



Write Your Graduate School Admissions Essay in 6 Easy Steps

1 Know what's needed.

If your graduate school offers a writing prompt or general theme, read it over, noting any requirements like margin width, font type or size, length restrictions, and more. Perhaps write out a timeline as well, so you know when you need to complete each step in the process before the application deadline.

Keep in mind, however, that even if there's a word limit, most reviewers will prefer a fully covered topic that slightly exceeds the recommended word count to a paper that stops at the exact word limit but is full of fluff. Ultimately, it boils down to quality instead of quantity.



2 Stay on track with an outline.

After reading the prompt and requirements, what thoughts sprang immediately to mind? Did a couple of facts or anecdotes from your experience seem particularly useful or relevant in answering the essay prompt?

Take a few minutes to think over your past experiences, and note any instances your mind returns to. Be sure to tie it back to your educational, personal, or professional development, so you are in some way "selling" yourself and the value you bring to the university's bottom line.

Once you've made a list of relevant experiences, go through and see if there is a unifying topic throughout. Rather than speaking to every great quality about you, try to focus on one or two related skills and explore how you learned them and how you foresee this degree program advancing these skills. What have you done, and what will this degree help you to do?

After picking a centralized focus or theme, compose a paragraph-by-paragraph outline, so you can make sure each section is feeding into and supporting this overarching idea. Every sentence should ultimately go back to your intended point.

3 Compose a bad first draft.

Getting started is often the hardest part of the writing process. Because our pasts are so meaningful to us, committing words to the page about our experiences can be particularly intimidating.

But don't worry! Just concentrate on getting ideas down, and allow yourself to be a little disorganized initially—but make yourself get started, regardless of any fear you might feel.

Try to keep the stakes low for your first draft, and leave yourself plenty of time to revise and proofread your later drafts. That way, you can write quickly without having to worry about how everything is tying together yet.

At this stage of the process, it's important to simply put words on the page.

4 Revise, polish, and refine.

Next, follow a simple set of guidelines to improve and enliven the first draft. As you edit, pay particular attention to your tone: It should be personal but not simple. Make sure you maintain an engaging voice that sings your praises, speaking to your individual merits while conveying your professional value.

Here are a few quick tips to ensure your essay is as polished as a graduate student's paper should be:

- Watch out for run-on sentences and comma splices
- Use formal phrasing rather than contractions (e.g. "did not" instead of "didn't")
- Avoid clichés, idioms, colloquialisms, and weaker verbs like "got"
- Strengthen your verb choices but don't let your thesaurus do the writing
- Maintain a personal voice rather than reverting to a robotic, explanatory tone
- Demonstrate skills and values that relate to your degree program
- Keep your thoughts organized (remember your outline!) and relevant

Keeping the tips above in mind, you should now go about revising your piece and completing your first real draft.

5 Friends, mentors, and Admissions Advisors make great proofreaders.

When it comes to editing our own writing, it is very easy to overlook typos, awkward phrasings, and more heinous grammatical mistakes, simply because we know what we wanted to say or meant by the language, even if an average reader would not follow our thoughts.

For this reason, an absolute must of writing your college admissions essay is sending it to a trusted reader and having them provide you with feedback. A few strong potential candidates for your proofreader may be:

- **A mentor** who you trust to consider what's best for you
- A friend who knows your past as well as your future goals
- **A "friendtor," or friend who functions as a mentor**
- A family member or another prospective student if you know any
- **An Admissions Advisor with the university**

Whoever your proofreader is, make sure it is someone you trust to spot any potential errors and to provide you with honest feedback on your work.

Additionally, be sure to send your university-provided prompt (if you had one) and your outline along with your first draft, so your proofreader knows what was required of you and what you want each section to fulfill.

6 Finalize Your Draft, Proofread It, and Submit!

After you've made all of the edits your proofreader recommended, give your essay a very thorough final read-through. Check again that you're meeting all of the requirements and that every paragraph ties together and fits your overall point.

If you're feeling confident, now's the time to submit your essay! Take a moment to appreciate the work you put into writing this and reflect on what you've done.

Depending on where you are in the application and admissions process, this very well might be your last step before getting into grad school. Congratulations on taking the next step!

