

## Customizing Your Writing for Graduate School Applications

### Customize Your Writing

When asked to explain why you want to be in a program, customize your answer in a meaningful way.

To customize:

- Show how your interests and goals align with specific elements of the program
- Detail how certain partnerships or collaborations within industry, the community or other academic units will support your research and professional interests
- Align your research interests and experience with 2-3 professors in the program that you want to do research with (a must for PhD applications and only needed for a master's if research-based)

Avoid:

- Telling a program about itself in terms of rankings, prestige, etc.
- Inserting a program name in your statement with plans to replace it for another so you can reuse your statement in full. If you only need to change a name, your writing is not customized.

### Telling vs. Showing

Strong, well-written statements show readers how your experiences are connected to each other instead of simply telling what happened in your life.

**Telling means that you essentially list experiences from your resume or CV using prose.**

**Telling:** *In spring of 2019, I led a class project as a student of Dr. Ima Lopez. Our project entailed developing an ergonomic blood testing kit for individuals with diabetes and limited hand dexterity. We used feedback from individuals who could benefit from the device to improve our design with each iteration. After that, I interned at Big Company and worked on....*

Note: No explanation is given as to why the writer is telling a reader any of this.

**Showing provides details about how those experiences shaped your research interests, advanced your knowledge, etc. and tell your reader why you are sharing the information.**

**Showing:** *In spring of 2019, I led a class project as a student of Dr. Ima Lopez. Our project entailed developing an ergonomic blood testing kit for individuals with diabetes and very limited hand dexterity. We used feedback from individuals who could benefit from the device to improve our design with each iteration. Prior to doing such research, I did not understand how difficult checking one's own blood sugar can be if you cannot move your hands easily. Being a part of a research team that included end users in the design process not only taught me how invaluable their feedback is but also made me realize that I wanted to continue to be a part of research that can improve the daily lives of others. My team ultimately created a device that is now awaiting FDA approval and that will positively impact the quality of life for many. The experience developing the blood test kit led me to seek out an internship at Big Company in order to gain more skills in....*

**Note:** The writer tells the reader about their experiences but also shows how those experiences shaped other decisions. The writer answers the question "why are you telling me this?" for a reader.

## Know Your Audience

Understanding your audience is key in any form of communication. The audiences for graduate school applications differ from undergraduate applications.

Undergraduate application audience	Graduate school application audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• various academic backgrounds</li><li>• not major/program specific</li><li>• no faculty (usually)</li><li>• decides if you are good fit for the whole school, not a particular major or field</li><li>• makes admissions decisions for departments across a university</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• department/program faculty</li><li>• experts in the field</li><li>• decides if you are good fit for their specific program</li><li>• follows guidelines from overarching graduate school but ultimately makes admissions decision</li><li>• video: <a href="https://b.gatech.edu/2pjh4t3">https://b.gatech.edu/2pjh4t3</a></li></ul>

Your audience is different for graduate school applications than it was for your undergraduate applications, which means you can write in language understandable to a specific audience.

Some points to consider:

- Although your audience may be comprised of experts in your chosen field, they might not all have the same specialty and research focus.
- Too much technical language from your particular research area can unintentionally exclude some readers on the review committee.

If you also have to submit a research statement, you can write at the same level that you would write as if submitting an article to a peer-reviewed academic journal.

## Writing Help

- Pre-Graduate Advisor, Susan Belmonte (appointment in Advisor Link <https://advisor.gatech.edu>)
- GT CommLab. [communicationcenter.gatech.edu](https://communicationcenter.gatech.edu)