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## **Five Elements of a Killer Grad School Essay** **By Rahima, a CC Admissions Coach**

So you've taken the GRE/GMAT/TOEFL, got your recommendations lined up, and picked your list of top schools. Now comes the part some people get really nervous about: translating your story into a really powerful application essay that convinces the admissions committee that they just have to have you. Below are five key elements of a strong graduate school application essay that are universally transferable across all graduate degree programs.

### **1. A defining moment, personal anecdote, or vision**

Right now, your application is a lot of numbers, words and bullets. The admissions committee is reading thousands of these. Bring yourself to life by sharing what is most meaningful to you, or a transformative time in your life that has made you who you are or driven you to pursue this path. Make it personal. Humanize yourself. Maybe it's a lofty vision to change something about a certain industry, or make yourself a better leader. Maybe it's a personal struggle or that of a family member. Maybe it's a story that highlights why you're passionate about your field. Whatever it is, bring it to life and don't be afraid to be vulnerable. That shows courage, self-awareness, and leadership - huge standouts to any admissions committee.

### **2. The accomplishments that have prepared you to excel**

Although your resume is undoubtedly among your application materials, it is critical to underscore some of your most relevant and noteworthy professional, extracurricular, or personal accomplishments. Instead of listing your job titles and responsibilities that are similar to what's on your resume, highlight the *skills* it took to achieve some of your biggest outcomes, as well as any obstacles or barriers you overcame to achieve success. You can talk about how you had to bring together diverse team members with differing views to finish a complex project, or how you learned that empathy was a powerful skill in connecting with someone you had conflict with, or whatever it is that you accomplished in your past experiences. This is your chance to provide context behind your resume bullets and help the admissions committee see why your accomplishment was even more impressive, and how you can bring teamwork, leadership, and dedication to their school.

### **3. Why you need to go to graduate school to achieve your career vision**

Paramount to any great application essay is a critical path analysis - why you made the big decisions you made in your professional career, and how they weave together to paint a complete picture of why this next step for you makes sense. You can mention things like why you chose your undergraduate school, why you chose certain internships, why you moved from your first job to your second, why you switched industries or careers, etc. Highlighting the motivations behind these decisions will help the admissions committee see how you have approached your career and life so far, and see that you are thoughtful about applying to graduate school. Most important to highlight is why you need to go to graduate school to further your long-term goals (this piece may be less relevant to medical school applicants), and what skillsets, experiences, or networks in this degree program will be useful to your future.

### **4. Why *this* graduate school is the ideal place to help you get there**

This section is particularly important to show the admissions committee that you are serious about *their* school. Do your research. Be able to name specific courses, research projects, professors, extracurricular activities, experiences, capstone components of the program, and other elements unique to the school/program that have especially appealed to you and that fit into the skills you want to develop at this school. This section doesn't need to be long, but a couple of sentences are crucial to demonstrating your understanding of the school's culture and academic and social offerings and highlighting what you want to get out of the experience.

### **5. What you will bring to the community**

It can't all be about what you will take from the experience. You should also share what you will *give* back and bring to the school's community. For example, you could talk about your own diverse perspective on a certain topic, your unique work experience, your background, your plans to create student clubs, or your skills at bringing classmates together. The list is endless. Think about the three things that really define who you are and what you've done, and use that to show the admissions committee that investing in you will bring a different voice to the class they are crafting.

Good luck! Remember to always be authentic and honest in your essays. You will find the right school who really values you.