

# Graduate School Application Assistance

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# **Part I : Researching and Applying to Graduate Programs and Professional Schools**

The goal of this section is to help students with the graduate and/or professional school admission process.

It consists of the following sections:

1. Funding graduate / professional education
2. Best Practices in researching and applying to graduate/professional schools

This material has been compiled through research conducted by speaking with career and educational counselors of select university career centers, discussions with educational consultants and reviews of books and articles. We strongly encourage you to consult university career centers, your professors, professionals working in your area of interest, and/or other resources to get more information on graduate/professional programs of your choice.

## ----- Section 1 -----

### **Funding graduate/professional education**

There are federal, provincial and university-based scholarships/awards available for students in graduate/professional programs at the masters or doctoral level.

#### **Federal Research Funding Agencies**

The Government of Canada has three major research funding agencies. They are:

*Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC):* The purpose of NSERC is to promote research in the field of natural sciences and engineering. It offers financial support (scholarships) to students doing research in masters or doctoral programs. For detailed information on all the awards/scholarships go to their website:

<http://www.nserc.ca/index.htm> > For Students and Fellows > Postgraduate

*Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC):* SSHRC is a federal agency that supports university-based research and graduate training in social sciences and humanities. For more information on its programs for masters and doctoral students contact your department or follow the link to their website:

[http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/students\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/students_e.asp) > Apply for Funding > Graduate Students

*Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR):* CIHR is another federal funding agency that supports research in the area of health sciences in both universities and industries. For more information on the awards/grants/scholarships visit their website:

<http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/>

#### **Provincial Funding Resources**

You can apply for scholarships/grants offered at the provincial level to fund your graduate/professional education. For example the Government of Ontario offers Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) to masters or doctoral students in Canadian universities. For more information on scholarships given by your province, you can contact Department/Faculty/School of graduate studies in the university or the Ministry of Education in your province.

#### **Graduate Assistantship for Students**

As a graduate student, especially at the Ph.D. level, there are opportunities to earn money by being employed as a teaching assistant or a research/ graduate assistant. This can give you valuable teaching or research experience as well as help you to network with other professors and students at the university.

#### **Information on Additional Funding Sources Available at University**

##### **Department/School/Faculty of Graduate Studies and Professional Schools**

The Department/Faculty/School of graduate studies and professional schools at your university maintains extensive information on financial resources to help graduate/professional students fund

their education. The financial resource information may include information on scholarships/awards from other professional organization or private trusts as well as several awards/scholarships databases. We strongly advise you to consult your university's Department/School/Faculty of Graduate Studies and Professional Programs. Following are some useful web links that may be helpful as you explore different options.

University of Victoria	Faculty of Graduate Studies <a href="http://web.uvic.ca/gradstudies/fund/">http://web.uvic.ca/gradstudies/fund/</a>
University of British Columbia	Faculty of Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/">http://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/</a>
Simon Fraser University	Dean of Graduate Studies Office <a href="http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/">http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/</a>
University of Northern British Columbia	Graduate Studies (Department) <a href="http://www.unbc.ca/calendar/graduate/financial_aid/">http://www.unbc.ca/calendar/graduate/financial_aid/</a>
University of Calgary	Faculty of Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.grad.ucalgary.ca/funding.aspx">http://www.grad.ucalgary.ca/funding.aspx</a>
University of Alberta	Faculty of Graduate Studies and Funding <a href="http://gradfile.fgsro.ualberta.ca/awardsfunding/">http://gradfile.fgsro.ualberta.ca/awardsfunding/</a>
University of Toronto (St. George)	School of Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/prospective/financial/index.asp">http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/prospective/financial/index.asp</a>
University of Toronto (Scarborough)	Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~vpresearch/graduate_studies/">http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~vpresearch/graduate_studies/</a>
Ryerson University	School of Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.ryerson.ca/graduate/funding/">http://www.ryerson.ca/graduate/funding/</a>
York University	Faculty of Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.yorku.ca/grads/financial/index.htm">http://www.yorku.ca/grads/financial/index.htm</a>
University of Guelph	Graduate Program Services <a href="http://www.uoguelph.ca/graduatestudies/">http://www.uoguelph.ca/graduatestudies/</a>
McMaster University	School of Graduate Scholarship <a href="http://www.mcmaster.ca/graduate/finance.htm">http://www.mcmaster.ca/graduate/finance.htm</a>
University of Western Ontario	Faculty of Graduate Studies <a href="http://www.uwo.ca/grad/financial_support.htm">http://www.uwo.ca/grad/financial_support.htm</a>
University of Windsor	Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research <a href="http://www.uwindsor.ca/grad">http://www.uwindsor.ca/grad</a>
Queens University	School of Graduate Studies and Research <a href="http://www.queensu.ca/sgr/prospective/fundingawards.php">http://www.queensu.ca/sgr/prospective/fundingawards.php</a>
McGill University	Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies <a href="http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/fellowships/">http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/fellowships/</a>
Stanford university	Stanford Financial Aid Office (Graduate Students) <a href="http://stanford.edu/dept/finaid/graduate/index.html">http://stanford.edu/dept/finaid/graduate/index.html</a>
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Student Financial Services <a href="http://web.mit.edu/finaid/grad_students/index.html">http://web.mit.edu/finaid/grad_students/index.html</a>

