

Graduate School Resumes, Goals Statements, Recommendation Letters

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What are “they” looking for in your application?

Graduate programs look at your resume, goals statement, and recommendations for evidence of the following:

- You are prepared academically for graduate school generally and this program in particular.
- The program will be a good fit—you demonstrate an understanding of what the program offers and a sense of how that fits with your academic and professional goals.
- You will contribute to the program culture and reputation in positive ways.
- You have the professionalism and maturity to handle the academic and social aspects of graduate school.
- You are capable of working more independently than is generally expected at the undergraduate level.

What are “they” looking for?

- You will take a more active role in your courses and every aspect of your education than is generally expected at the undergraduate level.
- You are capable of the heavier and more complex reading, writing, conceptualization, and application required of graduate study.
- You are capable of the larger time commitment required to succeed at graduate study.
- Especially in the sciences: your interests fit with those of faculty available to take on new students at this time.
- You would be a good candidate for an assistantship (research, teaching, or otherwise).

Resumes

- Are there requirements for formatting, categories, or set up for the resume or cv?
- Ask someone who knows you to review your resume and help you remember what you've done
- Consider using tables to set up columns and help with formatting
- If sending electronically, save as a pdf

Consider including the following categories:

- Education
- Relevant Coursework
- Honors and Awards
- Publications
- Conference Presentations
- Grants
- Work (Teaching, Tutoring, Advising, Lab) Experience
- Professional Development
- Academic and Community Service
- Professional Memberships
- Languages

Goals Statements (aka Personal Statements)

- Are there specific requirements?
- Do they ask you to answer specific questions?

Note: If you have questions about what is expected in the goals statement, contact the program directly and discuss your questions with the graduate program director or advisor.

Goals Statements Require Time, Feedback, and Revision

- Begin writing early (months ahead of the deadline if possible)
- Check out online and library resources for specific advice for particular programs
- Work with a faculty mentor to receive feedback on drafts
- Consider personalizing the statement for each program
- Revise, polish, proofread

Do's and Don'ts in the Statement

- Do talk about specific interests
- Do tailor your statement to the particular program (faculty you might want to work with, aspects of the program you like)
- Do provide a sense of your short-term and long-term goals
- Do mention things that may make you an appealingly unique applicant if those things seem relevant
- Do “own your story”—provide a coherent narrative that demonstrates how your academic, extracurricular, and/or professional pursuits to now have prepared you for your goals and this program
 - Don't use clichés
 - Don't adopt a negative tone
 - Don't include extraneous anecdotes

Recommendation Letters

Who to ask:

- Academic vs. Nonacademic
- Prestigious vs. Personalized

NOTE: Always waive your right to see recommendation letters. If you have concerns that someone may not write a supportive letter, discuss these concerns up front or consider asking someone else.

Rec Letters con't...

When to ask:

- As soon as possible
- Minimum two weeks' notice—two months is better
- If you plan to take time off, ask for letters right away and request they be updated later

Rec Letters con't...

How to ask:

Dear Professor Smith,

I am applying to graduate programs in Environmental Studies and Environmental Communication. Would you be willing to recommend me for graduate programs? I've included the list of schools and my timeline below. If you are willing and able, I am happy to meet with you to discuss my application, and/or to send you my resume/cv and personal statement if it would be helpful.

Western Illinois University

- M.A. in Environmental Studies (recommendations submitted online by 12/15/13)

University of Nevada Reno

- M.A. in Environmental Communication (recommendations postmarked by 1/20/13)

Thank you for your consideration,

Amy Mossman

Rec Letters con't...

What to Provide:

- Be willing to provide recommenders your resume or cv, a copy of your personal or goals statement, and any materials they need to write and send the letter (e.g., forms and deadlines, web or email addresses).
- Be willing to direct them in what you'd like them to focus on (for example, your research and writing skills, your teaching skills, your ability to assume a leadership role in the lab, a particular project, award, etc.).

Questions?