longer distinguish between constructive and unconstructive changes, then you may begin to detract from the freshness and strength of your essay. At that point, the only course you can take is to set the essay aside again until you can read it with a clear mind.

EssayEdge provides significant help with the editing and revising process. Having edited tens of thousands of admissions essays, our Harvard-educated editors can take a poor, boring essay and make it a powerful personal essay. We will carefully edit the essay to improve the impact of the introduction and conclusion, the logic and transition, the content, and the grammar. For more on our services, please visit our editing section.

✦ Select One:

- **Editing Checklist**
- **Final Steps**

✦ EssayEdge Extra: Soliciting Feedback

All writers rely on outside feedback. You may want to use friends, family, and teachers as an initial resource before submitting your essay for more hands-on editing by EssayEdge. While the people you know can give you valuable suggestions based on their relationship with you, EssayEdge offers a vital perspective in providing objective criticism and expertise specific to the admissions essay.

The following is an evaluative questionnaire for you to give your readers along with the essay:

1. Did my opening paragraph capture your attention?

2. Did you find the statement as a whole to be interesting?

3. Did you find it to be well written?

4. Did it seem positive, upbeat?

5. Did it sound like me?

6. Do you regard it as an honest and forthright presentation of who I am?

7. Did it seem to answer the question(s)?

8. Can you think of anything relevant that I might have inadvertently omitted?

9. Is there material within the statement that seems inappropriate?

10. Did you gain any insight about me from reading this?

11. Did you notice any typos or other errors?

12. Do you think the statement has in any way distinguished me from other applicants?

✦ Editing Checklist

The following checklist is divided into the basic categories that we used to organize this course: content, structure, and style.

CONTENT

Are you answering the actual question given in the prompt?

Have you been sincere and personal?

Is your essay within the word limit?

Will your reader find the essay interesting?

Are you showing rather than telling?

Does your introduction grab the reader's attention?

Do you explore your experiences in sufficient depth?

Does your essay contain a high level of detail and concrete evidence?

Have you avoided unsubstantiated claims?

Do you offer specific, personal insights rather than trite generalizations and clichés?

Does your essay reveal anything meaningful about your character?

Do you avoid summarizing information that can be found elsewhere on your application?

Will your essay make you stand out?

Does your conclusion leave a lasting impression?

STRUCTURE

Can you identify an overarching theme? Have you articulated that theme in the essay?

Does your theme have multiple layers and genuine depth?

Do you have a reason for placing every paragraph where it is?

Do your paragraphs flow smoothly? Are there any gaps or jumps?

Does each point build upon previous points, or does your essay sound like a list?

Have you written insightful transitions and resolutions that highlight your key themes?

Are your stories well integrated into your essay?

Is the essay clear and coherent? Have you strengthened its impact by using the optimal structure?

STYLE

Have you achieved a simple, straightforward style?

Have you varied your sentence constructions?

Have you avoided unnecessarily fancy vocabulary?

Have you avoided passive voice?

Have you achieved active writing through the use of strong verbs?

Have you avoided overusing adjectives and adverbs?

Is your tone conversational, rather than too casual or too formal?

Have you conveyed confidence, enthusiasm, and passion?

✦Final Steps

Read Your Essay Out Loud: To help you polish the essay even further, read it out loud. You will be amazed at the faulty grammar and awkward language that your ears can detect. This will also give you a good sense of the flow of the piece and will alert you to anything that sounds too abrupt or out of place. Good writing, like good music, has a certain rhythm. How does your essay sound? Is it interesting and varied or drawn out and monotonous?

Have Your Essay Professionally Edited: Named "the world's premier application essay editing service" by The New York Times, EssayEdge has helped more applicants write successful application essays than any other company in the world. Please click here to have your essay professionally edited.

<div align="center">

Congratulations!
You have completed the course.
We wish you the best of luck throughout the application process.

</div>

Statement of Purpose

GreedyRouter

http://www.1point3acres.com/bbs

Computer networks is a research field full of excitements and discoveries. There are a lot of design issues like performance, scalability and security. In performance alone, there are also a variety of benchmarks we can name; for example, throughput, delay, fairness and distributedness are among those factors. As new fields of networking research are emerging, the formulation of the problems changes with the time. In my perspective, the uncertainty and the diversity of the network research is the most challenging part and the source of my interest.

For me, I did not understand the excitement of network research at first. When I was a freshman, my advisor asked me to port a P2P network game to C++. I was excited at first because it was my first project in this university. I was programming for 5 hours a day and I kept my initiative for about one semester. Despite all the effort I made to the project, I made very little progress. After a while, I felt tired because porting code from Java to C++ was not really my interest. Even so, I learnt a lot about the design patterns in software engineering at that time thanks to the project. From my today's perspective, lack of experience and background might be another factor for me being so slow.

At my sophomore year, I found more fun in the algorithms than the design. I can still remember the day at the third semester, after listening to a seminar on S4(a routing algorithm) hosted by a professor from UPenn, I feel that's the work I would like to explore in the future. So I requested for a switch from P2P to geographic routing. I began to find more fun in that project.

In that year, I also tried to explore the machine learning for my XXXX course project. At that time, I just wanted to explore something other than networking. I tried to improve a tree learning algorithm called RIP. I thought I was able to make some discovery on the tree pruning by improving the heuristics. However, it was an unsuccessful attempt again. I also found AI was not so appealing to me as the algorithms in networking. Nevertheless, I still appreciate that attempt, because machine learning told me that overfitting exists. A straight-A student might not necessarily excel in his research. I learnt a lesson from that and decided to take the risk to challenge myself and learn more about my interest and potential.

The first semester in my junior year proves the most productive semester. I implemented a tag-based multipath routing algorithm on my advisor's simulator, by applying a global hash function and a tag specified by the source. The algorithm doubles the path diversity. Besides that, it requires fewer states on the intermediate nodes and eliminates the need of intermediate prime numbers. I believed the algorithm looks cute, though I cannot find any practical implications of my algorithms at that time. I got two B's for my major courses that semester. I think the main reason is that I was too overwhelmed by my UROP project and those courses and missed some assignments occasionally. My original plan was to port it to wireless sensor networks in TinyOS, since my advisor's simulator is about wireless network above the network layer and he thought we might be able to improve the throughput of sensor networks by trying different paths.

At the first semester in my junior year, I also tried to be a tutor for the introductory programming course. While my first programming language was Scheme at the university, I taught Java to the freshmen. It was an extremely interesting experience. I liked to challenge the students by asking them the questions which requires more understanding about the algorithms and software engineering. For example, I showed them the examples on the binary search, dynamic programming and also design patterns like factories. Later one of the students gave me such a comment: The discussion was dry at first. However, I liked the supplementary questions. In my perspective, that's the comment I liked most, because teaching for me is more about passion, inspiration and methods of thinking, instead of the knowledge alone, as the course title

indicated: Programmming Methodology.

Then at the second semester, I went to UW-Madison for the student exchange program. After talking with the chair there, an expert on modelling, I really learnt a lot and I can still remember her words, "You should think of something that will make an impact." I knew the importance of impact. Unfortunately, my algorithm looks unlikely to improve the throughput by a factor of more than 2. Also, the throughput does not seem to be the main concern for the wireless sensor networks.

I was lost for quite a long time after the talk. In the summer, I ported S4 from TinyOS 1.x to 2.x just to familiarize myself with TinyOS and even wanted to start a new project. I thought hard about what kind of difference I can make in my final year. I take the advanced network course here and find the Prof XXX's webpage. Her project *XXX* gives me insights about the design challenges. I begin to review my UROP in a different way. There are prices we need to pay for the source routing, i.e, the decrease in the throughput, despite a number of benefits in terms of security, fairness, etc., The problem is to study the tradeoff between all those factors. Improvement in throughput might not be as significant as the other factors like energy consumption in wireless sensor networks. Nevertheless, higher throughput means less collisons, which on the other hand improves the energy efficiency. Even an improvement with a factor of less than 2 is important for the energy consumption.

My plan for my Final Year Project is to investigate the impact of different path selection mechanisms for wireless sensor networks. At the moment, we already have the testbed set up. Algorithmes like GDSTR(a geographic routing algorithm) and S4 are running on the testbed. What we want to achieve is a better control over the flows. By solving the optimization problem for non-linear programming, we are able to control the sending rate for each of the flows. What is unclear to us is how we should control the number of flows and their directions, and how to capture the statistics for the optimization problem since wireless sensor networks are limited in energy.

My long-term goal is to study the challenges proposed by Prof XXX's project page and try to come up with new problems. In my perspective, besides the analysis saturated case in one of the papers, we might also want to consider the practical cases where the traffic pattern varies. I think the traffic pattern is quite important in the network research. However, nowadays, the simulation of traffic pattern is so complex that we have to use traces to simulate the real situations. So I am also thinking about studying and classifying practical traffic patterns for simulations, just as what people did for the network topology before.

For my career, I want to be a computer scientist with expertise on networking. I liked the diversity of the networking. It is a live and emerging research field that is worth my life-time effort. I got the background during my undergraduate studies. However, a PhD study will enable me to have an in-depth understanding of different networks, which I believe is a neccessary condition for excellence in research. I also want to be a professor in the future. As a child born in the rural areas in China, I understand the difficulty and struggle in acquiring new knowledge due to lack of guidance before the university. A good professor like my advisor really helped me a lot. I wish my experience can also give the students some guidance, both in the knowledge and the attitude.

To sum up, I will continue my endeavor to explore the design challenges of the networks. I need the chance where I can work closely with the people who is keen on this research. Duke's program seems to fit me well and I hope I can make a difference and contribute more to the network research community after my graduation if I get the chance.

Personal Statement

Junjie Cai

University of Science and Technology of China

I have defined my career goal as being a leading specialist in computer science and engineering, utilizing innovative technologies to address the challenging problems in the academic fields of multimedia, computer vision as well as pattern recognition. To be a prominent scientist or engineer requires many attributes: enthusiasm for learning various subjects, aspiration to solve emerging problems, dedication to research in particular fields.

I can still remember my first project experience. When I was a junior in Harbin Institute of Technology, my academic performance in courses won me an opportunity to take the class of Linear Control Theory by Prof. Sijiu Liu. As he was an American engineer, the English-edition textbook as well as our discussion about American advanced technology initially inspires me to study abroad. I played a central role in developing a circuit simulation system in his class.With the help from senior department fellows, I finished this project by applying theoretical knowledge in closed-loop control system into practical design and implementation with matlab software. And the more important thing is that I was amazed by computer programs' curial role in modern control system. Even if there was one tiny bug in a piece of code, the whole system did not work properly. I felt more enthusiastic about learning how to develop reliable program and decided to further my study in computer science related disciplines.

With inspirations from basic math and engineering courses, I got to know the Automation and Drives laboratory supervised by Prof. Xiaohua Zhang, in which I worked with a graduate student on a project of parameter identification algorithm. It was a quite challenging project for me as I had no experience of relevant math courses for postgraduate students. In order to catch up with other students working on this project, I worked in the laboratory all day long, doing experiments and studying relevant theories. Through extensive reading of papers and materials, I tried to understand them by repeating their simulation experiments, to testify their function in improving identification performance and to compare their effects in similar simulation environment. We finally managed to utilize a kind of kalman filter to realize the identification for unknown parameters. At the meantime, I discovered some of their shortcomings like high implementation costs. Unfortunately, I failed to solve these problems due to limitation of knowledge and time at that period. This was my first exposure to scientific and engineering research which uplifted me and offered great inspiration and enlightenment, especially when we had improvement of algorithm. Upon graduation from HIT, my undergraduate research advisor Prof. Xiaohua Zhang gave me a lot of advices on how to improve paper writing and presentation skills, which I thought were indispensable for successful research work. After demonstrating high research potential, I was awarded with positive remarks and selected as a candidate for a master degree waiving entrance exams to continue my research concerning pattern recognition in the University of Science and Technology of China.