## **Additional Funding Resources**

Funding for graduate/professional studies is also available from a host of other sources including private trusts, professional organizations etc. Below is a list of additional funding resources:

Action Canada Fellowships	<a href="http://www.actioncanada.ca/">http://www.actioncanada.ca/</a>
J. Armand Bombardier Internationalist Fellowships	<a href="http://www.cbie.ca/bombardier/bombardier.html">http://www.cbie.ca/bombardier/bombardier.html</a>
Awards administered by the Association of Commonwealth Universities	<a href="http://www.acu.ac.uk/scholarships/">http://www.acu.ac.uk/scholarships/</a>
The International Development Research Center Funding Opportunities	<a href="http://www.idrc.ca/index_en.html">http://www.idrc.ca/index_en.html</a>
Killam Trusts Fellowships and Awards	<a href="http://www.killamtrusts.ca/">http://www.killamtrusts.ca/</a>
Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation Fellowships	<a href="http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/">http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/</a>
The W. L. Mackenzie King Memorial Scholarships	<a href="http://www.mkingsscholarships.ca/">http://www.mkingsscholarships.ca/</a>
Foundation Baxter & Alma Richard	<a href="http://www.fondationricard.com/">http://www.fondationricard.com/</a>
John and Lois Lamont Graduate Scholarship	<a href="http://www.pffc.ca/ppfc/content.asp?articleid=122">http://www.pffc.ca/ppfc/content.asp?articleid=122</a>
Scholarships Canada, an extensive database to find scholarship, student awards, bursaries and grants at Canadian universities	<a href="http://www.scholarshipscanada.com/">http://www.scholarshipscanada.com/</a>
Student Awards Database	<a href="http://www.studentawards.com/">http://www.studentawards.com/</a>
List of Scholarships, Fellowships and Awards administered by the AUCC	<a href="http://www.aucc.ca/scholarships/open_e.html">http://www.aucc.ca/scholarships/open_e.html</a>
The Smart student Guide to Financial Aid	<a href="http://www.finaid.org/fafsa/">http://www.finaid.org/fafsa/</a>
Community of Science Funding Database	<a href="http://fundingopps2.cos.com/">http://fundingopps2.cos.com/</a>

## --- Section 2 ---

### Best Practices: Researching and Applying to Graduate and/or Professional Programs

The decision to pursue graduate or professional education is an important decision. These sections aim to advise you on some key issues when deciding to pursue graduate and/or professional education.

#### **Identify Schools and Programs**

You may start looking for graduate and/or professional programs by first identifying schools that offer programs in your area of discipline.

#### **University Career Centres**

Book an appointment with a counselor at your post-secondary career resource center to discuss your career goals and potential graduate and/or professional education programs. Use online as well as print directories and other resources available at your local post-secondary career resource centers.

#### **Online Directories**

Below are some online directories that guide your research for programs and schools:

AUCC: Directory of Canadian Universities  
[http://www.aucc.ca/can\\_uni/search/index\\_e.html](http://www.aucc.ca/can_uni/search/index_e.html)

School Finder  
<http://www.schoolfinder.com/>

Peterson's  
<http://www.petersons.com/> (Canadian and US universities)

The World-Wide Graduate Schools Directory  
<http://www.gradschools.com/>

#### **Print directories**

You should consult current print directories of graduate and/or professional programs. Be sure to look for updated and current information as programs and entrance requirements regularly change. These may be readily available at your university's career resource center.

Some print directories that you might find helpful are:

Graduate Programs in Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law & Social Work by Peterson's

Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences by Peterson's

## Graduate Programs in the Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Agricultural Sciences, the Environment & Natural Resources by Peterson's

Be sure to check several other discipline- specific directories (e.g. law programs in Canada) in the career resource library of your university.

### **Evaluating Programs**

Once you have identified programs and post-secondary institutions of interest, you should carefully study and evaluate these programs to ensure that they meet your preferences and needs as follows:

- Discuss your plans (about attending a graduate or professional school) with your professors. They can help you identify best programs. They can point out the best research experts in different programs.
- Seek opinions of graduate students in your chosen field about specific programs and universities. Though the experiences of different students are unique, they can give you valuable insights about the school and its programs – the inside scoop.
- Talk to various employers (in your chosen field) about their preferences of graduate schools. Some of the questions that you may want to ask are:
  1. Are there programs in this field that tend to get mentioned more frequently?
  2. Are there programs that are considered to be a closer match for some areas of specialization within this field of work?
  3. What criteria would you use in evaluating programs if you were going to undertake a graduate or professional program? (e.g. location, reputation, cost, program, people)
- Visit the campus and prospective department(s) of as many schools as possible; a university can feel very different in person. You will be spending the next few years of your life at this university, so it is important that you get a feel of the atmosphere. Also, this gives you an opportunity to check out the services and facilities for students, (i.e.dorms, etc.)
- Check if the school offers financial assistance for graduate/professional students like grants, teacher and research assistantships, fellowships, funding packages particularly for doctoral programs etc.
- Go on their websites. All schools have websites that list detailed program requirements information. It is important that you check these websites. Be sure to check if there are any standardized tests (i.e. MCAT, LSAT, GMAT, GRE) that you may need as part of the admissions requirements for your chosen program. Find out what minimum scores are required for admission. Some programs require specific years of work experience or even overseas experience to qualify.
- Research the faculty. You can use these websites to read faculty profiles, and identify the faculty that has similar research interests as yours. You can then contact them to meet in person to express your interest in their work and the program.

