

Writing Application Essays

Getting into the program of your choice may not be guaranteed, but writing the best possible application materials will really help. Programs can include graduate school, medical school, law school, an internship, or study abroad. This handout provides some key items to keep in mind throughout your writing process.

Your first step is to read the prompt(s). Notice what the program is asking you and why they want this information. They want to see who you are as a unique individual and why you would be a good fit for their program.

Your second step is to consider the audience. Generally, the audience will be professionals in the field with thorough knowledge about the program/school to which you are applying.

Readers will expect

- to hear *your* story.
- for you to explain why you are including a particular story or information.
- to see you have a clear direction and vision for your future.
- to see that your goals align with the program's goals.
- consistency and attention to detail.
- a professional tone.

A note on tone and audience: Some programs might expect a more formal tone than others; however, it is usually appropriate to use "I" phrases since you are writing about yourself. Focus on and match the tone and the topic set by the prompt.

Writing Process:

Prewrite

- Research the school or program. Your audience knows the program well, so errors really stand out.
- Be knowledgeable about the program's specialties that align with your career goals.
- Know the program's mission, approach to learning, accreditation standards, or values. Then, *show why* those are meaningful to you.
- Analyze the prompt, if one is provided:
 - ✓ How many parts are there? (Many prompts contain multiple questions.)
 - ✓ What language is used? (Use vocabulary from the prompt where you can in your essay.)

Go to pages 3-4 for brainstorming questions to help get you started.

Draft

With your prewriting done, you are ready to draft. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Be authentic. They want to know about you!

- Show; don't tell. Use vivid language to paint a picture of your experiences for your audience.
- Explain the meaning of those experiences and how they help you fit in the program.
- Avoid hero worship. When appropriate, mention people who influenced or encouraged you, being explicit about what you learned from them while keeping the focus on yourself.
- Be professional:
 - Avoid humor because you don't know what the audience will consider funny.
 - Avoid informal language/slang; however, "I" statements are appropriate when discussing your experiences.
 - Avoid generic language and cliches ("Ever since I was..." or "I want to become the best surgeon I could be to help my community").

Revise

- Share your writing with others (mentors, advisors, peers, The Writing Centers of TTU).
- Reread the prompt and highlight the parts of your paper that *specifically* answer it. If you haven't highlighted very much, you need to revise.
- Ask yourself if you accomplished your goals with the essay.
- Ask yourself if you showed you are informed about the program.
- Read your writing out loud to help with organization and proofreading.

A key takeaway is this: Present your unique and authentic self while showing how you will fit into and contribute to the program.

Prewriting Questions Common to Applications

Don't worry about complete sentences. Just take time to jot ideas down as they come. During the drafting stage, you can take your best ideas to build your essay.

What are some unique or impressive moments/events from your life?

Who shaped you in general or inspired you to go into this field? What was their effect on you?

What are some hardships you have overcome? They can be academic, financial, health-related, familial, etc.

What have you learned about your future field from school, conferences, volunteering, or internships?

What soft skills do you have, and how did you develop them? (e.g., perseverance, teamwork, communication, listening, leadership, confidence, integrity, compassion, etc.)

What are some of your short-term goals (the next 1-5 years)?

What are some of your long-term goals (the next 5-20 years)?

With your experience in the field so far (classes, internships, shadowing, etc.), what makes you confident that this career is the right one for you?

What have you learned about yourself through these experiences?

What activities have you enjoyed most during college? Why did you enjoy them?

Have you volunteered anywhere? Why did you choose that place/group of people to help?