

HDFS

Top Tips for Applying to Graduate School

1. SELECT THE BEST POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO WRITE RECOMMENDATION LETTERS.

When applying to graduate school it is best to ask faculty members to write letters of recommendation. Ideally, these faculty members will be tenure-track or tenured professors (people whose titles are assistant professor/associate professor/professor) who know you well and can write a personalized letter. It is best to ask faculty members for letters because they are most knowledgeable about the skills and qualities that are needed to be successful in graduate school, and their recommendations are valued to a greater degree. It can also be appropriate to ask an instructor or graduate student to write a letter if they know you well and can write a personalized letter. It is usually better to have a glowing letter that speaks specifically to your qualifications than a generic letter from a professor, and having your letters come from faculty is important! You may also ask a boss to write a letter of recommendation, but only if your job is relevant to the graduate program and your ultimate career goals. You should not ask friends or co-workers to write letters of recommendation for graduate school.

2. GIVE LETTER WRITERS INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE PROGRAM.

You will want to give each letter writer at minimum 2-3 weeks notice, although a month's notice is ideal. Ask your letter writer if they are willing to recommend you before you list them as a letter writer. When you ask a person to write a letter of recommendation, make sure they know the due date and where to send your letter of recommendation. You should share with the letter writer the name of and information about the graduate program. You should also give your CV/resume to your letter writer so they can learn more about you. Your CV/resume should be well-organized and include all your professional activities and scholarly accomplishments while in college. Some tips for writing a good CV are here:

<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/how-to-write-a-grad-school-resume/>

3. THE PERSONAL STATEMENT IS ABOUT YOUR PROFESSIONAL GOALS.

Many students erroneously believe the personal statement is about their personal journey and life story. Rather the personal statement should clearly articulate your scholarly accomplishments, professional interests, and career goals. In the personal statement you should explain your trajectory as a student and how the specific graduate program you are applying to will help you reach your professional goals. Essentially, the personal statement shares with the admissions committee your "fit" with the program and whether the program is appropriate to helping you meet your professional goals. The personal statement is also an opportunity to explain any challenges or notable accomplishments during your undergraduate career. For example, explain if you had lower grades during a certain semester due to a health reason, worked full-time during your undergraduate career, or presented research at a local conference.