Here are some suggestions for making the graduate school admission process more effective:

*Develop a graduate/professional school entry strategy early:* Start to think of graduate school as early as possible. Ideally, you should start researching graduate schools long before the final year of your undergraduate studies.

*Importance of good GPA:* Grade Point Average is a very important criterion for entry to graduate/professional programs. Though most graduate/ professional programs at Canadian universities require an average of B+ in the last two years of your undergraduate degree, a high GPA throughout your degree will strengthen your application. A GPA that is consistently high will impress admission committees.

*Keep an open mind:* It is not necessary that good programs exist only in big universities. Sometimes you may find that a well-recognized program in your field of study is located in a smaller university. Also, consider studying overseas. Programs in Canada can be very competitive. Do not give up if you are not accepted; keep your options open by looking at programs outside of Canada if that is an option for you.

*Pre-requisite requirements:* One of the advantages of starting research on graduate/professional programs early in your undergraduate program is that you can select courses early on to fulfill pre-requisite course requirements of the graduate/professional program in your chosen discipline. You must ensure that you have both the correct classes required for entrance to your graduate program and the sufficient standardized test scores to be accepted. It is not uncommon for students to write a standardized test more than once to improve their score, and most Canadian universities take the best score or average of two in determining one's marks for admission. It is also important to start early to give yourself time to prepare for any testing by enrolling in an exam preparation class (i.e. Kaplan, Princeton Review) and to write the test more than once if you wish. Students who choose to take a preparation class with an accredited educational agency can improve their scores by as many as 200 points; students who write the test more than once are also likely to improve their scores if they have studied how to take it.

*Establish good relationships with professors in your undergraduate program:* It is important that you get to know a couple of your professors really well. This should happen in your second year of undergraduate study, so that you can form relationships with professors who will write you strong letters of recommendation. Good letters weigh heavily on the decisions rendered by admissions committees. If you go to a big public university, it is difficult to get to know your professors well (they have so many students that they won't even remember your name unless you give them a reason to). You have to be proactive. Visit them during office hours; introduce yourself and let them know that you are an active learner. Email them; seek advice and guidance about papers, tests, labs, etc. You must come across as inquisitive and passionate to impress them. Once you are inspired by a professor in your field, take more than one class with him/ her. By getting to know them, you will gain valuable allies in your application process to graduate school.

*Study the application well:* Give yourself the necessary time to prepare for the application submission. Sometimes, you must include multiple copies of official transcripts from every school you have attended. Pay attention to detail. Incomplete applications will not be considered for admission and late materials may be discarded.

*Include Supplementary materials:* Include supplementary materials if you think it strengthens your application, even if they didn't ask for it. For example, if you have an impressive resume, submit it; if there's a paper you wrote that you want them to read, submit it. You never know what the deciding factor will be when they weigh your application against someone else's with the same grades and same scores as you.

*Have a Plan B:* There is intense competition to enter graduate/professional programs in any given year. With increased competition, it is likely that you may not be able to get in the program of your choice. We strongly advise you to have a *Plan B* (in case you do not get in). Here are some possibilities:

- Reapply for the program: You can contact the admission office and/or faculty to find how to strengthen your application the second time.
- Apply to another program: There may be more than one pathway to pursue the career of your choice and meet your career goals. Explore these options early.
- Look for Work: You can look for entry level work in your chosen field to get some experience. Having some related work experience can certainly make your application stronger than those candidates who have no related work experience.
- Volunteer: You can get experience through volunteering in different organizations within Canada or even overseas. There are many organizations that offer young Canadians with the opportunity to pursue short-term overseas internship or fellowships within different disciplines and geographic regions of the world.

### **Additional Resources**

Following are some additional resources on graduate/professional school admission process:

Making it into a top graduate school: 10 Steps to Successful Graduate Admission (2001) by Howard R. Greene & Matthew W. Greene; Publisher: Quill, New York.

Graduate School Admissions Adviser (2001) by Kaplan Publishing, New York.

A Fork in the Road: A Career Planning Guide for Young Adults (2003) by Susan Maltz & Barbara Grahm; Publisher: Impact Publications, Virginia.