Soon after I started my postgraduate study, Prof. Zengfu Wang recruited only two first-year students, including me, into his multimedia group as research assistants. I worked with Dr. Zheng-Jun Zha on a research topic, "Evaluation of Histogram Based Interest Point Detector In Web Image Classification and Search" which was published in the IEEE international Conference of Multimedia and Expo(ICME 2010). After that research, my enthusiasm for multimedia research ignited as I became fully aware that massive web image are triggering intensive research for various web image application, such as image classification, image search, image re-ranking, etc. This led me to devote much time to read a large amount of papers in the fields of multimedia and computer vision. Apart from that, I also took courses such as "Pattern Recognition" and "Artificial Intelligence", which might be potentially helpful for my research. I achieved a top remark among nearly 200 classmates in those courses and was selected as a teaching assistant for the next year.

In my later research, I found existing system had difficulties in generating satisfactory social group suggestions and user had to assign all their images to groups. So I tried to produce accurate recommendation of suitable photo-sharing groups from a user's personal photo collection. Based on the above work and new findings, I submitted my paper to the 17th International MultiMedia Modeling Conference. Through this work I got a taste for experimentation and implementation of my own ideas.

In July 2010, I went to Singapore to participate ICME 2010. During these five days, the lectures given by professors from America who are dedicated on multimedia research helped me to realize the wide gap between China and America. And I saw that I was not on the frontline of computer engineering and reaching the bottleneck of my research. Now I am determined to apply for a PhD in Multimedia related areas. And I know your University is the ideal location for my study. Your Department occupies a forefront position in the computer technology field, especially in the area of computer vision and multimedia. Students and professors in your department published valuable papers in top conferences and journals every year, and most of their research have close relationship with industrial community. My investigation of your program revealed an honorable academic community, state-of-the-art facilities and stimulating research atmosphere, all very conductive to the development of my later academic career.

Sincerely yours,
Junjie Cai

Statement of Purpose

Mihai Pătraşcu

My long and enjoyable interaction with computer science goes back one and a half decades, to the moment when I first learned to program. Before college, my main motivation in studying computer science was participating in computer olympiads. Among my achievements there were winning the first prize at the Romanian National Olympiad 9 years in a row, and obtaining 7 international medals (among which, 2 gold and 1 silver medal at IOI).

In college, I was naturally attracted to research in theoretical computer science. I have been working in this area for three years, under the supervision of Erik Demaine. Below, I touch on some of the contributions I made during this time. My main research interests are related to complexity in concrete models of computation (lower bounds), as well as advanced data structures and algorithms.

My plans for a PhD are centered around research in theoretical computer science. After the PhD, I will likely want to obtain a position in the academia. In this, I am motivated by my good experiences with teaching, including as a teaching assistant for a new graduate course at MIT.

Concrete Complexity. My most extensive contributions to date have been in the realm of dynamic cell-probe complexity, through a sequence of papers published in SICOMP, STOC, SODA and ICALP. The cell-probe model is a strong nonuniform model of computation, used for analyzing static or dynamic data-structure problems. For dynamic problems, lower bounds have been proved using the chronogram technique of Fredman and Saks, dating back to STOC'89. In that paper, a lower bound of $\Omega(\lg n / \lg \lg n)$ was derived, where n is the number of bits in the problem representation. Despite a flurry of works showing similar lower bounds for various problems, no higher lower bound could be proved *for 15 years*, and this limitation was recognized in papers and surveys as the *central open problem* of the field.

In papers with Erik Demaine appearing in SICOMP, STOC and SODA, we showed $\Omega(\lg n)$ lower bounds for maintaining partial sums and dynamic connectivity, breaking this long-standing barrier. Our bound demonstrates the optimality of the folklore solution to the partial-sums problem (augmented binary trees), which is quintessential of dynamic computation. Despite intense study, a tight bound was not even known in weaker algebraic models. Our bound for dynamic connectivity proves the optimality of several dynamic graph algorithms, including the famous dynamic trees of Sleator and Tarjan.

My work on these problems was recognized by the Computer Research Association's *award for best undergraduate research* in 2004. Interestingly, our original approach seemed entirely different from the chronogram technique. However, in joint work with Corina Tarniţă (Pătraşcu), we showed that this technique is equivalent to a subtle variation of the chronogram technique. Using this better understanding, we offered an almost quadratic improvement in the best lower bound for the bit-probe model, solving the *first open problem in a survey* by Miltersen. Our work received the *best student paper* award in ICALP.

In a recently submitted paper with Mikkel Thorup, we achieved a *break-through in static cell-probe complexity*. So far, there was essentially one known technique for proving space–time trade-offs for static data structures: reduction to asymmetric communication complexity. However, it is known that this approach cannot prove superconstant lower bounds for the most natural setting of parameters: the query and

a machine word have $O(\lg n)$ bits. In addition, communication complexity cannot differentiate polynomial factors in the space, while for most natural problems, the interesting behavior occurs inside the polynomial domain. We prove the first lower bound which breaks the communication barrier, and does not suffer from these limitations. A fundamental implication of our result is the *first separation between polynomial and near-linear space* (any space $n^{1+o(1)}$). Our bounds give a complete understanding of predecessor search, one of the most fundamental and well-studied problems. A surprising conclusion is that the famous data structure of van Emde Boas is optimal for quasilinear space, and in the dynamic case. Another interesting conclusion applies to the external-memory model: it is always optimal to either use the classic, comparison-based B-trees, or use the best RAM solution, which ignores the benefits of external memory.

These results open the door to many interesting problems in cell-probe complexity, which I plan to investigate. In the dynamic case, one could hope to prove polylogarithmic lower bounds (e.g., for range queries in constant dimension) or even $n^{\Omega(1)}$ (e.g., for dynamic problems in directed graphs). In both cases, these problems have been studied extensively on the upper-bound side, but we cannot hope to understand them without progress on the lower bounds. In the static scenario, one could ask for much higher lower bounds, now that we are not limited to communication complexity. In particular, it would be interesting to prove bounds demonstrating the "curse of dimensionality" which is conjectured to hold for problems of critical importance.

Though my results so far have centered around the cell-probe model, I maintain an active interest in analyzing other strong models of computation, such as circuits and branching programs. It is quite likely that the information-theoretic tools and intuition that I have employed in the cell-probe model will also prove useful in other contexts. As an illustration, in joint work with Adler, Demaine and Harvey to appear in SODA, we used tools from communication complexity to analyze information transmission across asymmetric channels. This problem has been investigated extensively in sensor networks, and many protocols have been proposed. We proved the first lower bounds for this problem, which almost match the behavior of the best known solution.

Data Structures and Algorithms.   My early training as programmer and competitor in computer olympiads have naturally given me a strong appreciation for algorithms. Despite my work in complexity, I find my instinctive patterns of reasoning are algorithmic.

One of my most influential papers, appearing in SICOMP and FOCS, concerns competitiveness of binary search trees. The famous dynamic optimality conjecture of Sleator and Tarjan asserts that splay trees are $O(1)$-competitive. However, no competitive ratio better than the trivial $O(\lg n)$ has been proved for splay trees or any other binary search tree, in *over two decades*. In joint work with Demaine, Harmon and Iacono, we described a new search tree which is provably $O(\lg \lg n)$-competitive. Of course, this result leaves two important open problems: are there $O(1)$-competitive search trees? and are splay trees $o(\lg n)$-competitive?

An important area of study in modern data structures is concerned with integer search problems. The van Emde Boas recursion is probably the most well-known result from the field, and its elegance helps motivate the field in general. For the predecessor problem, this algorithm is shown to be tight by my recent work with Mikkel Thorup mentioned above. However, for dynamic range reporting in one dimension, this turns out to not be the case. In joint work with Mortensen and Pagh appearing in STOC, we developed a *fundamental new recursive idea*, yielding a surprising exponential improvement in the query time. As opposed to van Emde Boas, who applies a binary search on paths of a trie, we apply a more complex recursion (similar to van Emde Boas search itself) on the paths. Nonetheless, the algorithm is remarkably clean and elegant.

Recently, I have been very interested in hashing and its applications. Our STOC paper on range reporting mentioned above needs to develop a *surprising hashing primitive*: a data structure which maintains a per-

fect hash function on a dynamic set, using sublinear memory (thus, without actually remembering the set). Tight upper and lower bounds for the space are developed in my subsequent LATIN paper with Demaine, Meyer auf der Heide and Pagh. An essential ingredient we develop is a dynamic dictionary which is simultaneously compact (uses asymptotically optimal space), and takes constant time per operation with high probability. Previous dictionaries could only achieve one of this desiderates. Using another set of hashing ideas, my WADS paper with Baran and Demaine achieves the first subquadratic algorithms for the famous 3SUM problem, exploiting the "parallelism" of the RAM or external memory models (given by bit-packing, respectively, larger memory pages).

There are many interesting open problems related to hashing, that I would like to investigate. Perhaps the most fundamental is the performance of deterministic dictionaries, which is one of the main uses of randomness in computation. Other interesting questions are related to permutation hash families, which also play a major role in cryptography. In the LATIN paper mentioned above, we develop an intriguing family of permutation hash functions, which fails to be k-wise independent for large k, yet has similar concentration bounds.

I also hold an interest in algorithmic number theory, and have three published results in the area. Additionally, in an ongoing collaborative research project, we are looking at the problem of counting primitive lattice points in planar shapes. This is an exciting question at the intersection of geometry and number theory, and has a long tradition on the mathematical side, dating back to Gauss. Our algorithm applies to polygons, and is significantly faster than previous methods for exact counting. In a paper with Corina Tarniţă (Pătraşcu) published in ANTS, we have already described a fast algorithm for a certain class of triangles. We used this to construct algorithms for rank and select queries in the Farey sequence, which are quadratically faster than enumerating the sequence.

Teaching.   I believe teaching is an integral part of doing research. A discovery is far from complete if one does not also find a way to present it to others. Even more importantly, organizing a vast array of result for presentation is a crucial skill that a researcher must share with a teacher, since without it, the researcher cannot gain a clear sense of direction in his work.

My early experiences with students came as a member of the scientific committee in Romanian national olympiads and one Balkan olympiad. There, one has to create problems which are original and elegant, while gauging the level of difficulty to select the best from a group of talented students. This requires perhaps the most elusive skill of a teacher: entering the students' minds to judge difficulty based on their abilities and a 5-hour time frame. While this is not a skill I can ever hope to fully master, contest result showed my problems were relevant, and my contributions were praised by the senior members of the committees.

My most significant and enjoyable teaching experience was as a teaching assistant for a graduate course on advanced data structures, taught by Erik Demaine. I created and graded the problem sets, and taught four lectures. Yet, the most interesting aspect was working with Erik to "create" the course from scratch. We had to decide what broad topics should be covered, and how to best present each topic. Given such an old and diverse field, this was a very challenging, but intellectually rewarding task. It was especially encouraging to receive feedback from people at other universities, who declared themselves impressed by the simultaneous breadth and coherence of the course.

Conclusions.   I look forward to continuing my research career as a PhD student. Above are a few of the open problems that motivate me, and I will continue to work on. In addition, as has happened frequently at MIT, interacting with members of your theory group will give me an invaluable opportunity to broaden my horizons, and work in many research areas that I cannot anticipate at the moment. Given my background, I believe I am in a good position to make crucial contributions in such pursuits.

Statement of Purpose

When I used the Google search or played my SNS, I couldn't help thinking how this quick and easy access to my desired information was possible in such a magical way. As I learned the courses Cryptology and The Principles of Database, I found myself absorbed in unearthing how the increasing volume and variety of data was processed especially when considering the security threats. I think that was the starting point where I found my real interest and began to explore the fabulous world of data. This unfailing penchant for probing into computer science issues has propelled me to embrace new challenges along the way. Having acquired a sturdy intellectual underpinning through rigorous undergraduate program and research experience in the laboratory, I feel it is the right time to apply for your master's program.

