Is graduate school really the right step toward your future?

First, consider these questions:

Do you have a clear idea of the career you want to pursue?

Is a graduate degree a requirement for your career, will it make employment easier, or could it make your job search difficult?

Who wants you to go to grad school? Is it your motivation and interests or are you responding to advice from others?

Is there another avenue for continued learning? Could you gain the marketable skills and knowledge you want through professional seminars, workshops, or community college classes?

What can you do with your Bachelor of Art or Bachelor or Science degree? If you are looking for some options, come to the Career Center to explore your career choices!

Examine your reasons for going to graduate or professional school:

Is it to further investigate an area of interest? Is it to bolster your credentials? Is it to extend your academic experience? Do you have the financial commitment it takes?

Next, select an academic focus.

- What could you study, read, write, and discuss that would keep you interested 2-5+ years?
- Have you explored the field through journals and talking to people in the field?
- Have you studied the course outlines of programs of interest?
- Have you looked over the textbooks you will be using in the program?
- Have you talked to current students in the program?

Develop a list of potential schools. Try out these helpful websites! Apply to more than one school!

Peterson’s Guides to Graduate Schools: http://www.petersons.com

GradSchools.com: http://www.gradschools.com

Graduate Guide: http://graduateguide.com


College Source: http://www.collegesource.org

Also, check out the Career Center website: http://www.flsouthern.edu/career

Graduate Programs at FSC

Masters of Business Administration (MBA)
Master of Education (MEd)
Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)
Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)
Masters of Accounting (MAcc)
Doctorate of Educational Leadership (EdD)
How to Write a Personal Statement

Through a personal statement, you introduce yourself to the university; it reflects your personality and intellect. It is important you read each question carefully and make every effort to understand and respond to it with well-considered responses and in a persuasive enough manner to hold the reader’s interest.

1. Understand and Explain Yourself
One of the main problems when writing is applicants fail to take a thorough and analytical look at themselves and their objectives. Admission committee members are looking for interesting, insightful, revealing, and non-generic essays that suggest you have successfully gone through a process of careful reflection and self-examination.

2. Set Yourself Apart
Committees are looking for something PERSONAL and ANALYTICAL. This means sharing information you rarely share with others and assessing your life more critically than usual. This approach is key to a successful personal statement.

Exercise: In order to begin writing your personal statement, your story, you’ll need to answer some basic questions to prepare yourself.

Questions:
• What is special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story? What details of your life (personal or family issues/history, any genuinely notable accomplishments, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
• When did you originally become interested in this field and what have you learned about it, and about yourself, which has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? This does not mean you should write, “Why I want to be a lawyer.” Instead, tell what insights you have gained from certain experiences reinforcing your decision to go to law school.
• How have you learned about this field? Is it through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, internships, or conversations with people already in the field?
• If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has the work contributed to your personal growth?
• What are your career goals?
• Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record you should explain (great grades and mediocre LSAT scores, for example, or a distinct improvement in your GRE if it was only average in the beginning)?
• Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (e.g., economic, familial, physical) in your life?
• What personal characteristic (integrity, compassion, persistence, for example) do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document you have these characteristics?
• What skills (leadership, communicative, analytical, for example) do you possess?
• Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school, and more successful and effective in the profession or field, than other applicants?
• What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

Tell a Story
Be truthful and stick to the facts; yet, think of your personal statement in the terms of writing a story. You want to write something fresh, lively, and different, to put yourself ahead of the other applicants. A personal statement MUST be MEMORABLE. One of the worst things you can do with your personal statement is to bore the admissions committee, yet this is exactly what most applicants do. Review your life very carefully (get help from family or friends if necessary) for facets or experiences that reveal an unusual dimension related to your professional goals or those serving as evidence of your suitability for being in this field.
More on Writing a Personal Statement

Florida Southern College Career Center

Find an Angle
If you are like most people, your life story might well lack significant drama, so figuring out a way to make it interesting becomes the big challenge. Finding an angle is vital. Brainstorm for ways to emphasize your exceptional qualities, goals, and past performances.