Worldwide Graduate Scholarship Directory (2000) by Dan Casidy; Publisher: The Career Lakes, Franklin Lakes

The Princeton Review; Website: <http://www.princetonreview.com/home.asp>

# **Part II: How to Write a Graduate / Professional School Application**

The goal of this section is to provide guidance and support to undergraduate students planning to apply / currently applying to graduate and professional schools in the next year. It covers all aspects of the application process, including components of written application, statement of intent, interviews, letters of reference and CV writing.

The graduate / professional school application process is divided into 8 parts:

1. *The application form*: how to fill it out, what information to provide, how to address short answer questions, whether to apply for funding etc.
2. *Statement of intent*: detailed account of what information to provide in each paragraph, how to write in narrative form while still addressing the questions, how to begin and end
3. *Letters of reference*: who should write them, what should be included, how many to include
4. *CV*: what information to provide in the CV, how to format it, how to sell yourself on paper
5. *Transcripts*: how many to include, which schools need to submit, deadlines for ordering your transcripts
6. *Supplementary materials*: what to include (including writing samples, awards, volunteer work, etc.)
7. *Packaging the application*: what to submit, how to format application, tips on keeping yourself organized, how to show your creativity, etc.
8. *Interviews*: how to sell yourself in person, how to set the tone of an interview, what questions to ask, how to answer questions they ask you

In this document, the application process is approached as follows:

## Stage 1

- Selecting a school and program
- Getting organized

## Stage 2

- Filling out the application (including short answer questions)
- Developing a CV
- Selecting referees for letters of reference

## Stage 3

- Writing a statement of intent
- Writing a letter to the admissions committee

## Stage 4

- Submitting transcripts
- Choosing writing samples/ supplementary materials
- Preparing for interviews
- Packaging your application

# **Stage 1: Selecting a school and program, Getting Organized**

The application process is all about packaging yourself. Begin thinking about academic and professional experiences, your goals and ambitions, any special talents or interests that you have, and your family or financial situation that would be pertinent to your application.

## **Step 1: Selecting a school and program**

Every student has different needs and interests. The school and program that you select for yourself may not be suitable for the next person. When selecting a school or program, there are a number of factors to take into account:

1. Location
2. Reputation
3. Cost
4. Program
5. People

### **1.1 Selecting a school and program worksheet**

#### **1. Location**

- a. Where are you willing to go to school?

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- b. Do you prefer a big city or a smaller town?

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- c. Is having family or friends close by important? \_\_\_\_\_

- d. Is the weather a factor for you in choosing a school? \_\_\_\_\_

- e. What are the cultural/recreational opportunities that you would look for when choosing a new place to live and go to school? (if applicable)?

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#### **2. Reputation**

- a. Which schools do you think have the best reputation?

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- b. How important is reputation for you? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Is it realistic for you (considering your grades and the strength of your application) to attend any of these schools? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Cost**

- a. What is the cost of the program you are applying for?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- b. Can you afford the cost of tuition, books, and living expenses in the cities you are looking at?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- c. What other hidden costs can you anticipate that need to be considered when choosing a school?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **4. Program**

- a. What are you looking for in a good program in your field?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- b. What are the requirements of each program in terms of field of study? (i.e. course work, time required to complete degree)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- c. What is the teaching philosophy in the program?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- d. What are the job placement/ career opportunities that you can benefit from in this program?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- d. What is the availability of support services and infrastructure (libraries, lab space, etc.)?

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**5. People**

a. Who are the “big names” that you want to work with and where do they work?

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b. Who have you made contact with so far and how do you feel about this person (if you are applying to Masters or PhD programs, this is a very important step that you must complete ASAP)?

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c. What do students who are currently enrolled in this program/ recent graduates of this program have to say about it?

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**Step 2: Getting Organized**

Before beginning the application process, get organized! Once you have determined to which programs you will apply, make a list of all the requirements for the application of each program.

Create folders (computer and paper) for each application with checklists and dates of expected completion. The application process is long and tedious, and you will make it less stressful if you have well-defined plan. Keep in mind holidays and dates when the university is closed or profs are on vacation.

Here is an example of how to organize your applications:

e.g. Applying to PhD programs (January 1 deadline)

York

- application form (2 copies) (complete by November 1)
- transcript #1 (order November 10)
- transcript # 2 (order November 10)
- statement of intent (2 copies) (complete 1<sup>st</sup> draft October 15)
- writing sample # 1 (edit and print November 15)

- writing sample #2 (edit and print November 15)
- letter of reference # 1 (2 copies) (request letter November 1)
- letter of reference # 2 (2 copies) (request letter November 1)
- letter to committee (write and edit December 1)
- CV (2 copies) (edit and print November 15)
- Published work (enclose with final package)
- Mail package (December 10)

Once you have researched your schools/ programs, fill out worksheet 1.2.

## **1.2 Organizing your applications worksheet**

**Name of school:**

	<b><u>Deadline</u></b>	<b><u>Edited</u></b>	<b><u>Completed</u></b>	<b><u>Additional info</u></b>
Application form				
Transcripts				
Statement of intent				
Letters of reference				
CV				
Writing samples (if applicable)				
Letter to admissions committee				
Standardized tests (if applicable)				
Published work/ supplementary materials				
Mail package				

## **Stage 2: Filling out the applications, Developing a CV, Selecting referees**

### **Step 1: Filling out the applications**

Most schools offer online application forms. Be sure to fill out the form well in advance of the deadline (approximately 8 weeks) so that you can make changes. You may need to look up some of the information required so do not expect you will complete the entire application in one sitting. Record the ID number and password and put it in your application folder.