Matriculated by one of the top 3 in Information Security major among universities in China, I devoted myself whole-heartedly to the abundant computing courses, which allowed me to rank 2nd out of 88 students. And driven by the particular interest in data privacy and organization, I joined the *Totem Database Laboratory* in my sophomore year and began to actively get involved in projects covering the fields of database, cryptology and cloud storage etc. Two years of research experience in the laboratory witnessed the most valuable and fulfilling time I have ever experienced in my university life, during which I have made many research achievements, including the completion of some research projects, several technical reports and papers, and a national patent of innovation. I do love the feeling of learning and creative thinking when doing research in the laboratory. It was during this period that I determined to go abroad for graduate study and pursue a more stimulating intellectual atmosphere and research environment.

One of the most noteworthy projects that I have dedicated myself to is *Efficient Full-text Retrieval Paradigm in Trusted Cloud Storage*, which aimed to achieve the secure and efficient query in cloud-based data outsourcing scenarios. During the research process, I read various papers on encryption algorithms and information retrieval strategies, and participated in weekly seminars to discuss problems and solutions. With my mathematical competence and keen analytical skills gained through previous training, I continuously put forward novel perspectives which helped accelerate the research headway. More specifically, I finished most of the system development for the cloud storage platform in Java and Flex, and continued with the optimization of the overall platform using distributed computing techniques. Besides, I was also engaged in paper writing in English and conducting experimental evaluations on acknowledged datasets. Although this process required considerable effort and sometimes I had to stay up all night for days to address those technical problems, I still enjoyed this kind of investigative and innovative research work.

Eventually our joint endeavors led to satisfying results. My teammates and I finally accomplished the construction of the trusted cloud storage platform which applied for a software copyright and I also co-authored three high-level papers based on this research work. We applied for a national patent for our revised approach of efficient query based on variants of bloom filters and inverted indices as well. Rather than calling it a painstaking research process, I would name it an exploring journey with fruitful payoffs. I have learned not merely a multitude of research methods but also the value and

spirit of teamwork. This has served to sharpen my inclination to engage in further investigation within this area. I am determined and ready to devote my next few years to my research field.

Now I have a clearer blueprint for my future advanced study abroad. By undertaking your master's program, I will involve myself in advanced coursework in my intended area of expertise to broaden and deepen my understanding of computer science. In addition, I will also participate in research activities in the laboratory where I can work with some of the most established experts. Since my primary research interest during the undergraduate period lies in trusted data management, I am eager to do in-depth research related to the developing of algorithms and systems to enable efficient and secure information sharing and knowledge discovery. After obtaining the master's degree in your program, I will continue my research career and pursue a Ph.D. degree. I am confident that your master's program will provide me with valuable research fundamentals and finally lead me to become a competent, independent and full-fledged professional.

Since the Computer Science Department in UCLA has continued flourishing with new and exciting ideas and I am always fascinated by this vibrant metropolitan center recognized as a leader for innovation, your esteemed institution is on top of my dream school list. After exploring the research areas and labs on your department website, I find the research conducted by Prof. Richard R. Muntz and Prof. D. Stott Parker interests me most and the *Information and Data Management Laboratory* is the team I wish I can dedicate to. The world-class faculty members are sure to help me gain intellectual achievements. In addition, with the experience I have acquired from my undergraduate research, I am confident that I can make contributions to the improvement of the overall research group.

Altogether, years of lab experience has given me much confidence for advanced overseas study. As my goal is to continue in doctoral studies, your master's program will undoubtedly be an essential preparation and add tremendous value in enabling me to achieve my professional goal. Thus, I sincerely hope that my application could be seriously considered because your decision will definitely exert a far-reaching impact on my future. Thank you for your consideration.

Statement of Purpose

Te-Yuan Huang

Applying for: CS PH.D.

huangty@gmail.com

Looking forward to a rigorous training and having independent research ability is exactly the reason why I apply for a PHD program. My research interest involves **computer networking**. In Stanford, there are many world-renown researchers and laboratories working on **network traffic measurement & modeling, network quality of service and performance evaluation**, which are the sub-domains that I am particularly interested in.

I am always curious about everything and taking courses simply cannot satisfy my curiosity. Thus, during my undergrad years, I seized every opportunity to explore further knowledge. I served as technical assistant in the computer center, where I learned practical system and network administrative experiences; I also joined a research lab led by Prof. John K. Zao and implemented a multicast streaming service over peer-to-peer network, which later received an award from the National Science Council in Taiwan. However, being familiar with the current network services, it is intuitive for me to ask: *ARE THOSE SERVICES GOOD ENOUGH?*

This question led me to the realm of research. In my senior year, I joined a project led by Prof. Polly Huang. Starting with Skype, the goal of the project is to develop a methodology to evaluate human-perceived performances of network services. From real life Skype traces, we revealed the relationships between QoS factors and Skype performance. The result shows that users are most sensitive to source rate and its jitter. We further quantified the impact of each factor and proposed a model, User Satisfaction Index. With it, we are able to quantify user satisfaction based on network QoS factors. Then, based on this work, *IS IT POSSIBLE TO BUILD A BETTER SERVICE?*

Since we have noticed that source rate and its jitter are critical for user satisfaction, a service could have better performance if it can adapt its source rate to a high but stable bandwidth channel. Our idea is simple, yet innovative. If the sending rate is too limited, user satisfaction must be low. On the other hand, if the sending rate causes congestion, then users would experience packet loss and delay, which would also degrade user satisfaction. Therefore, tuning for user satisfaction, we may be able to find such a channel. To evaluate this idea, a rate-adaptive algorithm was designed and compared with other algorithms. The result shows that, with proper parameter settings, our user-centric rate-adaptive algorithm does have a chance to outperform others! I presented this exciting work in ACM SIGCOMM 2007 poster section, and the audiences are attracted by this interesting idea and its promising preliminary result.

In the future, I would like to continue my prior research on exploring user satisfaction. There are many issues that we have not yet fully explored; for example, ***the modeling of multi-modal human perception***. Recent works only were focused on voice or video perception. However, as the prevailing of multimedia and virtual-reality system, multisensory models should be established. In addition, ***quantifying the quality of VoIP conferencing*** is also an interesting topic. The modeling work is made even more difficult with the complicated conversational patterns. I would like to approach these problems from objective perspective, since objective metrics can capture subconscious reactions and keep the model simple. Along with studying networking, I am also attracted to Artificial Intelligence. In fact, many techniques in AI, such as Bayesian

Statement of Purpose

Te-Yuan Huang

huangty@gmail.com

Classifier, are very useful on network traffic classification and analysis.

As a student graduating with honor, I have well prepared myself with core curricula in the field of computer science. As a researcher, I always keep a curious mind and polish my skills by participating in research projects. Now, with the urge to know more about this world, I am applying for your PHD program and seeking for the opportunity to explore further in the field of computer science!

作者：Teamtalent 搜集整理

PS 原文：

Since my time in school I have always known that science and technology was the direction I would take in my studies. It was a fascination that still carries on with me to this day. In my first chemistry class in high school I became conscious of the feeling that chemistry was something I really enjoyed. Since that time I have been down many paths that have led me back to the field of chemistry.

The first chemistry course I took in high school was much like any other class. It was not too involved and was geared toward learning the basics. However, I did well and was given the opportunity to take an Advanced Placement (AP) chemistry course, which I lunged at taking. The instructor, Mr. Miller, tasked us with choosing a topic to research throughout the semester, in addition to regular coursework. This was my first real introduction into research. I enjoyed going to the local universities and spending time looking through all the material. Additionally, I wanted to be a pilot for the Air Force. The appeal of flight to me was great, and I spent much of my time devoted to becoming a pilot. Through much physical and mental preparation I made it into the *** Academy. My dream of becoming a pilot was well on its way. I had gone through glider training and soloed in my first aircraft. I also still had a fondness for science and opted for the science and engineering track of courses offered at the Academy. However, after two years there I learned that I would not become a pilot after all. My vision was not up to Air Force standards. It was a demoralizing setback, but one I knew I could overcome. I left the Academy and returned to my hometown school, *** University. My first semester at *** University was a difficult semester during which I did not know what I wanted to do any more. I knew I liked chemistry but I wasn't sure it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The military had taught me to persevere in times of adversity, so I stuck with the chemistry program. The chemistry department at the University took me in and showed me what chemistry was all about. I thoroughly enjoyed spending time in labs performing experiments and learning the basics of chemistry. However, I needed more than laid out lab experiments from the books. This motivated me to seek an opportunity to perform research with Prof.***. After speaking with him, he offered me a position in his group doing research on decomposition mechanisms of electro-optic dyes. Taking him up on his offer was likely the turning point in my education as an undergraduate chemist. If not for his personal guidance and help, I doubt I would be where I am today: a young chemist with motivation and a love for chemistry.

The research I performed involved finding suitable organic dyes for electro-optic modulators. After gaining some experience in the lab and conducting long hours of research, I was able to present my research at *** Meetings. Networking with other chemists and seeing their research allowed me to see the full value of the courses I've taken as an undergraduate. It was also during this time I decided to make chemistry a career.

When I completed my bachelor's degree I had a two year commitment in the Air Force which I am currently close to completing. My time in the Air Force as an intelligence analyst has given me real world experience which I know I will need in the future. Completing tasks while communicating with many different people in extremely time sensitive situations has provided me with skills that no book or classroom can offer.

I think that my coursework and undergraduate research experience at the University have provided me with the foundation for further study as a graduate student. While interested in broad ranges of topics in chemistry, I am partial to inorganic and materials chemistry. My next goal is to attain a PhD in chemistry. I know I am ready to put forth the time and effort to obtain this goal.

I believe that the *** University has the resources to allow me to accomplish my goals. Perseverance, determination, and hard work are the keys to being a successful graduate student and I am ready and willing to conquer this challenge. These traits will not only help me in my graduate studies but will carry on in my goals to be a successful student and chemist.

编辑回信：

Dear,

Your essay was a pleasure to read. You did an excellent job of sharing your life story. I took the essence of your essay and revised its structure, grammar, and style, giving it an elegance and sophistication that will set you apart from other applicants.

阅读您的文章是一种享受。您在文中与读者分享了您的生活历程，写得真不错。我抓住了您文中的精髓所在，并在结构、语法和行文上进行了一些修改，使文章变的更加高雅和更有说服力，从而使您在众多申请者中能脱颖而出。

Most of my work focused on restructuring specific sentences to improve the essay's overall flow and rhythm. I made changes to grammar, diction, and vocabulary, added statements to give your thoughts clarity and resonance, varied sentence length to hold the reader's interest, and revised awkward passages as necessary. Mostly, I tried to increase the impact of your words by adding more force and detail to the essay.

我的修改主要集中于重组句子，提高全文的流畅性和节奏感。我进行了如下操作：变换语法、措辞和词汇，增加了一些语句从而使您的想法表达的更清楚并且前后呼应，变换句子的长度从而使读者不会感觉枯燥，还有，我对一些糟糕的段落进行了必要的修改。总之，通过增加词语的力度，我使全文变得更有说服力，同时也完善了文章的一些细节部分。

Here are my specific comments on each individual paragraph of your essay:

下面是我对每一个段落的编辑注释：

第一段 To grab the attention of the admissions committee, I seized upon one element of your original essay--your experience in AP Chemistry--and expanded it into an anecdote. Making your introduction as specific and personal as possible is often the best way to begin an essay. The new anecdote about your AP Chemistry course reveals both your experience and your dedication to chemistry.

为在一开始就抓住录取委员会的注意力，我抓住了原文中一个亮点——您在高中时代当化学特长生的经历——我把这段经历演化成了一个故事性很强的情节。把一段非常具体非常个性化的描写做为您的第一段，通常是文章最好的开篇方案。这段演化后的小故事既回答了您是怎样第一次接触化学的，同时也表明了您对化学领域的热爱。

第二段 "It was not too involved and was geared toward learning the basics."

