Top Ten Tips for Graduate School Essays*

- Treat each essay as a unique, original exercise. Play by rules of each school/program and carefully follow their instructions. Never present the work of someone else as your own.

- Avoid the typical introductory paragraph that refers back to an earlier time in your life. Such as: “I have known that I wanted to do this since I was __ years old.” Or “I have known I wanted to do this since __ year in school.” Consider telling a relevant story or recounting of a specific experience in the opening paragraph to draw the reader in right away.

- Don’t pepper your essay with words that you would never use in conversation. Keep the tone professional, yet conversational. Do not use contractions or slang.

- They are called “clichés” for a reason. Never use them in your essay.

- The passive voice should be avoided. (If you don’t understand this, Google™ it.)

- Be specific and descriptive, not superficial.

- Avoid a step by step, incident by incident recounting of events in your life. (First I did this, then I did that, then I did that...)

- Your qualifications are not simply the experiences you have racked up. What you learn from those experiences makes you a strong applicant and ultimately a strong professional in your chosen field.

- Typos, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors may be the fast way into the “no” pile of applications. Proofread your own essay (read it backwards if you need to), use spell check and visit the Writing Center in Murphy Library.

- Get feedback on the content of your essay. Ask a professional in your field (if you know one), a faculty member and a staff member to read it. Family and friends are often not the best resources for critiquing essays. They may not have experience with this type of writing and their first concern may be to try to support you, not give you critical feedback.

- If you have an obvious flaw in your academic record, discuss it in your essay. Don’t make excuses. Address why it happened and highlight what you learned from the experience that will make you a stronger graduate student.

- Review your essays to see if you have answered these questions for the reader: Why do I want to pursue this field? Why am I a good fit for this field? How have I grown professionally from my education and experience? Why do I want to attend this school or program?

* There are really twelve.
A Selection of Helpful Links on Graduate School Application Essays

These links are presented as a service to the reader and should not be interpreted as an endorsement by UW-L or the UW-L Career Services staff.

Purdue University Online Writing Lab
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/

University of California Berkeley Career Center
https://career.berkeley.edu/grad/gradstatement.stm

Peterson's
http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/graduate-school-essay-mistakes.aspx

Accepted.com (Caution: this company charges for its services, but the free info on the website is insightful.)
http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx

The Plagiarism Checker (better safe, than sorry)
http://www.dustball.com/cs/plagiarism.checker/