Make sure the information you provide is factual and accurate. They will check your answers against your CV, transcripts and letters of reference for inconsistencies.

When you have verified and completed the application, print it out and include two copies in your application package. Also indicate the date on which you completed the application online. Sometimes there are technical problems with websites; you may need to produce proof of completion.

If applying to an academic graduate school program (i.e. MED, MA, MSc, EdD, PhD), be sure that you verify all the application requirements for both the graduate school and the specific program to which you are applying. Sometimes they overlap and sometimes they differ.

Here are examples of application forms (UBC Grad School, Ontario Law School application)

<http://www.grad.ubc.ca/apply/online/index.asp>

[http://compass.ouac.on.ca/shopouac/olsas\\_english/welcome.html](http://compass.ouac.on.ca/shopouac/olsas_english/welcome.html)

### **Step 2: Developing a CV**

Your academic CV will likely be different from your employment CV (unless of course you are applying to a professional school that requires you to list your experience in the field)

Be sure to include your current and past courses, including the titles of the courses and the grades earned in each course (go back only one year, not your entire undergraduate degree). This information will also appear on your transcripts but you do not want the admissions committee to have to go looking for any information. Do not make them do the work—that is your job.

Include all relevant volunteer, work and research (if applicable) experience, as well as any publications, conference presentations, leadership positions, overseas experiences etc. that may be relevant. Your CV need not be (and should not be) only 1 page, like your employment resume. Forget everything you have learned about applying for a job with your CV; the rules are completely different now.

Use headings such as: (in order)

- Education (include courses and grades as well as all degrees/ diplomas earned—do not include your high school unless you have something in particular to highlight here)
- Skills (languages, research, writing, etc..)
- Work/ Research experience
- Volunteer experience
- Activities/ Leadership/ Interests
- Conferences/ Publications
- References

Use worksheet 2.1 to help you format the information for your CV.

## **2.1 Developing a CV Worksheet**

### **a. Education**

Dates:  
 Institution:  
 Degree earned:  
 GPA:  
 Courses (if applicable):

Dates:  
 Institution:  
 Degree earned:  
 GPA:  
 Courses (if applicable):

Dates:  
 Institution:  
 Degree earned:  
 GPA:  
 Courses (if applicable):

### **b. Skills**

Skill:  
 Details:

Skill:  
 Details:

Skill:  
 Details:

Skill:

Details:

Skill:

Details:

### **c. Work/ Research Experience**

Dates:

Location:

Company/ University/ Organization:

Description:

Awards/ Honours/ Important information:

Dates:

Location:

Company/ University/ Organization:

Description:

Awards/ Honours/ Important information:

Dates:

Location:

Company/ University/ Organization:

Description:

Awards/ Honours/ Important information:

Dates:

Location:

Company/ University/ Organization:

Description:

Awards/ Honours/ Important information:

Dates:

Location:

Company/ University/ Organization:

Description:

Awards/ Honours/ Important information:

### **d. Volunteer Experience**

Dates:

Location:

Company/ University/ Organization:

Nature of work:

Important skills developed:

Important issues you learned about:

Dates:  
Location:  
Company/ University/ Organization:  
Nature of work:  
Important skills developed:  
Important issues you learned about:

Dates:  
Location:  
Company/ University/ Organization:  
Nature of work:  
Important skills developed:  
Important issues you learned about:

Dates:  
Location:  
Company/ University/ Organization:  
Nature of work:  
Important skills developed:  
Important issues you learned about:

**e. Activities/ Leadership/ Interests**

Dates:  
Location:  
Organization (if applicable):  
Description:

Dates:  
Location:  
Organization (if applicable):  
Description:

Dates:  
Location:  
Organization (if applicable):  
Description:

Dates:  
Location:  
Organization (if applicable):  
Description:

(for Interests, simply list them)

**f. Conferences/ Publications/ Honours and Awards (if applicable)**

**g. References (use 2 references, same people as those submitting letters of reference)**

**Step 3: Selecting referees-- Letters of Reference**

You will need 2 or 3 letters of reference for in support of your application. These are usually academic references (i.e. professors, supervisors with whom you have taken classes/ worked)

Choose carefully. Not only do you need people who know you well and will write excellent references for you, but you also want to think about who they are and how well respected they are in your field.

Your letters of reference are the SECOND MOST IMPORTANT component of your application. They are of paramount importance because they convey the opinions of professionals and colleagues of the admissions committee.

Your referees will sometimes be asked to rank you against all other students that this prof has taught/ worked with over their entire career. Make sure that you have impressed them enough so that they will feel confident ticking the “Top 10%” or “Top 2%” box on the reference form.