"学习那些基本的东西对我而言是小菜一碟。"

One thing you should not do in this type of essay is downplay your accomplishments. Never admit that a class was easy or that you did not have to work hard to succeed. If a class is worth mentioning in an admissions essay, it should be one in which you worked hard and

gained a lot of valuable information.

写申请信时，您不应该对您的成就轻描淡写。永远不要说任何课程很容易，或者您不需要付出努力就获得成功。如果某一门课程出现在您的申请信中，那么必须是那种您曾经为之奋斗过而且获得了很多收获的课程，否则，那就干脆提都别提。

In this paragraph, I also put more emphasis on the description of how you were accepted into the *** Academy. This is a very impressive accomplishment and should be given greater prominence in your essay.

在这段中，我还重点描写了您是怎样获得空军军校的录取的。这是一个给人深刻印象的成就，应该在文中置于更显著的地位。

第三段 You showed strong instincts in mentioning your continued study of science at the *** Academy. It is wise to express the idea that your interest in science persisted throughout your life and that it was not simply a fickle choice when your first option (becoming a pilot) fell through.

您非常本能地提到了您在军校中还继续学习喜欢的科学。您非常聪明地在文中表达了这样一个信息：您对自然科学的兴趣自始至终贯穿着您的一生，而并不是当您的第一目标（当飞行员）失败后的无奈选择。

第四段 The moment that you discovered that your eyesight would prevent you from flying was clearly a major turning point in your life. In the revised essay, I have included a new paragraph that explains how you dealt with this setback. Describing how you overcame this obstacle shows your character, and it provides a good dramatic moment that maintains the reader's interest.

您突然发现您的视力问题使您不能上天飞行，这显然是您一生中的一个转折点。在修改后的文章里，我增加了一个额外的段落来解释您怎样面对这个挫折。描写您怎样跨越这个挫折能够体现出您的性格，这样一段戏剧性的生动的描写能够牢牢抓住读者的兴趣。

第五段 "My first semester at *** University was a difficult semester during which I did not know what I wanted to do any more."

"我在 *** 大学的第一个学期过的很艰难，我不知道我想干什么，人生目标感没有了。"

Instead of giving the impression that you took up chemistry as a last resort, I have tried to soften this message. In the revised essay, I suggest showing that your time at UTA simply made you more convinced that you wanted to dedicate your life to chemistry.

原文总让人感觉，化学是您无奈之下的选择，我则尽量淡化这一信息。在我修改后的文章里，您在 *** 大学期间越来越相信化学才值得您奉献一生。

第六段 Again in this paragraph, I tried to play up a major accomplishment that you only casually mentioned in your original draft--your commission as an intelligence officer. Although this experience is not directly related to your intended degree, it does show a high level of responsibility and discipline.

在这段中，我再次重笔描绘了一个被原文一笔带过的成就——您在军队担任情报员的经历。尽管这段经历并不与您要申请的专业直接相关，但是能够体现您高度的责任心和严格的纪律性。

第七段 I rewrote your final paragraph to remind the committee of your strengths and character. In addition, I added more dimension to the description of your career goals. Without specifically addressing your future plans (even if they are subject to change), you do not fully answer the question.

我重写了最后一段，再次提醒了学校录取您的优点和个性。此外，我拓宽描写了您的职

业目标。学校录取方期待着看到申请者对他们的未来做一个具体的计划（即使未来是可能变化的）。

纵观全文，修改后的文章比原文更清晰更流畅。我为您的文章赋予了能够抓住读者兴趣的风格和细节描述，从而使您脱颖而出成为录取方眼中一位有价值的申请者。同时我要提醒您的是，作为一名编辑，我本能地想修改一切，尽管有些修改可能不会完美地适合您的具体情况。因此，请您认真地阅读修改后的文章，自行决定哪些部分的修改是适合您的。

祝您好运！

编辑后的 PS：

"This semester," bellowed the teacher as he addressed the room of high school seniors, "I will make you all chemists." The class let out a collective groan. The teacher continued unfazed. "You will all have to complete a real research project using the facilities of local universities." Like most of my classmates in my high school Advanced Placement (AP) Chemistry course, I dreaded the huge amount of work that loomed before me. Little did I know that this work would help determine my future. In the months ahead, I committed more time to this one course than I ever had before, poring over chemistry textbooks and working in the laboratory into the early hours of the morning. I always had an inkling that my future lay in science and technology, and this experience proved it beyond question. The methodical laboratory preparations, the interweaving of theory and practice, and the tangible results of a successful experiment all appealed to my disciplined and inquisitive nature. By the end of my senior year, I had developed a solid foundation in the principles of chemistry, and just as my teacher had promised, I was on my way to becoming a chemist.

Despite my growing interest in chemistry, I still harbored dreams of becoming a fighter pilot in the Air Force at the time of my high school graduation. Even as I spent my evenings in the laboratory for AP Chemistry, I woke up early in the morning to run and do a routine of sit-ups and pushups. I was preparing for the rigorous physical and mental demands of the *** Academy. Over the course of previous summers, I had experienced the sweeping rush of glider school and had soloed in my first motorized aircraft. I hoped for the challenging life of an Air Force pilot and was on my way to making it a reality through sweaty self-discipline and intense mental focus. On one sunny afternoon, I saw a thick letter in my mailbox. I was now a cadet at the Academy.

As with all military institutions, the first years at the Academy were intensely demanding. Strenuous endurance tests, high-level academic work, and hazing by upperclassmen made a junior cadet's life extremely trying. Nonetheless, I thrived during these years because I never lost my sense of focus or my love of chemistry. Even as I dreamed of being a fighter pilot, I found my chemistry courses to be highly engaging and challenging. All cadets were given a

choice of academic tracks, and I had chosen science and engineering. As in high school, I worked in the laboratory late at night and ran early in the morning. Whenever I got fatigued, I just remembered how close I was to fulfilling my goal of becoming a pilot.

After a visit to the ophthalmologist one day, my dreams of airborne glory were abruptly shot down. My vision did not meet the Air Force standards required of pilots. It was a crushing blow, and at first I did not know what to do. Nonetheless, I knew that I was not without direction. Once again, my life pushed me towards studying chemistry. This was a subject that I knew I would enjoy, so I packed up my science textbooks, threw away my flight training manuals, and headed back to my hometown college, the *** University.

As much as I had loved chemistry before, my studies at *** University convinced me that I had found the right vocation. I was particularly inspired by Prof.***. Like my high school chemistry teacher, Prof.*** knew that the best way to instill an appreciation for the field was through active research and meaningful laboratory work. He believed that one should never learn from a book what one could learn from a beaker, flask, or Bunsen burner. As soon as I explained my experience and interest in the field to him, he offered me a position in his group doing research on the decomposition mechanisms of electro-optic dyes. The research I performed involved finding suitable organic dyes for electro-optic modulators. After months of grueling work and wise guidance from Prof.***, I was ready to present my research at *** Meetings. Networking with chemists from around the country allowed me to glimpse not only other possible fields of chemical research, but also the potential career options I might want to pursue. Had it not been for Prof.***'s personal guidance and help, I doubt that my future career plans in chemistry would be as clear as they are today.

Because of my two-year commitment to the Air Force, I was unable to apply to graduate school directly after college. Instead, I spent two years serving as an intelligence officer. From this job, I have greatly improved my analytic ability, communication skills, pressure management techniques, and patience as a researcher. Like chemists, intelligence officers often have to construct coherent models of reality from incomplete pieces of data. This position has offered me insights and training that no classroom setting could match. Nonetheless, I am ready to return to my first love, chemistry.

Although my life has taken some unexpected turns in the last few years, the field of chemistry has been an unwavering companion and a source of intellectual interest. Whether it was discovering research in high school, learning advanced chemical theories at the Air Force Academy, or presenting my findings at meetings of the Chemical Society, the lure of studying physical structures has always guided my decisions. My advanced research in electro-optic modulators and my course work in classes such as Molecular Orbital Theory have given me the analytical ability, laboratory skills, and theoretical knowledge to excel in a rigorous doctoral program. During my Ph.D. studies, I intend to focus on inorganic and materials chemistry in order to design new materials for use in industry. By a stroke of fate, the weak vision that prevented me from becoming a fighter pilot allowed me to envision my future as a successful chemist.

美国院校对 PS 的一般标准

I. INTRODUCTION

To successfully apply to the college or university of your choice requires more than a transcript, a list of your accomplishments, and a letter of recommendation from a favorite teacher. After all, your application will be reviewed with hundreds of others', many of whom may have grades, extracurricular activities, awards and honors equal to your own or even better. What will differentiate you from these hundreds of other applicants?

The answer, of course, is your personal statement. An effective, compelling personal statement has the ability to communicate your unique characteristics and experiences to the admissions committee in your own words. Your persistence. Your ambition. Your commitment to others. Your sense of humor. These are qualities that don't come across in the fill-in-the-blanks portion of the application. Take the opportunity that the personal statement gives you, and use it to your best advantage.

While the rest of the candidate pool may be able to write clearly and competently, the smart candidate realizes that the admissions process is, after all, a competition. To come out ahead, you must stand out from the other applicants through creative, innovative, and engaging writing comes into play. It's a demanding task. Within the narrow constraints of the application's wording, you have to: examine your personality traits and personal history and consider how to present them to a perfect stranger; review your experiences and accomplishments, determine how they are relevant to the admissions criteria, and prioritize them according to their relevance and importance; transform your list of accomplishments into a coherent, organized narrative structure; and let your own "voice" come across in your essay while ensuring your tone is neither too familiar nor stiffly formal.

Writing Tip 1: Strategy

A Means to an End
Before sitting down to write your essay, it's helpful to take a moment to re-assess what you hope to achieve. Ask yourself what you hope to get out of the program to which you are applying. What impact will your degree have on your short-term and long-term career plans? Your earnings expectations? Your professional development? It's crucial that you have a solid understanding of how important the quality of your application is but don't allow the process to make you feel overwhelmed or anxious. Instead, let your ambition motivate you to write the best personal statement that you possibly can.

Common Pitfalls
Application questions can range from the extremely specific ("What personal challenges regarding interpersonal matters brought out your conflict mediation and management skills?") to the hugely open-ended ("Tell us something about why you want to become an attorney"). The latter is more conducive to a discussion of your personal characteristics; the former is an excellent opportunity

to showcase a particular achievement. In either case, here are some pitfalls you'll want to avoid when planning your essay strategy.

Answer the Question.

You may have a remarkable achievement or personal experience that you think would make an impression on the admissions committee? Say, for instance, you emigrated from a foreign land when you were young and had to learn a new language, assimilate to a new culture, and you're your own way through school. But the personal statement question on your law school application is, "How do you plan to use your degree in your career?" Unfortunately, your experience simply doesn't have much to do with the question. So *don't use it.* There's a reason that the question was posed the way it was: the school wants to read your answer. Instead of trying to manipulate your experience to "fit" the question, focus on the scope of the question and ask yourself what exactly is being asked. If guidelines for answering the question are provided, examine these, too. You won't impress anyone by deviating from the information they want; they'll simply conclude that you didn't answer the question.

Don't Assume That One Size Fits All

No one likes to receive a form letter that pretends to be personalized. Similarly, admissions committees are less impressed by generic personal statements that are clearly written to be sent to multiple schools. Though it's possible that your personal statement might *generally* meet the requirements of more than one school, it's also true that there is no one personal statement that could possibly meet *all* the questions posed by the *all* the schools to which you are applying. Establish what information each personal statement question seeks, and then determine the type and structure of essay that would be the most appropriate. Ideally, you will write a separate personal statement for each application.

Don't Repeat Yourself (I).

