

# >>> 5 WAYS To Make Your Health Professions Graduate School Application Stand Out

When applying to graduate school in the health professions, many promising possibilities come to mind: Learning a completely new field. Expanding your career opportunities. Helping people in a rewarding profession. Exhibiting both excitement and thoughtfulness about this significant career move, will help you craft an outstanding application that will truly make you stand out. Let's look at 4 ways to really make you and your application shine!

## 1 IDENTIFY THE RIGHT PROGRAM

Centralized application services make it easy to apply to dozens of graduate programs with minimal effort; but that doesn't mean you should. Even if they all look alike to you, graduate schools tend to think of themselves as having distinct profiles with students who "fit" their values. Therefore, it's likely that your interests, aptitudes and goals will match with a small number of programs. To determine which ones, first figure out the type of institution where you will thrive and take into account all of these factors:

- **Location:** Would you like to study in a small or larger city? Near family or friends? Which affiliated hospitals and practices are nearby?
- **Size of the Institution:** Small? Medium? Large?
- **Facilities:** Do the program's facilities meet your needs and expectations? Are simulation resources available?
- **Faculty:** What projects, studies, or experience of the faculty interest and inspire you? Do the faculty have deep experience in both health care practice and research? Remember, faculty members tend to play a role in admissions, so it's important to identify a few whose profiles match yours.
- **Teaching Philosophy:** Does the program employ interactive, team-based learning or a traditional lecture format? Is there an interprofessional emphasis?
- **Career Path:** Do you see yourself pursuing research after graduation? Teaching? Private practice? What type of advising would you receive?
- **Financial Aid:** What percentage of students receive aid? What is the school's overall financial aid budget? How much will you need?

Once you have answered these questions, you will have your own personal profile that you can use to evaluate any program. It will also provide you with specifics to weave into a personalized and compelling application essay.



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Finally, although some sources may pretend otherwise, there is no definitive ranking of graduate programs. Selecting a graduate school is about finding the right fit for you with no single set of criteria applying to everyone. Here are some resources, from both private and public sources, to help you:

- [Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs](#)
- [National Research Council](#)
- [Noodle.org](#)
- [US News and World Report](#)
- [National Center for Educational Statistics](#)

## 2 CRAFT A CATCHY PERSONAL STATEMENT

A common mistake in the application process is for an applicant to explain all the reasons that attending graduate school would help him or her achieve personal goals. While sincere, this approach will not distinguish you from all the other applicants. Instead, focus carefully on the following strategies to make your application stand out to the admissions committee.

By now, you should have a sense of how graduate admissions officers think. They are looking for students who will succeed at their institution. Short of a crystal ball to peer into the future, they must predict success based on your academic preparation, undergraduate GPA and test scores, personal characteristics, letters of reference, and the written statement. First, let's focus on the personal statement, which is your opportunity to make a case for how you will fit into the program and institution.

There is no need to use your personal statement to convince the faculty on the importance of your chosen discipline; they already know that. Nor do you have to repeat things from other parts of your application.

So, how do you write an essay that will stand out? One that will convey passion and interest without being too clichéd or abstract? Well, first know what personal traits your audience is looking for, and then give them concrete examples and evidence of how you demonstrate them. The following are typical traits many health professions graduate schools seek in their students:

- **Commitment:** What motivates you to pursue graduate study? What have you done in the past that shows you won't be sidetracked by setbacks along the way?



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- **Creativity:** What will you bring to the program that no other student can? What about your experience is unique?
- **Interests:** Have you done your homework about the program? What specific course options or faculty research make this school a good fit?
- **Professionalism:** Do you value this opportunity enough to write clearly and with no errors?

