

Writing Exercises

for the

Graduate Admissions Essay, Statement of Purpose, or Letter of Intent

Answer each question with a narrative essay of any length, from a paragraph to several pages, whatever feels right.

1. How did you first get interested in this field of study? Can you remember the very first time you had this interest?
2. What has influenced this interest over time? What professors, classes, labs, papers, research projects, books or ideas have influenced you? What out-of-class experiences have influenced you?
3. If your interest has changed over time, how has your prior interest contributed to your understanding of/approach to your current interest?
4. Make a list of all your undergraduate papers, labs, and research projects. If you cannot remember their exact names, approximate or paraphrase.
5. Do you have any publications or presentations at academic conferences? Are there publications you can submit or any academic conferences you can attend (in any capacity) between now and when you would begin your graduate studies?
6. What will you do between now and when you will arrive at your graduate institution? Which classes will you take? What skills will you acquire? What internship, work or community service experiences will you complete?
7. How have you researched your graduate school options to date? Have you visited schools, researched them on Web sites, written to professors, attended conferences?
8. Can you remember encouraging words you have received from professors, employers, coaches, or peers? If others have encouraged you to pursue your goals, can you remember, as exactly as you can, what they said to you? If so, make a list of quotes.
9. What is your GPA in the following categories: overall, year by year, over the last four completed semesters, in your major, since you declared your current major, in math and sciences, not counting math and sciences, not counting semesters abroad, etc.? Look at your transcripts and see if there are other ways of analyzing your GPA that might be of interest to admissions readers.
10. How have you prepared yourself for success in graduate school? What body of relevant knowledge will you take with you? What study or laboratory skills will help you succeed? What personal attributes will help you?
11. Have you overcome adversity to get where you are? (Be brief.)
12. What makes you unique or unusual? List several things.
13. What are your leisure activities? What do you do when you are not being a student? What do you do to relieve stress?
14. How might you contribute to the academic community you intend to join? How will that community be benefited by association with you?
15. Can you name specific professors of interest at your top three graduate programs? If so, list them along with their research/academic specialties.
16. What will you do with this degree? Will you teach, do research, work in industry or government? All of the above? (If you don't know, don't invent.)