Using your essay to simply reiterate your GPA and/or your courses is wasting an incredible opportunity. This information will be given adequate consideration elsewhere. Instead, use the personal statement to present information that the admissions committee wouldn't otherwise know.

Don't Repeat Yourself (II).

Some applications ask for one primary essay and several supplemental, short-answer statements. Remember that they will be read together, and plan carefully so that the information presented in one isn't being re-stated in another. Make sure your primary statement answers the question while also ensuring that it shows the admissions committee there is more to you than was previously revealed.

Don't Apologize.

The last thing the person reading your essay wants to read is a list of excuses for why your GPA isn't as high as you might like. Mentioning your weak points only brings attention to them; the only valid reason for dwelling on such a topic would be if the problem was caused by, say, an illness that required hospitalization or a serious family problem that took you away from school

for an extended time. In such a case, present the information in a factual manner and move on. Focus on your achievements, not your shortcomings.

Do Your Homework

Research the schools to which you plan to apply. The more you know about the school, its programs, and its faculty members, the better you will be able to structure your essay and show that you are truly interested in the school. Here are some ways to gather information:

Call the admissions department and request a brochure that provides information about the school's expectations from its applicants.

Talk to people you know who attended the school.

Contact the alumni office and ask whether it would be possible to contact alumni to hear their thoughts on the school.

Make an appointment with an admissions counselor or another official to get a better idea of the graduate experience.

Use AdmissionsEssays.Com's free search engine, which lists key statistics and URLs for highly regarded colleges, universities, professional, and graduate schools. This extra effort alerts the reader that you have taken time to learn about the school, which gives a favorable impression of your diligence, dedication and interest in their institution. Of course, don't overdo it, the admissions committee already knows when the school was founded and how many students attend each year. You need only show that you have gone the extra mile.

The Bottom Line

Your personal statement is your chance to shine. Plan accordingly. Discuss accomplishments and valuable experiences; emphasize the positive and empowering; make sure you come across as bright, involved, engaging and motivated. Don't dwell on negative experiences or setbacks unless you do so to introduce an example of overcoming obstacles and rising above circumstance. Don't bore or depress the reader. And remember, admissions committees are composed of experienced professionals who have collectively read thousands of personal statements. They will be able to read between the lines! Be honest.

Step Two: Organization

Find Your Voice

Storytelling has many voices, from factual to confessional to descriptive. Giving your personal statement is no different; there are as many approaches as there are individuals. However, remember that your personal statement is really a very specific form of introduction which generally answers two questions: "Who are you?" and "What can you offer?" The successful essay never strays from these themes of introducing yourself and describing your potential as a successful candidate. Therefore, organizing the structure of your statement should begin with an examination of your key accomplishments, turning points, and events which will help answer these questions. Analyze your resume, personal history and memory to isolate certain key "defining moments" in your life.

Writing your personal statement can be an exciting process because it encourages you to tell and explore your own personal history. What you write down, what you focus on, what you highlight and explore all give insight into your own particular and unique values, hopes, aspirations and ideals. Because of this, the information you present, as well as how you present it, can reveal you as positive and eager or as someone who's just going through the motions. Keep in mind what image you wish to present when you are choosing the facts you will include in your essay.

Some of the topics to explore and develop for essay purposes include:
hobbies
projects you have completed
particular jobs and responsibilities
accomplishments -- both professional and scholastic
major life events that you believe have changed you
challenges and personal hurdles you have overcome
life events which motivate you to apply for this particular course of education
individuals who influenced, prepared, or motivated you
particular traits, work habits, attitudes or sensibilities that you have developed
your goals

Always remember to explore these topics in a way that is relevant to the essay question. How do they relate to the fact that you have the motivation, direction, and drive to succeed in the school to which you are applying? At this point you should begin to write down, as specifically as possible, the different events and accomplishments that you feel should be mentioned. Don't worry about spelling, grammar or even structure at this point, the goal is to describe your chosen events and accomplishments comprehensively.

Organizing the Facts

What you now have in front of you is a list of your interests, accomplishments, employment history and successes. Read over your list carefully and ask yourself what emotion is triggered by each item-- pride, resolution, motivation, acceptance, growth. Next to each item, write a word or two that describe the key feelings with which you associate it.

Next, identify the items from your list which gave you the most satisfaction and group them together. Then identify the items that were most reflective of learning experiences or periods of personal or professional growth, and circle those items. Continue to make groupings of your list items, making sure you have a clear idea of what each item represents ("goals," "pride," "overcoming obstacles," etc.). And finally, write a few short sentences about each group, explaining how the qualities exemplified by your list items would add to your success in the school or program to which you are applying.

By highlighting your personal achievements and potential for excellence, the Biography(sm) lets our writers to craft an effective sample personal statement for you to use as an inspiration for organizing your own essay.

Choosing a Format

Just as stories take various forms, from a novel to a short story to a parable or allegory, your personal statement could be presented as several different themes. Below are three of the most popular themes that AdmissionsEssays.Com uses in developing custom personal statements.

1. OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

This format emphasizes your tenacity, patience, and diligence in dealing with, overcoming, or making peace with difficult events or circumstances that have the potential to change a person's life. Without placing external blame or making excuses, this format isolates the applicant's ability to thrive.

DO write descriptively. Use facts to back up your assertions.

Remember the rule, "Don't tell me--show me." How exactly are you "more mature"? What experiences warrant your describing yourself as "entrepreneurial" and "creative"?

DO show who you are. Although most admissions committees are not necessarily looking for a statement that describes extraordinary personal revelation or enlightenment, they do want to see how you use your background to describe who you are and why you are exceptional.

DO emphasize your positive attitude by stating your future plans.

Link this material with facts about the school.

DO show a proactive attitude through your word choices and sentence sequence.

Use action verbs rather than passive ones.

DON'T present yourself as a victim, dwell on how you suffered, or indulge in self-pity.

DON'T place blame or pass judgment.

DON'T come across as bitter or angry. You will make the reader uncomfortable and make it difficult for him or her to identify with your experience.

DON'T place blame or judge--you don't want to come off as bitter and angry.

2. PERSONAL GROWTH. This format surveys the applicant's achievements and accomplishments and comments on them, tracing the individual's evolution and transformation into a successful and determined candidate.

DO use a positive, active voice. Focus on the changes in your attitude and perspective, giving concrete factual examples. Include clear, concise and adequately developed descriptions of key events that added to your personal growth and wisdom.

DON'T make excuses for failed efforts and disappointments. If applicable, you may explain how a personal setback allowed you to learn and grow.

DON'T appear to feel angry, bitter, or sorry for yourself.

DON'T focus on just one achievement. Give several examples to prove your point.

. FAMILY HISTORY. This format tells the story of a member of the applicant's family, showing how the applicant was influenced by him or her or was inspired by his or her achievements. This format is often used to show how family history colors and shapes us.

DO isolate personal traits and attributes.

DO choose a family member who has inspired you to pursue your education or profession.

DO briefly discuss any struggles that your family has overcome and how they affected you.

DON'T lose the focus on *your* achievements by giving too much attention to the family member. Keep it relevant.

DON'T exaggerate family problems.

DON'T appear to be asking for pity.

Step Three: Execution

Writing with a Distinctive Voice

Once you've gathered your information and selected a structure for your essay, you are now ready to write your statement. A key element of the writing process is choosing which point of view you will use to present your information.

It's important to remember that you're not being judged on your creative writing skills. Many styles that would be effective and engaging in a short story or a magazine article would seem strained and awkward used in an application essay. The vast majority of writers use the first person singular, as in, "I feel that I am uniquely qualified for a career in law." It is a straightforward, easy-to-read style that can be very effective. Make sure that you vary your sentence structure, length and rhythm to keep the essay flowing.

In seem excessively casual and a more traditional reader might take it as "sloppy." It is best to use this device sparingly, in sentences where the "you" could be replaced by "one." For instance, "You can always achieve your goals if you plan wisely, work hard, and delegate."

Third-person narration (using "he" or "she" to refer to yourself) is extremely difficult and does not work well in form of a personal statement. The commonest reaction to a piece written in the third-person is simply confusion. "What's going on here? We were expecting an essay from the applicant, but this is an essay the applicant. Who wrote this?" It would be disastrous to write about yourself "from the point of view of" a favorite teacher or mentor and have the admissions committee suspect that you are forging letters of recommendation. Even if your literary device is understood and accepted, it's easy to come across as eccentric, affected and self-important by referring

The best bet is to use your own style--this isn't the time to experiment with a new "voice." Just make sure that whatever you write is clear, concise, and grammatically correct. Don't try to impress the admissions officers by using big words; simply make sure that the ones you *do* use aren't misspelled.

It Was A Dark and Stormy Night...

Your introductory paragraph could well be the most crucial portion of your entire essay. A good introduction grabs the reader's attention and has them halfway through the personal statement before they realize what's hit them. It's best to draft multiple openings and then select the one

which is most compelling. You don't have to summarize your whole essay in the first paragraph if you can instead draw the reader in to read what follows. If you are absolutely set on the dramatic effects of third-person narration, you may want to use it in your introduction. For instance, you could describe a galvanizing moment in your life--"It was only the first day of the sixth grade, and already the funny-looking new boy, the little Chinese kid, was being sent to the principal's office"-- as an introduction to the difficulty of assimilating to a new culture. Be certain to take "ownership" of the paragraph, though ("That kid was me. It was just the beginning of my long struggle to fit into mainstream American culture coming from a remote province in China") and move into first-person narration fairly quickly.

The Meat of the Message
The bulk of your essay should consist of events, experiences and activities, arranged either chronologically, by topic, or in order of importance. Feel free to give emphasis to those accomplishments that you believe deserve particular attention -- remember, you are selling yourself to the readers. Don't merely tell them that you deserve to get admitted to their school; tell them *why*. Be confident but not arrogant; let them know that you would be an asset to the incoming class, but don't tell them that they're lucky to have you. Give each paragraph a distinct point that you could sum up in one sentence if necessary, and make sure that the segues between paragraphs are smooth.

Wrap It Up
An effective personal essay, like any strong piece of writing piece, is "front loaded." Your most compelling anecdote or fact should come right at the beginning; don't bury the "good stuff" or leave dramatic revelations for the last paragraph. Conclusions should be brief and to the point, summarizing your qualifications while not rehashing the entire content of the essay. You may wish to restate your goals and motivations in a forceful, compelling style: "my excellent academic record, experience in the business world, and incomparable leadership skills make me a confident, accomplished and promising candidate who would be an asset to the incoming class" rather than "I have worked hard in school and I believe that I will be successful at your school."

Step Four: Editing and Proofing

It's possible that your personal statement is the most important essays you will ever write. Painful though it may seem after already having done so much work, 80% of a successful piece is in the editing: you still have a lot of work to do.

When editing, you should feel free to mark up the page, write questions in the margins, and generally make a mess. Remember, nothing is set in stone.
Don't hesitate to analyze your essay line by line. Question whether each thought connects with the others and whether each sentence follows the preceding one in a logical order.
Paragraph by paragraph, make sure that your statements are concise, effective, relevant, and fresh. Repeating the same topic or theme over and over again will bore the reader, and the essay will lack professionalism.
Remember: if something is not absolutely clear to you, it certainly will not be clear to the reader

who knows nothing about you.

Ask yourself what's missing. Are there any additional experiences that would help support your thesis?

Make sure every assertion is backed up by hard facts; show us, don't tell us. Compare "Despite our full course loads in engineering, my roommate and formed our own software company at the start of our sophomore year" with "I am an extremely enterprising individual."

Proofreading

When you feel that your essay is in good shape -- or you have read it so many times that you've completely lost perspective -- find several people to read over your personal statement. It's best if you can find one to read for the technical aspects of your writing and two to read for content.