Be sure to verify whether the schools to which you are applying require written letters in Word documents or specific references to be filled out in PDF form.

Check to confirm how many copies of each letter is required. Make sure that each letter is placed in a sealed envelope with the referee’s signature on the back.

## Stage 3: Writing a Statement of Interest, Writing a Letter to Admissions Committee

### Step 1: Writing a Statement of Interest

Each school will have specific areas it will want you to address in your statement of intent, but they all have common threads. It is likely that you may use the same statement (by making minor changes) for every application.

It is usually 1-2 pages, but requirements vary by program. Sometimes it is a document you need to fill out; sometimes it is a word document that you will have to write.

**\*\*\*\*This is one of the most important components of the application, so make sure you spend the most time on it.**

You will have to edit it multiple times, so give yourself plenty of time and seek help from family, friends, mentors and/ or professors, especially if they have experience in the area.

This is your chance to sell yourself on paper (and perhaps the only chance you have to sell yourself if you do not interview). Often times, your statement of interest is the determining factor when admissions committees choose between two applicants.

Examples of Statement of Intent questions:

#### Masters and PhD Program in Education:

OISE/ University of Toronto (SESE)

<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/apprequirements.html>

Provide a careful statement of intellectual interests and concerns relevant to sociology and equity studies in education, as well as an outline of how their areas of interests relate to SESE faculty research areas. Applicants should indicate in their statements the departmental research areas in which they have a primary interest.

#### Masters and PhD program in Social Sciences (Women's Studies)

UBC (Women's Studies)

<http://www.wmst.ubc.ca/programsMasters.html#admission>

Explain why you wish to do graduate work in the area. Include a description of non-academic relevant experience, an outline of your areas of greatest interest, and an explanation of any discrepancies in your academic record.

#### Law program:

York (Osgoode Hall Law) LLB, 1<sup>st</sup> year students

<http://www.osgoode.yorku.ca/pdf/firstyearpersonalcover.pdf>

- Discuss how your academic and non-academic experience has prepared you for the study of law. (max. 2000 characters)
- Discuss the significance of a law degree in light of your goals. (max. 2000 characters)

- Please discuss (max. 2000 characters for each)
- how your educational experience has been affected as a result of systemic barriers and how this has influenced your access to education and/ or,
- the circumstances that have affected your academic performance

### Medicine program

UBC (Faculty of Medicine), undergraduate MD program

[http://www.med.ubc.ca/education/md\\_programs/md\\_ugrad/MD\\_Undergraduate\\_Admissions/Application\\_Instructions\\_for\\_2006\\_07/Section\\_8\\_-\\_Autobiographical\\_Essay\\_and\\_Attachments\\_.htm](http://www.med.ubc.ca/education/md_programs/md_ugrad/MD_Undergraduate_Admissions/Application_Instructions_for_2006_07/Section_8_-_Autobiographical_Essay_and_Attachments_.htm)

Write a concise, organized essay in which you introduce yourself to members of the selection committee. This is your opportunity to tell us who you are and why you want to study medicine. You may wish to demonstrate how your non-academic experiences have contributed to your preparation for a career in medicine. Applicants must submit their own composition.

### Masters and PhD in Sciences (Genetics)

University of Toronto, (Department of Molecular and Medical Genetics), MSc/ PhD

<http://www.utoronto.ca/medicalgenetics/student%20site/admission%20and%20application%20.htm#1>

A letter of intent. This letter should briefly describe your previous research experience, outline your future goals, and research interests (e.g. tell us which professors in our department you would be interested in working with and why).

### Tips for writing your statement

- Be sure to address all the areas they ask
- Include any and all relevant information
- Write in concise but scholarly language
- EDIT, EDIT, EDIT!
- Write in narrative form. If you tell it like a story, not only will it be more engaging, but it will be easier for them to follow your passions and experiences that have led you to this point in your life

## **WRITING AN EFFECTIVE ADMISSIONS STATEMENT**

When you write a letter or personal statement as part of applying for graduate or professional school, you make your case as much by the way you write as by what you say. Here are some qualities to aim for.

**Be focussed.** Take your cue first from the prompts given in the application form; also research the program widely, looking for hints about its values and identity. What is the main stated question (e.g., why you will be a good researcher or lawyer, what experience you can bring to the program, whether you can stand the pressure)? If the prompt is very general (or lacking), choose an overall point you want to make: that you are a proven achiever that you thrive on challenges, that you have

something special to contribute to the profession. . . . Don't just write about law or medicine or anthropology: write about yourself as a lawyer, physician or anthropologist.

**Be coherent.** Being "together" is a quality of writing as well as of character. A clearly organized letter can create a picture of a clear-minded and sensible person. You might want to write from an outline or a diagram of main points. At least check the topic sentences of each paragraph in your finished piece to see if they make a logical sequence. Ask a tough-minded friend to give her impression.

**Be interpretive.** You need to make an impression concisely, so don't use your letter just to repeat the facts set out in other parts of the application. Provide explicit answers for the question that arises in the mind of any reader looking at a hundred or more similar documents: "So what?" Use nouns and adjectives that name qualities (*outgoing, curiosity, confident*) and verbs that show action (*coordinated, investigated, tried*). Make an effort to find the exact right ones to suit the evidence you are offering.