Some students find it helpful to see sample essays. You can find some at the links below along with general guidelines. Of course, it's difficult to demonstrate creativity and personal interest if you're copying someone else's format. Use these sites as a template for the general tone and length that your statement should follow:

- [Association of American Medical Colleges](#)
- [Psi Chi: International Honor Society in Psychology](#)
- [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)
- [UC Berkeley Career Services](#)

## 3 SOLICIT PERSUASIVE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

In addition to the personal statement, the other way that admissions officers gain a sense of your academic potential is through letters of recommendation. All letters of recommendation are positive (you choose the writers after all!), so if one of yours reveals the slightest bit of concern, it will harm your application. Although you cannot control the content of the letters, you can select people who know you well and give them the material they need to write a persuasive letter.

One challenge is that sometimes the people whose opinion matters most to graduate schools – your professors – know you the least. Still, the majority of your letters should come from recommenders who know you in an academic context. These include faculty members, advisers, and research mentors. The next best recommender is someone who supervised you in a health care setting. Letters from family friends or clergy may reflect a different facet of your character, but they are usually irrelevant to your ability to excel in a graduate program. You can help your writers appear to know you better by preparing them adequately:

- **Provide** six to eight weeks' advance notice of the deadline.
- **Give** them your CV, transcript, and personal statement.



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- **Save** any assignments you completed with a specific professor and share his/her comments.
- **Instruct** them to cover different aspects of your record. You can have one writer explain a gap in your resume or a particularly weak semester. Another one can emphasize your extracurricular work. Your writers will appreciate the guidance.

Faculty members get bombarded with requests for letters of recommendation in the fall. Be kind to your professors by following the advice at these links:

- [Ohio University Department of Psychology](#)
- [Brown University Department of Computer Science](#)
- [A professor of English](#)
- [Psi Chi: The International Honor Society in Psychology](#)
- [UC Berkeley Career Center](#)

## 4 PREPARE A STRONG CV

Curriculum vitae means “course of life” and is usually referred to as a “CV.” The CV differs from a standard job resume in that it grows along with your accomplishments. It also is more focused on academic achievements, which is why many graduate programs request one from applicants.

The CV offers you another opportunity to present yourself as an intellectually curious, engaged, future health care professional. Depending on where you are in your career, you may not have much to include on your CV, but you can still use your experience to tell a story of how all your activities have prepared and motivated you for graduate school. It’s not just relevant content that will convey this; a nice format and layout will also demonstrate your careful attention to detail and present you in the best light possible to potential schools.

At a minimum, a good CV should include (in roughly this order):

- Educational Credentials
- Health Care Experience
- Extracurricular Activities
- Honors and Awards
- Publications and Presentations



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You may also have items to add in categories like:

- Research Experience
- Leadership Roles
- Community Service
- Professional Society Memberships
- Computer Skills
- Languages

Always exclude content that sends the wrong signal:

- Personal information
- High school activities (unless at a regional or national level)
- Local organizations or awards that contain no explanation
- Irrelevant work experience

And avoid formatting errors that will distract your audience from the content itself:

- Inconsistent date formats
- Cramped text
- Illogical ordering and/or no section headings
- Typos, multiple fonts, images, and other distracting elements

There is no single format for CVs, though certain professions have their own conventions. You can usually find the CVs of faculty in programs where you're applying on departmental websites. These may give you ideas, but don't assume that faculty have clear, concise CVs. You can also visit these career services sites for models:

- [Central Washington University](#)
- [Cornell University](#)
- [Microsoft Word templates](#)
- [Psi Chi: The International Honor Society in Psychology](#)
- [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)



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## 5 KEEP IT REAL

Finally, it is also important to consider some of the significant realities involved in attending graduate school:

- **It's expensive.** Enough said, other than to add that the rigors of the curriculum often mean that you will have limited time to work while earning your degree.
- **It's demanding.** Professors expect you to manage your time and to assimilate large amounts of material. Furthermore, unlike undergraduate studies, graduate school curricula tend to be lock step. That is, all students in a cohort take the same sequence of classes. This means that if you fail one, you may have to drop back an entire year to retake it. You really want to be fully committed to your graduate study when you begin.

If you keep these realities in mind – as well as the four things outlined above – crafting a compelling health professions graduate school application will be possible! And you will be ready to being the next stage of a meaningful and fulfilling career.

### About The Author

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