Select your proofreader carefully. Few things make as immediate and as negative an impression as misspellings, incorrect grammar and clumsy sentence structure. Don't trust your computer's spell-checker, either. Get a real human being.

Your first content reader should be an individual who is very familiar with your background and who can tell you whether you've adequately conveyed your strengths; the second should be someone who does not know you as well and can spot any areas in your essay which are unclear to him or her (and would therefore be unclear to the admissions committee).

Once you have rewritten according to your editors' comments, give them the revised draft and repeat the process.

一位副教授对 PS 写作的建议

作者：Teamtalent 搜集整理

I've read many applications to our graduate program, and I've seen a lot of statements of purpose that, frankly, aren't very good.

Here are some thoughts and comments that will hopefully help you write a better statement of purpose. These are merely my own thoughts and should not be construed as official guidelines of any sort.

What the statement of purpose is not

Many students (particularly foreign students) think that the statement of purpose is about *character*. While honesty, sincerety, conscientiousness, etc. are important attributes, I assume students with good academic records applying to graduate school have these traits.

Many students think that the statement of purpose should be an autobiographical sketch. Believe me, the story of your first computer when you were 10 years old and how it inspired you to devote your life to Computer Science does not make particularly interesting reading, nor does it tell me the things I want to know.

Questions that your statement of purpose should answer

When I read a statement of purpose (which I think is one of the most important parts of a graduate application), I have the following questions in mind.

Don't structure your statement with these questions! (I can just see the applications pouring in now with my questions used as section headings.)

Your statement of purpose should be a cohesive piece of prose. (Some use of section headings is OK, but not with my questions.) It should present yourself to the reader. One way you can think of your statement is as an extended (and somewhat more formal) answer to the interview question, "Tell me about yourself..."

While some of my questions below can (and should) be answered directly, the rest should be addressed by relating relevant experiences and accomplishments.

Why do you want to get a PhD (or MS)?

What are your research interests?

Be as specific as possible, but keep in mind who will be reading your application.

In the Rensselaer CS department, research groups read applications — the one(s) you specify on your application. At other schools, a department committee may read all applications and decide upon admissions on behalf of the whole department.

For the Rensselaer CS department, unless you are an exceptional student with a broad range of experience/accomplishments, you should target your application to just one research group — a student who specifies interest in robotics and networking, for example, may not be taken seriously by either group.

Multiple faculty within a research group will read your application.

Why are you interested in these research topics?

Don't write an autobiography!

Do you have the motivation/perseverence to complete a PhD?

If you have an undergraduate degree in something other than Computer Science or Computer Engineering, then another question is: do you have the background to pass the PhD qualifiers?

The statement of purpose is also an opportunity to describe some of your accomplishments and

their significance. The reader will not be familiar with the programs, competitions, examinations, etc. for all parts of the United States, not to mention other countries.

Other things to keep in mind

Format: Single spaced (or maybe even "one and a half" spacing, but definitely not double spaced) with at least a 10 point font and reasonable margins (at least 1 inch on all sides, preferrably more on the left and right with a 10 point font).

 Length: Definitely not more than 2 pages! (Who has time to read more than that?)

When I was applying to graduate schools, I was advised to keep my statement of purpose to a single page. I now think that this was not good advice — one page tends to be too short if you're covering everything you should.

Don't try to "cram" more into your two pages using typographical tricks (line spacing, font size, margins, etc.) You're not fooling anyone. Inability to write a concise statement of purpose indicates a lack of critical thinking skills.

I should duly note that most undergraduate Computer Science students confuse "concise" with "short". "Concise" means that you have given thought to the composition of your statement to make it a clear and cohesive piece of prose (with a natural/logical flow) that covers all the necessary points and doesn't cover unnecessary points. "Short" pieces of writing are usually too short because they omit important points, aren't cohesive, etc.

 Spell check it! Get someone else to proofread it!

Special note to Chinese (and some Indian) faculty...

Fer cryin' out loud, stop saying that every student is your favorite student!

I never really believe it anyway...

Advice to Graduate School Recommendation Letter Writers

Shriram Krishnamurthi

First version: 2008-03-25. Revised: 2008-03-26 (thanks, Kathi Fisler). Revised: 2010-10-21, 2010-11-20, 2012-05-04.

Some years ago I was talking to a visiting scholar who was a faculty member in a foreign country. I asked her why letters from her country seemed to be so uninformative. She pointed out that there, faculty never *read* letters: they only write them. Even graduate students are admitted purely on the basis of test scores.

The facts were hardly surprising—after all, this is the system I grew up with in India—but after hearing the way she put it, the proverbial bulb lit up. If you never evaluate letters yourself, how would you know what letters should and shouldn't contain? The feedback—admission decisions—is seemingly random, and therefore of little use. Hence this article.

Disclaimer: This is an extremely personal opinion. It doesn't represent the views of my department or my university. More importantly, many faculty may disagree with the opinions here, so use them with caution! **Feedback welcome**.

What this document is about: Writing effective recommendation letters for PhD students applying to computer science PhD programs in the US.

Whom this is for: Letter-writers who are unsure of what makes for a good letter. This may also help students prepare better dossiers to give their letter-writers. (A brave student might even point her letter-writer to this article.)

Also read: Mor Harchol-Balter's comments, Michael Ernst's advice.

Why Letters Matter

Does anyone read the letters at all? We do, rigorously, sometimes as carefully as we read a research paper: pen in hand, circling comments, annotating margins, noting what the letter did and didn't say.

In fact, letters are so important, even a bad transcript can be offset by them. I know a student who got into a fine graduate program with just a 2.67 GPA. This is because his 2.67 was special: he aced hard classes and got bored in easy ones. His letters presumably said so, and illustrated this with several anecdotes. So, not every 2.67 is equal, and your student's may be of just the right kind; but we won't know that without your letter.

My Constraints (or, The One-Minute Rule)

When I'm on the committee, I try to read every application; when I chair it, I make sure I do, some multiple times. That's many hundreds of applications in under a month. Factor in lots and lots of late letters, classes, etc., and it's clear I have to work pretty fast.

For the first pass—deciding whether the application deserves more time or not—I can afford to spend no more than about 6-7 minutes per application. (Keep in mind I've read maybe a few thousand applications, so I've had practice.) If I decide the application is promising, I may spend over half an hour (in some cases, days!) on it. But in those first 6-7 minutes, I have to:

- eyeball the student's research record

- form a summary of the transcript

- glance at the standardized test scores

- determine whether the statement is promising

- get the gist of 2-3 letters of recommendation

In practice, that means I have about one minute to devote to the first reading of your letter. Now think about whether your letter works in this context. (For instance, some letter writers put a big, prominent paragraph of boilerplate legalese at the beginning of their letter, which I have to read before I realize it's irrelevant. Could you have buried that in a postscript? Was that the best use of my minute?)

Call this the One-Minute Rule and write, read, and re-read your letter against this rule before sending it in.

Be Concrete

If you take away just one piece of concrete advice, let it be this.

The single biggest problem with most letters is that they are filled with abstract generalities and infinitives. If we don't know you or your institution, we can't judge what any of these statements mean relative to our standards. Always consider the illustrative anecdote:

Due to deadline pressure, I asked him to grow a pumpkin in just one month. As you know it takes over 100 days to grow a pumpkin, but over the weekend he devised a new method to accelerate their growth. On Monday morning I arrived to find not just a pumpkin but a steaming, flavorful pie.

Anecdote about acts of raw coding are only so helpful in understanding research potential, but they're better than nothing (see the section on Corporate Letters, below). An extra book or paper they read, *and demonstrated understanding of* (again, be concrete about why you believe this), goes a long way.

Triangulation and Credibility

When we read a letter we're supposedly evaluating the student, but we're actually evaluating the letter-writer too. What I care about is not only what you think, but also what I think of what you think. If I don't know you, I need to calibrate you.

Of course, sometimes information can hurt. If you praise research that is no harder than what we assign our first-year undergraduate students, that tells us a lot about your program, but not a lot *positive*. I saw precisely such a letter back in about 2002; to this day, I can name the college (and the student...). Until that program becomes a whole lot stronger, I wouldn't want to admit anyone from it.

If you've been holding back praise, tell us: If you haven't written a letter this strong since 1998, and you've written two dozen letters in that time, it helps for us to know that. Of course, be honest. If we take you at your word and your student proves to be significantly weaker than your letter, we won't trust your future recommendations.

It also helps to know your track record. Especially if you are a professor at a lesser-known university, tell us where your past graduates have gone. Even better, tell us where they are now (maybe the lack of name-recognition for your school means the students didn't go to well-known places initially, but if they did well and are now placed in good positions, that's good to know). Remember to compare *this student* to that population.

Finally, tell us a little about your background. A brief para of bio-sketch never hurts. If you publish papers, tell us where. But keep it short: the letter is about the student, not you!

Ultimately, remember two things:

- Your most valuable resource is your credibility. If you are a credible letter-writer, we will take you at your word and, if one day you tell us about a stellar student, we will do everything we can to make room for her. But credibility is one-way: hard to acquire, easy to lose.

- You can't get a student in, but you can make a student not get in. That is, there is only so much you can say to get a student admitted, but if we come to distrust your letter, your *next* student is going to have a much harder time getting in. For "you", substitute your institution also.

Reporting on Research

At a highly-competitive university like Brown, we want to know the student's research potential. The best assessment of this is what they have already done. If you are their research advisor, you have a special obligation to them (and to us) in your letter:

- describe their work in your own words

- tell us what the student's contribution was

- tell us whether it succeeded or failed

- if it's ongoing, tell us why you think it will succeed

We rarely expect the ideas to have *originated* from the student, but we would like to see signs that they took ownership of the project, improved it in some way, refined the idea, and so on. Finally:

- put any publications in context

Students don't always know how to do this. If you published a paper on the work, tell us about the quality of the venue. In particular, students are poor at telling different *kinds* of publications apart (tech report from conference poster from research paper) and may even try to hide the distinction (I've seen this happen). Help us understand what they really accomplished.

If you run a summer research center, you may get bombarded with letter requests from each of your students. I have seen such people write perfunctory one-paragraph letters. These hurt students, and are ultimately unethical. Someone gave you money to run that center; when you asked for it, you took on an obligation. Fulfill it, or else get out of the way. There are plenty of others who will gladly put that money to better use.

Reporting on Courses

Naturally, your most significant contact with the student is likely to be in courses. Yet what could be a rich source of description is often the poorest: Mor Harchol-Balter reports that at CMU, they call a certain class of these "DWIC" letters ("did well in class"), which are effectively useless.

Give us context. What textbook did you use? How much of it did you cover? Did the student take it earlier than usual?

Don't just report the grade; put it in perspective. How many students got that grade or better? If your transcript isn't nuanced (e.g., at Brown we give only letter grades with no +/- decorations), fill it in. Did they do an exceptional job at something? (Tell us what they did!) Were they biased towards some aspect of your class? (For instance, in my programming languages course, some take much better to the theoretical aspects, while others prefer the systems work. The transcript won't reveal this, but it's extremely valuable information for a professor trying to decide whether or not to recruit a student.)

Reporting on Personality

This is tricky, but it can help a potential advisor assess how good a fit the student will be. Some advisors work best with quiet, shy students, others with boisterous ones. Be as honest as necessary. For instance, I've had the pleasure of working with numerous exceptional students, but

a few have had more peculiar personalities than the norm. In such cases, I write a "care and feeding" section (this goes back to the bit about credibility). I have never yet known this to be held against the student.

Corporate Letters

An important special case is the corporate letter: when you, the letter-writer, work in industry and have no academic affiliation. Many corporate letters (like many academic letters, but more so) tend to be vapid, clearly written in a different culture and for a different audience. Unless they actually did academic research with you, here are some suggestions for improving them.

A common mistake is to focus on teamwork. This is important even in academia, but often this is the *primary* focus of the letter, which makes it less valuable. Of course we care about it, but it's secondary to their technical skills.