**Be specific.** There's no point making claims unless you can back them up. Refer to the fact lists in other parts of your application ("as my academic record shows"), but offer enough examples so that your letter can stand on its own. Say that they are just instances, not your whole proof ("An incident from last summer is an example..."). The concrete language you use for these specific references will also balance the generalizing words of your interpretive points.

**Be personal.** Your letter substitutes for an interview. In effect, the readers have asked you to tell stories, mention details, expand on facts. So mention things you might not have put into the rest of the application—your ethnic background or political interests, even. Don't be afraid to mention problems or weaknesses if you can show how you overcame them and what you learned from the experience.

Use *I* rather than evasive phrases like "this writer" or "was experienced." A stylistic tip: to avoid monotony, start some sentences with a subordinate clause such as "While I scrubbed floors" or "Because of my difficulties"—then go on to *I did* or *I learned*.

## Options for Organizing an Admissions Letter

Judge by the clues on the application form and by the nature of the profession or discipline what kind of logical structure you could use to tie your points together into a coherent whole. You may see indications you are expected to demonstrate your personality, or be self-analytical, or enter into discussions in the discipline. You will probably use one or more of these standard expository patterns.

**Narrative:** A chronological order is easy to organize. It progresses from a beginning to an end, and you can divide up the middle into manageable sections. But beware of overworked openings like "I have always wanted to be a dentist," and of excessive detail. Select relevant and interesting stories and make sure that the readers know why you are telling them.

**Analytic:** To deal with the central question why you are a good match for the program, give an overall answer about yourself and then discuss the elements that contribute to your engagement with the discipline. Discuss your interests in terms of key issues and theories in your discipline. To balance the dryness of this approach, break into memorable stories at times, using specific details, and use verbs to put yourself into action. Show what you intend to do after you have completed the program.

**Technical:** To indicate your research or professional interests, show your involvement with a specific issue. Don't just outline the topic you want to work on; write about your summer research job or independent-study project, or even your program on student radio or your volunteer experience. Outline specific undergraduate projects as examples. Emphasize what you learned from these activities, and indicate how your studies will extend that learning.

## **Other Sources of Advice**

**Specific Guidebooks:** A number of books give advice specifically on writing admissions letter. Since they're all focussed on American universities, take their advice and samples with a grain of salt. Above all, don't imitate too closely as being suspected plagiarism or obvious insincerity would lead to quick rejection.

e.g. Donald Asher. *Graduate Admissions Essays*.  
Howard Greene. *Beyond The Ivy Wall: 10 Essential Steps to Graduate School Admission*.  
R.J. Stelzer. *How to Write a Winning Personal Statement*.

**Websites:** Sites like these also give advice. They sometimes include samples.

e.g. Purdue University, [owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p\\_perstate.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html)  
University of Wisconsin, [www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/apessay.html](http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/apessay.html)  
PsychWeb, [www.psywww.com/careers/applicat.htm](http://www.psywww.com/careers/applicat.htm)  
Milwaukee on letters of recommendation, [www.uwm.edu/People/ccp2/work/recletter.html](http://www.uwm.edu/People/ccp2/work/recletter.html)  
Survey on Doctoral Education on questions to ask ahead, [www.phd-survey.org/advice/advice.htm](http://www.phd-survey.org/advice/advice.htm)

This information was compiled by the University of Toronto Coordinator of Writing Support, Dr. Margaret Procter, 2004. This file is available online at [www.utoronto.ca/writing/admiss.html](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/admiss.html).

Using this advice and drawing from your own experiences and creativity, use the following worksheet to guide your writing process.

### **3.1 Writing a Statement of Interest Worksheet**

Paragraph 1: [this is the narrative component—use something about yourself to grab them]

Paragraph 2: [what made you want to do this work?]

Paragraph 3: [what experience/ qualifications/ courses you have taken that prepare you for this program?]

Paragraph 4: [where will you go with what you have learned? What are your future plans?]

Paragraph 5: [catchy conclusion, tie back to narrative in introduction if possible]

## **Step 2: Writing a Letter to Admissions Committee**

You may also write a personal letter to the admissions committee, noting any discrepancies in your record, why you want to come to their school, or any personal things you want to tell them. Make yourself a tangible person, not just another applicant. This step is optional but recommended, especially if you have some information that would be important for the committee to know when considering your application. Life happens to all of us. Let them know how it has affected your education.

## **Stage 4: Submitting transcripts, Choosing writing samples/ supplementary materials, Preparing for interviews**

### **Step 1: Submitting Transcripts**

Include transcripts from every undergraduate and graduate institution you have attended. Be sure to verify how many transcripts you need for each school (some require 2 copies; some only need 1)

Provide full and detailed information about each school to which you need your transcripts sent. If you are applying to 6 grad schools with different deadlines, and need 2 copies of transcripts for some and only one copy for others, be very clear to your previous institution about how many, where and by when you need them sent.