Concentrate on Your Opening Paragraph
Keep in mind, when composing your statement, the lead or OPENING PARAGRAPH IS generally the MOST IMPORTANT. Here you either GRAB the reader’s attention or lose it. If you are telling a story you will use this first paragraph to introduce the elements most relevant to your story, and the ones that will hold the greatest interest for the reader.

Tell Who You Are
The committee needs to get a sense of who you are, what makes you tick, and how you are different from other applicants. They should be interested in you, eager to hear more, impressed by what you are saying to them and is not what they have read a thousand times before.

Sometimes a personal statement can be perfectly well written in terms of language and grammar, but disastrous in lacking punch or impact; being totally off the mark concerning what it chooses to present about the applicant. Remember, what is most important about your personal statement is what you say and how you say it! Be selective about what you tell the admissions committee.

What you choose to say in your statement is, again, very much a reflection of you, because it shows the committee what your priorities are, what you consider to be important. The personal statement is often an indication, too, of your judgment, so be careful and give a great deal of thought to what you write. Think about yourself, your background, and your experiences and abilities to develop a strategy.

Other Things To Consider
- Determine what you would tell an admission committee member if you had five minutes to answer the question “What is most important for us to know about you?” This exercise will force you to do the type of thinking necessary in the preparation of an effective personal statement.
- Do not make the mistake of trying to guess what the admissions committee is looking for, and do not just write what you think the committee wants to hear. Such ploys are highly obvious to admissions people and can be detrimental to your cause.
- Be selective. Don’t introduce inappropriate material or get into too much detail, bringing your judgment to be called into question.
- Try to maintain a positive and upbeat tone. Overall, you want to project confidence and enthusiasm.
- Be specific when appropriate and use details.
- Adhere to stated word limits. Do not give them reason to toss your application packet.
- Be meticulous (type and proof read your essay carefully and have others read it too).
- If a school wants to know why you are applying to it rather than another school, do a bit of research if necessary to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.
- Are you providing something more than a recitation of information available elsewhere in the application? Do not repeat information you have already included in other documents. Are you avoiding obvious clichés? For example, a medical school applicant who writes he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought.

(By UNM Prof. Elizabeth Archuleta)

Make an appointment to see a Career Counselor for individualized assistance with your personal statement!
Don’t leave your applications for the last minute! Here’s a guideline to keep you on track.

**Summer**
- Write a draft of your personal statement. The Career Center can assist you in this process.
- Start browsing through guides to graduate programs.
- Sign up for required standardized tests.

**September**
- Meet with a career counselor to discuss your personal statement and possible programs.
- Consider whom you might ask to be a reference and ask their permission.
- Take standardized tests.

**October**
- If you have not yet taken standardized tests, **do it now!**
- Request application materials from programs.

**November**
- Order transcripts and complete application forms.
- Give references all the information needed to write recommendations.

**December**
- Mail applications. Get them in early, if possible.

**February**
- Contact programs about visiting and make the trip, if possible.
- Make sure your file is complete.

**April**
- File a copy of your federal income tax return, if you are applying for need-based financial programs.
- Send out your acceptance and rejection letters as soon as you make a decision. Remember, someone else could be waiting for that spot.

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**Magazines & books to check-out from the career center library:**
- Peterson’s Graduate and Professional Programs: An Overview
- Graduate School Guide
- Graduate Admissions Essays by Donald Asher
- Secrets to Winning a Scholarship by Mark Kantrowitz
- Peterson’s Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
- Best 143 Business Schools (The Princeton Review)

**Scholarships/Financial Aid**

While most students are aware there is money for financial aid available for undergraduate study, many would be surprised to find out just how much assistance is available for those who want to pursue advanced degrees. Check out these sites:

- [http://www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)
- [http://www.college-scholarships.com](http://www.college-scholarships.com)
- [http://www.saltsmoney.org](http://www.saltsmoney.org)

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**Stop by the Career Center!** We are here to help and provide you with resources so you’ll be confident about your graduate school choice. We have everything from books to flyers, to practice GRE, GMAT and LSAT practice exams, available on our Career Center computers.

**Also, log onto our website:**
[http://www.flsouthern.edu/career](http://www.flsouthern.edu/career)

**Check out MyPlan with links to graduate schools, financial aid help, personal assessment tests, interest inventory, salary calculator, and lots more!**