- Tell us if they learned something particularly quickly, mastered a complex technology, or solved a problem others were stuck on. Give us a paragraph of details.

- If you have a concrete reason to evaluate research potential, do so concretely. Otherwise, don't bother.

- Give us a brief bio-sketch, including educational qualifications.

- Put the applicant in context, and tell us the context. It's fine to relate it to your own student days, or to your experience hiring students. E.g.:

Compared to the students I studied with at Cucumber and Melon University, and the ones I now recruit from there, I would put him in the top 10%.

Don't Personalize (or, How to Personalize)

Don't waste your time personalizing the letter for each school, unless you *really* personalize it. I'm not impressed by your mail-merge program. Absolutely nobody cares that you don't list Brown's postal address at the top of the letter. Spend that extra minute or five making the letter better. Besides, invariably, you will mess up: every year we get a handful of letters stuffed in the wrong envelope. (Just because they're good enough for Harvard doesn't mean they're good enough for *us*! [I hope Greg Morrisett doesn't read this.])

Of course, you could *really* personalize a letter by writing a paragraph specific to an institution. But only do this if you really have something to say. For instance, I sometimes write,

Hey folks—Eva Echidna is more dedicated than Jonas Jackaroo and every bit as smart as Walter Wallaby, both of whom are past students of mine who appear to be thriving in your program.

You could do this with LaTeX or Word macro trickery, but you know what I do? I just write the paragraph by hand. It's quicker, easier, and even has the feel of authenticity, because everyone knows professors can't afford machines that simulate hand-writing: only alumni offices have *that* kind of money on campus.

A simpler, but also important, level of personalization is to take into account the quality of the target institution. Sometimes, students apply to schools well beyond their quality, and you may not be able to talk them out of it (nor, perhaps, should you; they're just exercising their freedom). You may consider having slightly different letters, one for each level of institution. A cheap way to achieve the same effect is to simply mark different boxes in the tables you're asked to fill in (e.g., mark them in a higher percentile for schools where you think they belong, and a lower percentile for places where they will be overmatched).

While we're at it, here's a great instance of customization gone wrong (the ellipses are mine, the rest is literal text):

It is my pleasure to recommend ... be admitted to the PhD in Computer Science program at Brown University. I am an associate professor in the Department of Computer Science, the University of ..., where I have taught for [THIS MANY] years.

Didn't even proof-read it, eh?

Ask Your Student for Help

Ah yes! Here's where I tell you to ask the student to write a draft of their own letter. Not.

Asking students to write even a draft of their own letter is one of the shabbiest practices I can imagine. Yes, I know, many otherwise respectable people do it (I've even had more than one letter-writer of mine—people I respect profoundly—ask me to). I've heard arguments about how it helps a student demonstrate professionalism, maturity, and so on. This isn't the place to explain why I'm completely unswayed.

So what do I mean?

I **tell my students** to give me a list of everything about them that they think is relevant. I explicitly tell them to brag (some students are shy and may not give themselves enough credit otherwise): filtering their input is my job, not theirs, and I say so. Sometimes I do get items that are over-the-top, but no harm done. Much more often a student will remind me of something they did that I had forgotten, but was well worth remembering.

In particular, for my top research students who are currently working with me, I have no shortage of information. But for the others, or ones I haven't worked with in a while, this helps immensely. Some item suddenly brings them alive after several years, helping me reconstruct forgotten details and provide an illustration or two.

Tell Us About Relevant Things That Didn't Happen

Sometimes the negative spaces also matter: a statement like

Despite my best efforts to persuade her to work with me, Eva decided to spend her second summer working for the Rocky Raccoon Corporation, a local maker of surveillance equipment. Because of this I cannot say much about her research skills, but I'm told she did good work there. Moreover, her experience in industry convinced her she would rather be in graduate school.

can, in some contexts, tell the reader a lot.

Help Your Students Form a Strategy

It's very frustrating to get three essentially identical letters. If you are the advisor (or even simply someone who thinks the student deserves to do well), take a little time to help students plan out their application strategy. Ask them who their other writers are, help them find writers who can highlight all their strengths, and identify pointless overlap. Summarize anything you think we should know about: e.g.,

I know that Eva did a superb project with Prof Dolfenfuss—I was blown away by the creativity of their work on intrusion detection for raccoons that raid pumpkin patches. She's told me she has asked Dr. D. for a letter, so I trust he will elaborate.

Just Say No

Don't write a letter because you're feeling badly for a student. We can tell from your letter, and it won't help the student one bit. Just say no. If you really care for the student, spend that time instead helping him find letter-writers who can better get across his talents. Heck, maybe he shouldn't be applying to graduate school at all, at least not right now. A few minutes of your time may save him years of his.

Practice the Fundamentals

Mail the darned thing in on time! We don't begin to read applications until they are "sufficiently complete" to be worth the time. While you're crafting your prose for the Paris Review (and fidgeting with the details of your mail merge program), your student's folder is becoming close friends with the **historic, 200+-year-old, pre-Revolutionary War** dust in the corner of some office building at Brown.

MU **MYTHIC UNIVERSITY**

123 Ivy Road, Mythic CA 99999   555-123-4567

December xx, 20xx

To the Review Committee:

I am pleased to write a letter of recommendation for Janet Lerner, an honors undergraduate student in our program. I have known Janet for more than two years. I came to know her very well when she was a student in my economic geography course. This summer, I hired her to work on an NSF-sponsored research project on Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change. And for the past six months, we have been developing a laboratory manual for my undergraduate course on the global economy. It is on the basis of this extensive experience that I write a letter of unequivocal support.

Janet is an undergraduate student in the honors program at Mythic University. The honors program is designed to provide the educational experience of a small Ivy League college within a large public university. To be accepted, a student must have high SAT scores, be an excellent writer, and have very good high school grades. Students fulfill their course requirements by taking honors courses or by selecting a combination of classes with a heavy emphasis on graduate seminars and independent reading courses. Students must maintain a GPA of 3.2 or better in all courses in order to remain in the honors program. Janet has fulfilled this requirement admirably, maintaining a GPA of 3.8 or better throughout her career. Over the last few years, Janet designed a difficult curriculum for herself and has been very successful in combining graduate seminars and advanced undergraduate reading courses to fulfill her degree requirements. She is comfortable with herself and is well-recognized by her peer group. She, along with her peers from the honors program, will enter the nation's best graduate schools next year in such varied fields as medicine, law, and other allied social sciences. She seeks to enroll in your graduate planning program.

Janet is an enthusiastic, energetic, and exceptionally well-organized student. She writes beautifully, is widely read, and demonstrates good quantitative skills. In my economic geography course, she was the best student in the class. Her performance exceeded that of the incoming graduate students, including an NSF fellowship recipient. She always came to class prepared and was clearly far above her peers in understanding and appreciating the course material.

I have been especially impressed by Janet's determination and sparkle. Her work on the Model United Nations program (MUN) is an extremely large responsibility. The Model United Nations program convenes approximately 1000 high school students from around the world to simulate the experience of the UN. Janet has responsibility for designing and executing all phases of the simulation. She reviews the agendas of the UN over the previous year, and then collaboratively develops the student-run assembly

agenda. To undertake this task successfully, she must understand international relations, international political economy, and world economic development issues. Her UN work has clearly influenced her interests and has been a very broadening experience for her. I am sure one explanation for why she has done so well in courses with me is that she understands the geography of the global economy from the simulated, yet very real-world perspective of the Model United Nations program.

Concerning her potential as a teaching assistant, Janet has detailed experience in developing educational materials for courses. After many years of dissatisfaction with economic geography texts, I decided I would develop a laboratory manual for my introductory course. Based on Janet's superior performance in the course I employed her to put the manual together. Although we talked at length about the project and I gave her broad outlines for each segment, nonetheless the lab manual is very much her creation. It is a five-assignment workbook built around a hypothetical scenario in which the student is a staff advisor to a program officer of the Ford Foundation. The assignments require that students complete a thorough analysis of a country, including an economic history, demographic analysis, trade assessment, and policy proposal. The manual is designed such that a student will be able to retrieve the necessary quantitative and cartographic information to complete the projects. Each assignment results in a memo based on a template Janet developed. Janet identified and tested all sources listed in the manual, and this project would not have reached fruition without Janet's tireless efforts.

I know from discussions with colleagues and graduate students in my department that we all think Janet is a very special student. I have enjoyed getting to know her as a person and find her surprisingly mature for her young age, quite capable of working entirely on her own in a self-directed manner. I am pleased that Janet is planning to enroll in graduate school starting this fall. I have no doubt that she has the skills, focus, and determination to successfully complete a master's degree in a timely fashion. I also believe she will seek to complete a Ph.D.

Janet is a rare find. She is well-trained, ambitious, and yet very open-minded and even self-effacing. I believe she will be successful wherever she ends up attending graduate school. She will be a dedicated student and a competent professional.

I recommend her very highly and without reservation.

Sincerely,
Janet Teacher
Janet Teacher
Professor of Geography

MU — **MYTHIC UNIVERSITY**

123 Ivy Road, Mythic CA 99999   555-123-4567

November xx, 20xx

Letter of recommendation for Janet Lerner's graduate application

Janet Lerner is the best student I have this year, and I enthusiastically support her graduate application. She is highly intelligent, works well as a team member, and has demonstrated leadership potential. I enthusiastically supported her application for the student position on the Mythic University Board of Trustees for the same reasons. She was the runner-up for that distinguished post, and Mythic University lost out on a true leader. But I believe her time is yet to come.

Janet has taken only one class with me, but we have maintained contact through discussions in my office and on the squash court. She is an excellent student—she received an A in my class and was among the top two or three students in all facets of the course. She writes well, she is very analytical, she is articulate, and she is prepared. But the A hardly did justice to her performance in my class. A major component of this class was a local government simulation. Students played a variety of roles and dealt with issues given to them in the simulation textbook and by me, as simulation leader. We spent over three weeks of class time on this activity, and it allowed me to evaluate my students' strengths and weaknesses in some depth. Janet did not simply succeed in this simulation; rather, she *owned* it. The simulation included a zoning/development problem that is intended to be virtually intractable given the assigned roles and other simulation constraints. Janet beat the simulation. Her proposals were innovative, but within the confines of the simulation rules. She developed a solution, built the necessary coalition, developed creative compromises, and worked through to the proposal's enactment.

For her ingenuity, creativity, adherence to role, and enthusiasm, she received the class award for the most valuable simulation participant. But from my perspective her contribution went beyond this performance. Through the simulation Janet helped to set a tone, to take the simulation seriously and never say "it's not real" as would many of the other students. She showed leadership within the simulation and within the class.

Reflective now about Janet's contribution to the class, I would add one more point about the simulation. Janet was also the most severe critic of its design and my operational decisions. She challenged me to keep the simulation realistic and to avoid contradictions and implausible developments. Janet is critical, perceptive, aggressive, but not overpowering. Her criticisms were honest and appropriate.

Needless to say, I would love to teach a whole class full of Janet Lerners. She will make an outstanding graduate student. She has the intellectual capacity and she has the ambition. Based on what I have seen of her in the classroom and on the squash court, she also has the drive. And she will bring to graduate school a breadth rarely seen among graduate students: She double-majored in Political Science and Art History, a combination you do not often see. She speaks easily, and unusually perceptively, about politics, sports, the university community and academia in general, and anything else that comes up.

She will be a rare catch for any graduate school, and I will watch her career develop with great interest and high expectations.

Sincerely,
Janet Teacher
Janet Teacher
Assistant Professor of Political Science

MU MYTHIC UNIVERSITY

123 Ivy Road, Mythic CA 99999   555-123-4567

OCTOBER xx, 20xx

To the UCD School of Film Application Committee:

Letter of Support for John Lerner's UCD Graduate Scholarship

Perhaps the most memorable discussion I've ever had with a student about his decision to switch majors was three years ago. The student was a first-year Polymer Science and Engineering major on a scholarship, taking my introductory film class as an elective, and he told me he was considering a switch to Film. Assuming that this student was simply running into typical academic problems in first-year chemistry and physics courses, I asked how those courses were going. "Oh, I'm getting As in those," he assured me with a calm wave of his hand. "But I long to study Film." That student was John Lerner.