It is your responsibility to make sure that the transcripts arrive on time. Even if you have ordered them correctly and they do not arrive on time, it is still your fault. Keep copies of all your correspondence and put it in your folders. Give the schools plenty of time to send and receive transcripts (do NOT leave it until the last minute).

Be sure to check if you need to pay for the transcripts to be sent (some schools charge, some do not). They will not release them until you pay for them. Keep confirmation numbers and receipts in your folders.

### **Step 2: Choosing writing samples/ Supplementary Materials**

Include any and all materials you think are relevant to strengthen your application, even if they are not required.

This may be in the form of a CV, extra (academic or non-academic) letters of reference, supplementary writing samples, photocopies of awards, newspaper articles, or publications, artistic portfolios, etc...

Your supplementary materials will make a big difference if it comes down to one spot and two very qualified applicants. They also let the committee know that you are keen and well-rounded, giving them a more accurate picture of you as a person. Show them that you are an asset to their program in any way you can.

### **Step 3: Preparing for Interviews**

Not all schools or programs offer interviews. It does not matter if they do or not—you will still need to make contact with them.

If any program to which you are applying does, be sure to schedule a meeting time with the appropriate person well ahead of time. Prepare your questions (make sure they do not already appear on the website anywhere—if they do, you will appear sloppy or unprepared) and possible answers ahead of time.

If they do not offer formal interviews, contact the head of the department, the admissions person, or a prospective faculty member with whom you want to work (for grad school applicants) and organize a face-to-face or telephone meeting. **IT IS SO IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO MAKE CONTACT WITH A REAL PERSON WHO KNOWS YOUR NAME.** You need to be more than a student number when it comes to the selection process. If there is someone who knows you or has spoken to you ahead of time, they can be a valuable ally in the committee room.

If possible, visit the school in advance to get a feel for the faculty, department and geography of the city. The “feel” of a school is incredibly important and subjective, so you need to go in person to find out. You will be spending the next few years of your life here; you must feel comfortable in the environment.

#### Examples of interview questions:

1. Why do you want to pursue this area of study? (Make sure to include autobiographical information that illustrates how you got to this point in your life and why you are passionate about this work)
2. What skills, insights, attributes to you bring to this program? (Basically, why should we take you and not someone else? Demonstrate your unique perspective, position, skill-base that you feel sets you apart. Also include any experiences that are different – i.e. I worked in a refugee camp in Central Asia for 6 months—from the average person’s)
3. What is your plan after you graduate? (Be realistic but don’t limit yourself. Be honest but think outside the box with your answers)
4. Why do you want to come to our program instead of -----? (You may tell them that you have applied to their competition’s programs too, but make theirs seem like your first choice even if it isn’t. Do your homework here! Make sure there is something special about each school that drew you to it. Alternatively, you may have a special circumstance –i.e. my mother is very sick and I want to be close to her—that you should definitely articulate to them).

### **Step 4: Packaging your application**

Believe it or not, how you present your application can make a difference in whether you are accepted or not. The way that you package your application is reflective of the way that you package yourself.

Be organized and systematic in your presentation. Use the checklists that you developed when you started the application process; include them as the first page of your application package.

Use the following worksheet to create a title page for every application.

#### **4.1 Packaging your application worksheet**

Application for \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ September 2008  
(degree) (program)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(name and student number)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of University)

1. Completed application form [2 copies]—enclosed
2. Official transcript from \_\_\_(institution)\_\_\_\_\_ [2 copies]—mailed directly by \_\_\_\_\_
3. Official transcript from \_\_\_\_\_ [2 copies]—mailed directly by \_\_\_\_\_
4. Reference letter from \_\_\_\_\_ ((position), (faculty), (university)) [2 copies]—enclosed
5. Reference letter from -----, ((position), (faculty), (university)) [2 copies]—mailed directly by referee
6. Reference letter from -----, ((position), (faculty), (university)) [2 copies]—mailed directly by referee
7. CV of (your name) [2 copies] – enclosed
8. Statement of Interest [2 copies]—enclosed
9. Letter from applicant [2 copies] –enclosed
10. Writing sample #1: (title of essay) \_\_\_\_\_ -- enclosed
11. Supplementary materials: \_\_\_\_\_ -- enclosed

## **Final tips**

**Be confident and believe in yourself!** You have gotten to this point in life, so celebrate your achievements and be proud of what you have accomplished. If you are, it will come through in your application and interviews!

**Be more organized than you ever have been!** Keep detailed records of contacts, deadlines, materials, dates and correspondence.

**Give yourself plenty of time!** This process is really time-consuming so do not short-change yourself on time. Admissions committees can tell who has put in the time and has paid close attention to detail. It is never too early to begin the process.

**Follow up!** Call and email schools from which you have requested transcripts, pros who are writing your references, schools to which you are applying to make sure materials have been sent and received. **You have to be on top of your application at all times, everyday. It should consume your life for a couple of months.** Then, celebrate when you are done! This process prepares you well for many other things you will face in life!