Writing and Research Services

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How to Write Grad School Application Materials

Writing the CV, and Preparing a Statement of Intent/ Purpose





Early Document Preparation

- Give yourself ample time to *prepare* and *polish* documents; grad school applications can be costly and competitive.
- Ideally, begin preparing these documents the September *before* the September of your intended program start date.
- Early preparation allows you to avoid unforeseen delays and threats to your success, such as a lost transcript, a late recommendation, unclear and sloppy documents, and submit with time to spare



Requesting the Letter of Reference

- Ask early and if the writer is willing to provide a strong letter.
- Clearly identify all instructions.
- Create a package including your curriculum vitae, a list of accomplishments worth highlighting, statement of intent/purpose, and any other useful information.
- Send a courteous reminder 4-5 days before the letter is required and thank the writers.

Sample Reference Letter Request via email

Dear Dr. Collins,

I am applying to the Master of Arts English program at the University of British Columbia for September, 2016. Would you be willing to write me a letter of reference? Based on the courses I have taken with you in Indigenous Literature, I feel that you are best able to comment on my academic performance and potential for a Masters degree focused on colonialism and Canadian Indigenous Literature.

The letter must be sent directly to the college of graduate studies in a sealed envelope with your signature across the seal no later than January 15th, 2016; the address is provided below. In order to facilitate the writing, I have attached my current CV, working statement of purpose, and a word document with a list of the courses I have taken with you and my final marks in those courses.

Please let me know if you are able to provide a strong reference, and if there is anything that I have forgotten or any information that you need, please don't hesitate to ask.

Very Best, Student X

Some Things to Remember

- Seek out references who best know your work and can comment positively on your performance.
- Cultivate a working relationship with your professors so that they know who you are and how you contribute.
- Do your research and frame reference requests in the context of specific program instructions.
- Don't be afraid to ask your supervisor/a professor for feedback on your documents!



Writing the Academic CV

/	http://students.ubc.ca/caree r/resources/resumes	CV	Resume
	Audience	Academics in your field of study	Employers hiring you for a specific position
	Length	Highly flexible	1–2 pages
	Focus	Represents your academic achievements and your scholarly potential	Represents skills, job-related experience, accomplishments, and volunteer efforts
	Essentials	List of publications, presentations, teaching experience, education, honours, and grants	Skills and experiences related to the job you're seeking
	References	Include	Don't include
	Goal	Present a full history of your academic credentials, including teaching, researching, awards, and services	Present a brief snapshot of your skills and experiences that communicates your ability to perform the job you're seeking

General CV Information

- For new researchers, typically 2-4 pages long.
- Begin with most recent information and work your way back.
- Only include material that is relevant to your academic performance and professional development.
- · Use active verbs in descriptions of skills or duties.
- Be concise and precise.
- Avoid "I" statements.
- Use present tense if you are still holding a position;
 otherwise, use past tense.

Edit thoroughly

Skills and Corresponding Verbs

Financial	Creative	Helping	Clerical	Accomplishments
administered	designed	assisted	monitored	improved
managed	established	facilitated	organized	achieved
developed	instituted	instructed	compiled	resolved

E.g. Evaluated term work of 30 students in a first year Engineering class E.g. Invigilated final exams for 3 sections of Physics 100 *Quantify accomplishments when possible*



Formatting Principles

- Be consistent: include the same information for each entry (parallelism) and use the same gapping/formats throughout
- Use a readable, professional font (e.g. Times New Roman)
- Consider a running head with your surname and page number
- Distinguish headings and key information with bold or slightly larger fonts (parallelism)
- Avoid underlining: it can actually interfere with printing/scanning/faxing

Academic CV Structure

- Typically begins with personal information and is then followed by education.
- Personal information should include name, address, contact information and can include citizenship, if you wish.
- An objective or list of skills is sometimes included for graduate school applications; education may include some details about the most recent degree (eg. dissertation title/ supervisor/ GPA/ relevant coursework).
 If you decide to include a GPA, only do so if it is 3 grade points or above.



Awards and Employment

- Grants or awards, publications (if applicable), presentations, service, and references.
- If grants or awards are less significant, place them after employment.
- Research employment may be separated from teaching positions, if applicable.
- If professional employment is applicable then it can follow academic employment



Publications (if applicable)

- Publications follow experience; use the standard bibliographic format for your discipline (MLA, APA, etc.) and give full information for publications
- Separate peer-reviewed from non peer-reviewed publications; separate books from articles/ chapters, from reviews/ entries; specify as "forthcoming" any publications not yet available
- Creative works (e.g. performances, installations, and poetry) may be considered forms of publication



Presentations and Service

- Conference presentations follow publications.
 Invited talks can be separated and placed before regular presentations.
- Service work follows presentations: identify important tasks or accomplishments.
 - Include organizational activities.