Since that time, I've worked with John as a mentor on several of his papers for classes ranging from honors composition to film history and theory. In my seven-year career as a film instructor, no student has been more delightful to work with than has John. His papers are always creative, self-styled, skillful, and analytical. I quote from a creative essay he wrote during his first year of study, spoofing college philosophy and psychology classes by claiming that he got through them simply by peppering in quotations from Ingmar Bergman films: "When my philosophy professor asked me to explain human reactions to fear, I snapped, 'In our fear, we make an image, and that image we call God.' I got an A in the course." Later, John as a character in the essay discovers that he can arbitrarily quote Bergman films to advance his personal relationships as a college student as well, in that college is "a world full of fake intellectuals."

This is not to say that John's work is too quirky or sardonic to thrive in the traditional academic arena. Another paper he wrote for a film class on Francois Truffaut's *La Nuit Américaine* clearly demonstrates his facility with formal analysis. In this paper, John compares Truffaut's life to his art (a staple of film criticism, certainly), but he does not trot out sophomoric insights—rather he analyzes crisply and complexly, embracing principles of paradox, juxtaposition, technique. One sees John's gift for language and analytical focus from the first line of the paper: "The tap of his cane is heard before the first appearance of the boy on screen—almost an apparition of Antione Doinel—hustling down the sidewalk toward an imposing set of vertical bars." In this paper and others I've reviewed with John, it's clear that he has mastered the art of student paper writing, and he is just as comfortable with a formal analysis of film noir as he is with dropping in cultural references to vernacular English or Groucho Marx.

I turn to these examples of John's work so prominently not because I lack other kinds of evidence, but because as I read his work I am so impressed with the richness and diversity of his talents. More personally, I have had numerous opportunities to match my opinion of John's work with that of his character. I've been intrigued and moved by conversations with him about his three adopted siblings. I've spoken with his peers about the particular sensibility that he brings to discussions in his classes, and I've spoken with his other professors about him, one of whom reports that he consistently "raises the tenor of class discussion greatly." As a lover of film and a screenplay author, I have enjoyed many relaxed conversations with John about both film and script writing. As his writing mentor, I have discovered that he is willing to do complete retooling of a script that is off the mark, or that I need only briefly characterize a trend in his work for his jaunty mind to apply it to self-improvement.

In short, John is both scholarly and culturally entrenched, ambitious but not pretentious, self-deprecating yet confident, forthright but unassuming, delightfully irreverent yet appropriately respectful—a complex and whole human being. A recent discussion with him about his GPA crystallizes these traits: "I have a 3.99-something GPA," he smiled. "I got an A- in a one-credit skiing class. I'm glad, really. Took the pressure off."

Given the substantial two-year stipend of the UCD Graduate Scholarship and your express request that recommenders voice their criticisms as well as their praise, I offer a few comments in that regard. Clearly, I mean to give John Lerner the highest recommendation, but not so subjectively that my opinion of him is varnished. I have known students with more concrete long-term goals than John has, I have worked with better writers, and for all his academic accomplishment, John is still a slightly withdrawn figure and at times the best in him needs to be coaxed forth. None of these issues, though, keep me from considering him to be among the best, most admired students I have known in my teaching career—a student on par with the award of a prestigious university scholarship.

Because of John's obvious writing and scholarly talent and his proven high level of interest in film, no student I have known would be more suited to thrive at the UCD School of Film, especially with a scholarship to fund his first two years. Please do give him your considered attention.

Sincerely,
John Teacher
John Teacher, PhD
Instructor in Film Studies

Dear Admissions Committee:

As the mentor for Ms. Qianwen Zhang, I have the distinct pleasure to write a recommendation letter for her, who does excellent work in my laboratory. My acquaintance with her, spreading over two years, has given me an opportunity to witness her growth from a novice to a qualified undergraduate researcher. Therefore, I highly recommend her to your distinguished program.

I became Qianwen's advising professor through the Candlelight Guide program which was launched by our department to track the undergraduates' academic performance. Frequent meetings and discussions led me to find that this young lady displayed great enthusiasm for computer science discipline and did very well in all of her professional courses. I was very happy that she expressed eagerness to join my research team and get involved in research on data management. Via subsequent working together with her, I have further confirmed that Qianwen is an intelligent, dependable and dedicated person, who is always ready to achieve her goals.

Although she was unfamiliar with her first project here during the initial period, she worked extremely hard and adapted herself to it fairly fast. After reading the technical reports and related codes, she soon caught on to how our trusted web email system worked and could generate interesting and thought-provoking ideas to further optimize the system efficiency and security in weekly seminars. Qianwen also showed remarkable problem-solving capabilities. There was a time when our trusted email system could not classify emails automatically midway through the experiment. She spent a full weekend troubleshooting the system. Finally she made it and corrected the minor but critical error, thus perfecting our system.

Moreover, I was deeply impressed by Qianwen's commitment to scientific research and outstanding programming qualification. Once we needed experimental support for our original proposals, she would immediately design programs that could support the theoretical analysis. A student without a quick analysis of complex problems and deep understanding of knowledge in algorithms and data structures could never accomplish such jobs so smoothly. In particular, I cannot fail to mention that Qianwen nearly devoted all her time to our later project in the laboratory, which illustrated her high level of motivation. She was usually the first one in the lab in the morning and the last to leave in the evening, and made a significant contribution to the whole group's accomplishments. Her devotion and aptitude for research are sure to bring her more scientific fruits in her forthcoming study.

Except for academic dedication, I am informed that Qianwen has also engaged herself

in a lot of social voluntary work. As the vice minister of the Youth Volunteer Club in our department, she continuously led her club members to repair the computers for free in the local community and spent a summer in some undeveloped areas of China teaching children there the basic computer skills. I am so glad that she not only focuses on her individual growth but also delivers her best to help others.

All in all, Qianwen exhibits great potential as an eligible graduate student. Clearly she is one of the best few undergraduates I have ever cooperated with in my laboratory. I would very much like her to undertake our graduate program. Even though I hope she stays here, I think she would benefit more from the overseas research environment and bring exceptional vigor to your program. I give her my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

Zhiyong Peng
Ph.D., Professor, Vice Dean
School of Computer, Wuhan University
Email: peng@whu.edu.cn
Tel: +86-189-8621-3018

学生请老师写推荐信，首先要试探老师愿意不愿意写，通过老师的态度来判断他能不能写好推荐信。比如有的老师非常热情地答应，非常愿意帮忙；而有的老师态度冷淡，话中带有保留，那么学生应该不必勉强这种带有保留的老师。但是有一点必须强调的是：自己的直接导师必须出示推荐信，否则在用人单位眼里看来就是"redflag"，看到这种情况（没有导师推荐信）就枪毙。

老师只要答应了请求，一般不会写坏话。在 KathyBaker 的 Atthe Helm: A Laboratory Navigator 一书里，作者从用人者的角度介绍到："Youwill seldom receive an overtly bad recommendation. Candidates will usuallyrequest recommendations only from people who think they will give a goodreport. In addition, most people who would write a bad recommendation willinform the candidate."但是不写坏话就够了吗？Kathy Baker 说："AP.I. may write a less-than-honest recommendation to make sure that thecandidate finds a job, i.e., to be sure that the candidate leave the P.I.'slab...But usually, even the most desperate person will not be totally dishonestand will couch their problems in telltale phrases hidden among thecompliments."也就是说，有的导师虽然看似在说好话，但其实锦里藏针，把一些话潜伏在句子里面！也就是说，话中有话！让我们阅读书上举出的例子：

Reading Comprehension: Success in 20 Minutes a Day 里面举出一个例子："Nicole Bryan usually completes her work on time and checks it carefully. She is a competent lab technician and is familiar with several ways to evaluate test results. She has some knowledge of the latest medical research, which has been helpful".这个虽然没有说一句坏话，但是绝对不是好的推荐信！用人单位看到这样的推荐信保证当场枪毙了。

那么，哪样写才是好的推荐信呢？Reading Comprehension: Success in 20 Minutes a Day 里面举出另外一个例子："Nicole Bryan always submits her work promptly and checks it judiciously. She is an excellent lab technician and has mastered several ways to evaluate test results. She has an extensive knowledge of the latest medical research, which has been invaluable."

两段话的字面意思几乎一样，但是为什么差别这么明显？读者们，你们体会到了吗？

再比如 At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator 一书里，作者举例："I am writing in support of XX for his application to graduate school. XX was in my lab for 3 years and was a conscientious worker, always doing what was suggested. Although his work resulted in only one senior author paper, he is an author on two other paper sin the lab and was always willing to help the more junior lab members."这看上去是一封好的推荐信，也许很多想出国的学生得到的推荐信也是这样的，但是事实是这恰恰是一封坏的推荐信！

好的推荐信除了没有"话中有话"以外，还表现在"吹捧"的程度上，网上资料 How to Write a Good Recommendation (The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 31,2008)说："As

one associate professor of English noted, 'the level of praise is so high that any assessment short of 'brilliant' can look tepid. That means that any consideration of a candidate's weakness is probably a kiss of death."也就是说，美国人就是喜欢"吹"的，推荐信里面不写高度赞扬的话，被推荐人就很难得到职位。中国人喜欢用"good"来形容一个人，但是在美国看推荐信的人那里，good 就是一般，outstanding, excellent, brilliant, extraordinary, superb 才是好！

推荐人写信的语气语调（tone）也非常重要。坏的推荐信采用一种不瘟不火、有气无力、带有保留、有种不大认识被推荐人的感觉的语调，这种语调叫做 cool, lukewarm, tepid。有这种语调，保证被推荐人会吃大亏。而写得好的推荐信正面、富有激情（passion），如燃烧的火焰。这正如收到推荐信后，用人单位打电话给你老板。虽然你的老板没有说你坏话，但是有气无力，没有富有激情地力荐你说你是百年不遇的千里马缺你不行，你就是拿不到工作。

写推荐信要注意：不要只是吹捧而忘了举出实例、给出细节！比如说，推荐人说该生科研能力强，那么请给出个例子并举出具体的数字！网上资料 How to Write a Good Recommendation (The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 31,2008)说："The dean of academic affairs we talked with said that details help to give 'a rationale for the superlatives-- not just that 'Dr. Smith is the greatest academic of her generation' but why she is special."该资料还说："Details can help those reading the letters get and idea of the quality of the relationship, and how the referee regards the applicant beyond the effusive praise that is often standard."知道这个道理后，需要写推荐信的人可以主动给推荐人提供自己最新的背景材料，如简历、情况总结、发表文章等，并和推荐人多沟通，商量你要强调自己什么。

最后，看推荐信的人不但看推荐人写了什么，而且看推荐人没有写什么！在 Kathy Baker 的 At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator 一书里，作者从用人者的角度介绍到："Look for things not said. Look for the qualities you do require."比如，很多准备出国的人在自己起草的推荐信里面都漏掉"积极参加系里的学术报告和国内学术会议"这一句话，还有的人缺乏对于人相处、合作的描述。再比如，出国读研究生主要需要科研能力，但是如果推荐信上写该生花了大量时间在下象棋上或者唱卡拉 OK 上，或者助人为乐上，却只字不提该生的科研能力、科研成果和成果的意义，这有用吗？

写推荐信的学问很多，好的推荐信和坏的推荐信，一看就能看出来。这篇博文是写给学生和老师看的。如果学生读者发现自己老师没有写好推荐信，欢迎把本文推荐给老师。如果觉得有启发，欢迎学习并推荐给同学。