

Preparing Your Application

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Plan for today:

- Part 1: cover the application process
- Part 2: reading and editing your applications

Before the application...

- Find what you want to work on
- Find people who work on these problems: ask your thesis advisor, professors, your Graduate Sister...
- Studying their lab's website, reviewing the list of publications
- Apply to schools where these professors work

Your Application

- Transcripts & grades
- GRE & TOEFL
- Personal statement
- Recommendations
- Awards, outreach, volunteering



Reviewed by 3+
faculty members

Grades

- Do grades matter?..
- Average admitted CMU grad student GPA: 3.8
- 3.5 - 4.0, but could go much lower
- Can boost grades during a Masters
- What really matters: research
- Graduate classes in your research area, with a decent grade

GRE

- Some schools **ignore** GRE scores, some **require** it
- Math + English
- www.gre.org — a couple of month to prepare, take in the last year, before sending applications
- Lots of study guides!
- Do it while still in school (it's good for 5 years)

TOEFL

- Test of English as a foreign language (only for non-native speakers)
- Prepare and do well on it :)
- Tells your future school if you can communicate effectively
- Sometimes students with lower scores are offered to take an English class

Personal statement

- A **very** important piece of your application!
- Personal statement == research statement
- What research have you done?
- What research you want to do?
- Why do you like research?
- Need to answer these questions + tell the committee that you have the right skillz

Personal statement

1. Describe areas of research that you want to explore
2. Describe research projects you worked on
 - what problem were you solving?
 - why is it important?
 - what did you try?
 - did it work? if no, why? alternatives?
3. Why you want to pursue a PhD
4. Why you want to apply to this school: why is it a good fit for you — **change** for each school

Personal statement

- **Avoid** talking about yourself too much; talk about the project(s) you have worked on
- Can **include** course projects that turned into something bigger
- **Mention** your teaching experience (TA, tutoring), your outreach efforts
- Be **selective**: do not list everything, instead, put your best foot (i.e. project) forward
- **Respect** page limits

Personal statement

- Just start writing
- Make an outline — thesis words and sentences, fill out later
- Write bits and pieces, then move them around, fill out the rest
- Tailor to each program, OK to reuse pieces
- Revise & polish, have someone else read it (like today)
- Publications? Tech. report? **Include** them.

Recommendation letters

- Another **very** important piece of your application!
- 3-4 letters from people who know your research well
 - professors you did research with
 - professors who know your work and know you
 - your manager at work (esp. if you did research-related work)
- People who will say good things about you: *self-motivated, independent thinker, creative, vast knowledge of X, Y, Z*
- People who can talk about your research abilities

Recommendation letters

- Ask in **advance**
- If they are not-so-familiar with your research, prepare a little packet: your personal statement, transcript, description of research projects, courses w/ grades
- Indicate due dates; where to send the letter (URL)
- Keep track in a spreadsheet
- Follow up w/ school that letters were sent & received
- Thank your recommenders
- Let them know of your progress

Awards, outreach, volunteering

- Can mention some of these at the end of personal statement, e.g. “looking forward to TA a grad course”
- Can list on a separate page in addition to your statement, or as part of a CV
- Tutoring, TAing, running a workshop for fellow students, co-teaching, giving lectures — good to include

Fellowship applications

- Apply to **many** and **early**
- Can apply as a senior undergrad, 1st and 2nd year PhD student
- Check eligibility: **US citizen/PR**, **minority groups**
- Check conditions of award: some fellowships require you to work
- Mostly PhD, but some open to MS — check with your school

Fellowship applications

- Why apply to fellowships?
 - It's very *cool* to have on CV
 - Easier to choose an advisor since you have your own funding
 - Can include in your grad school applications — shows that you are *self-motivated* ;)
 - Some pay for your conference travel
 - Networking opportunities w/in the program

Fellowship applications

- Similar to writing a personal statement
- May require a more detailed research/outreach plan
- May ask you to write about a specific question
- Require recommendations, transcripts, GRE scores

Resources

- CMU's Global Communication Center: <http://www.cmu.edu/gcc/>
- Purdue's OWL: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/48/>
- Graduate fellowships: <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~gradfellowships/>
- Mor's write up on graduate school, section 3: <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~harchol/>