Final Elements

- Professional development (i.e. additional training or workshops) and certifications.
- Languages spoken and read/ additional skills.
- References: names and contact information for 3 academics who have agreed to serve as references.



Notes on the CV

- As a young academic, it is okay if you do not yet have any experience under one or more of these subheadings.
- Focus on experience that has given you a skill set that will be useful for/applicable to the graduate program to which you are applying.





The Statement of Intent/Purpose

- Who are you? Why are you suitable for this program? Why do you want to participate in this program in particular?
- Perhaps the most important and challenging part of your package.
- Should clearly and concisely reflect who you are and why you would be an asset to the program you are applying to.
- You need to stand out from the many other applicants.
- This statement enables you to make a strong impression.
- Start EARLY and draft often.



Statement Writing Style

Be specific

- Be sure to follow specific guidelines of the program you are applying to!
- Programs often ask specific guiding questions and provide word limits.
 - Copy/paste or write these down.
- Edit and tailor your application statement for each school you apply to.





Statement Writing Style (cont.)

- Use formal language
- Spelling and grammar must be impeccable
- As in the CV, use action verbs
- Avoid gimmicks (poems etc.) and use humour with caution
- Use "I" statements sparingly to avoid monotony; try to vary sentence structure
- Remember, the admissions committee will sometimes read hundreds of letters; yours should be interesting and dynamic but specific

Getting Started

- Think seriously about why you want to go to grad school
- Start by looking for an overall theme: consider the degree you've chosen, courses you've taken and research you've done.
- What life experiences, hobbies, and volunteer work enhance your interest in and suitability for the graduate program you are applying for?
 Demonstrate genuine enthusiasm.
- Research your program of choice: Why have you chosen to apply to this program?
- Are there particular faculty members who do specific research you are interested in? Does it offer unique opportunities?



Paragraph 1: Hook

Unique personal experience that made you want to pursue graduate school, if applicable.

Personal Anecdote

- Opening with a personal anecdote can keep your statement fresh and lively or make you stand out.
- Use a personal anecdote that is relevant and to the point, if at all:
- Ex. "I grew up on a farm and have always had empathy and love for both pets and domestic farm animals. I was responsible for the care of my family's farm animals since I was 14. Witnessing my family's farming practices as opposed to those of large factory farms inspired me to explore the ethics surrounding how we treat and utilize animals through a graduate degree in Critical Animal Studies."



Example 2

Paragraph 2: What You've Done/Are Doing

Specific academic background/coursework/ topic that qualifies you to move forward, and from which you have learned or acquired skills.

Specific additional travel, work, volunteer experience that attests to your interest in, potential for, and relevant background for grad school

Paragraph 3: Why are you applying to this Program?

Why the program you have chosen in particular? Be specific. Why is it a good fit for you and your goals? Why are you a good fit for them? Future plans.

Core Components

Hooking Your Reader

Present a research question/Pitch a project

Can be an anecdote, introducing your "thesis"

Streamlined Approach

Functions similarly to a thesis by establishing your approach

Enables you to keep focus throughout your document (theme)

Identifying Your Goals

What do you hope to explore? Investigate? Examine?

Similar approach to applying for Tri-Council funding (SSHRC; CIHR;

NSERC)



Core Components (cont.)

Identifying a Plan

Give an outline of what you would like to do during your degree

Do you know which courses will be offered?

Will you be presenting your research at specific conferences?

What have you accomplished so far (training/expertise)?

Identifying the Program/School Fit

Is there a specific researcher that you hope to work with?

Why do you want to apply to this program?

Are there specific resources available at the campus or nearby that will help you complete your research?



Caveats

- Represent yourself honestly and genuinely; do not just write what you think the committee wants to hear
- Market yourself, but don't be too self congratulatory!
- Avoid controversial issues that may trigger personal/professional biases
- Do not cite frugality, convenience, proximity to family, friends, the city, only option as reasons you have chosen the school or program!
- Do mention courses, faculty, distinctions, etc.

Caveats (cont.)

- Avoid platitudes that are overly general:
- "I want to be a doctor because I want to help others"
- What is it about your life, knowledge and experience that makes you stand out?
- Don't talk about experiences in highschool or earlier unless significant, but do focus on what you've done in the past
- Don't just list experiences: explain specifically how your background and experiences have provided you with the necessary skills to undergo graduate school



Final Suggestions

- Complete your statement first, then look at others and adapt other good strategies
- Keep your letter original and in your own words
- Have someone else read it; put it aside for a few days before editing



Sources

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