

MITOCW | mitres16-9960-graduate_school_applications_captions

[Morse code beeps] [Whoosh]

[Helicopter rotor]

Hi, everyone.

My name is Nick Rober.

I'm a Fellow with the AeroAstro Comm Lab, and today we're going to be talking about graduate school applications.

So first we're going to jump right into an activity.

So this is just, a reflection activity.

You can go ahead and open the file "Grad School Motivation" and take five or so minutes to think about why it is that you plan to apply for grad school.

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So the lesson goals for today are first, we're going to identify key elements of a strong grad school application.

We're going to analyze sample application materials.

So this could be a CV, statement of purpose, and then recommendation requests.

We're going to look at clarity style and persuasiveness.

And then finally we will learn to draft and revise sections of different grad school application components so that you can go and take these lessons, to develop your own grad school applications.

So what are the main components of a grad school application?

A grad school application typically consists of a statement of purpose, so a written piece, a CV/resume, a set of letters of recommendations from faculty or other people that you've worked with, and then it may include, reaching out to faculty or departments that you're interested in applying for.

A successful grad school application will do a few things.

First and foremost, it tells a cohesive story.

So, who are you, why are you interested in a certain field, and why are you prepared to do good research?

It will employ both technical and persuasive writing, and then it will finally, convince a committee or faculty member that you're a good fit for their program and will do well as a grad student there.

So first, the statement of purpose.

So this is usually the the most challenging, piece of a grad school application.

But the statement of purpose basically lays out your motivation for applying to grad school.

So, it has to convince some admissions committee, so this is usually a committee made up of faculty members, that you're driven to do important research and, that you will be able to be successful in their program.

It might be separated into a couple of different statements.

So you might see different applications where you have a personal statement and a research statement, but ultimately, it's all kind of the same information just split in in different ways.

Keep in mind that the audience for these statements of purpose are faculty members.

They're pretty busy people.

You need to be able to kind of catch their attention pretty quickly and they have a lot of these to read through.

So you want to be someone who can stand out in some way.

So ultimately you want to make it clear why a specific program and why a specific field?

Tips for actually writing the statement of purpose.

You want to weave in evidence that you are going to be an effective researcher through your motivation and goals.

You should provide specific technical examples from your history in terms of what you have done that support your preparedness to do research.

And then you want to basically highlight any kind of elements in your CV or resume that may not be super front and center, but can contribute to your strength as a grad student.

So next we'll jump into an activity.

So this is going to be the file "Analyze SOP Excerpts", and take about eight minutes to complete this.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

So the next piece of graduate application is the CV and resume.

So specifically for graduate programs you want to be tailoring your, your CV or resume to this specific graduate program, so prioritizing research and research adjacent experiences is a must.

If you have limited research experience, that's okay, but you should be trying to highlight skills that, would transfer into research.

So if any any experience that you can highlight some skill that is similar to research, that should be something that you try and highlight as well.

And as always, include strong action action verbs at the start of each each component, clear statement of what you did, and then an outcome as well, if that's applicable.

And you also want to quantify outcomes and actions when possible.

Check out our other lesson on CVs and resumes for a lot more information, but this was just kind of the specific stuff to grad school.

So moving on with what to include, you always want to be including experiences that demonstrate research readiness and your ability to have an impact on a research field.

So one of the main things, if you have them, you should be including paper and research outputs.

So anything that you've submitted to a journal, conference, any papers that you might have in preparation or on a pre-print, basically any any work that you've done that kind of quantifies or describes your research output is is super important.

Another common thing to have is awards and honors.

So you might have something like a Dean's List accolade.

These are things that can be good to include just to kind of, give you credence to your ability as a researcher.

Teaching experience can be applicable, especially if your program has a specific requirement.

And then also things like technical service, leadership positions, and then other skills that you might have are good to include.

So next, we'll jump into the resume experience activities.

So go ahead and open the "Resume Experience" file and take roughly five minutes to complete that.

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So the next piece of the graduate application is letter recommendations.

And this is kind of unique because this isn't something you necessarily have to do yourself, but it is an important piece of the application because it gives the committee, the acceptance committee, some sort of view into your efficacy as a researcher from a third person perspective.

So how to choose letter writers?

This is something that we get asked a lot, but basically the the rule of thumb is you want to get letter writers who are able to speak to your specific abilities.

So people that you've worked with, maybe a professor who you've done research for or worked a lot in class with, employers can be valid, letter writers as well.

But you want people that are able to speak to your specific skills.

And another thing to keep in mind is you should definitely be asking your letter writers well in advance of a deadline.

This is the one piece of your application that you aren't fully in control of and then typically, your letter writers are going to be very busy people as well, so they need a good warning before a letter is due.

You can't be emailing them.

You know, the day before the letter is due, asking them for a letter of rec or it's probably not going to be the highest quality letter that you could get.

So, out of courtesy for your letter writers and out of your own interest, be sure to email and ask well in advance of the deadline.

And then a final piece of a graduate application, which may or may not be included in in many of your applications, is actually reaching out to faculty.

So, some faculty will ask specifically, specifically that you don't do this, some will ask that you do do this, but ultimately, if you're emailing faculty members, you should be doing it with a specific purpose.

So you don't want to be asking general questions that you can find on through other resources, but you should be asking specific questions that can really only be answered by emails from them.

So you may want to indicate specific interests in pieces of their work.

This can help you kind of stand out as an applicant, check if they're hiring students, because not all faculty are hiring students every year, and then you can ask other reasonable questions about, you know, the typical person that they're looking for as admitting to their group.

In terms of how this actually fits into your application, it can help refine your statement of purpose.

So that this is something you do before your statement of purpose.

You can kind of work whatever information you get from the email into the statement of purpose.

It also just signals your seriousness as an applicant.

And, but keep in mind that it's not usually required for most applications.

This is something that, you can kind of address on a case by case basis.

So in terms of what not to do or what to do and what not to do when emailing faculty members, make sure you read a couple of their papers ahead of time and have some sort of idea of what type of work they're, they're doing.

This just gives you the ability to have a very informed email and look prepared.

Always be concise.

Faculty members are usually pretty busy people as well, so they don't have time to read through a super super long email.

And then again, write with a purpose.

Make sure you're introducing yourself, giving interest, and asking any specific questions that you might have.

Things not to do.

Don't, send an email if they're specifically asking not to.

That's something I mentioned earlier.

Don't ask questions that can be answered through other resources like department website or the faculty's web page.

And then finally, don't worry if you don't hear back because ultimately they're very busy.

If they don't get back to you, that doesn't mean they're not interested in bringing you into their lab, it just means maybe they didn't have time to send an email.

So that will launch into the final activity.

Open "Complete an Email" file and take roughly five minutes to complete that.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

Okay, with that lesson, you should now be able to identify key elements of a grad school application and analyze your own application material and iteratively improve upon it.

So, thank you.

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