

PERSONAL STATEMENT BRAINSTORMING

This is to help you build a pool of information. Not all of it will be used in the essay; but it should provide a start to forming main points. After answering all of these questions, you may have crafted the first draft of your essay without even realizing it.

SHARE SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE.

- What is most unusual thing about you as a person—not you as an applicant or you as a student—but you as a unique and unusual person?
- What is something you've experienced, or done, or are that will not seem common to the people reading?
- What is unusual about you, your family, your upbringing, your travels, and your college?

REMEMBER YOUR INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

- What writers in a particular field have made you think the most?
- Who were your favorite professors?
- What is the best paper you've ever written or speech you've presented?
- What is the most important book you've read?
- What is the single most important concept you've learned in college?

REMEMBER WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM OTHERS

- Who has said these things?
- What were the specific words they used?
- How did these people or words encourage you to go beyond your abilities to accomplish a goal or dream?

THINK ABOUT WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE THIS PARTICULAR DIRECTION OF STUDY:

- What were you doing when the light went off?
- Who were you with?

THINK ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YOUR GRADUATE STUDY DECISION:

- How have your interests evolved over time?
- What specific turning points were there?
- What professional experiences have led you to pursue graduate school?
- What volunteer/service experiences have led you to pursue graduate school?
- How has your family influenced you?

DEFINE YOUR CAREER GOALS CLEARLY:

- What attracts you to this career?
- What do you hope to gain?
- How will you go about achieving these goals?
- What are your manageable goals?
- What are your stretch goals?

CONSIDER YOUR ACADEMIC BACKGROUND:

- How have you prepared yourself to succeed in graduate school?
- What body of relevant knowledge will be taken with you?
- What study, laboratory, or computer skills have you acquired?
- What personal strengths make you particularly likely to succeed?
- What are some of your educational achievements?

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CONSIDER YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS AND EXPERIENCE:

- What research have you conducted to date?
- If you were to publish your research, what would you title it?
- Would you consider talking to a professor about the path to publication?
- How would you describe your level of participation in your research experiences?
- How would you describe the hypotheses, methods, findings, and discussions?
- What was the overall purpose of the research and what were the ramifications of it?
- What did you learn overall from your research?

IDENTIFY PEOPLE WITH COMMON INTERESTS:

- What professors are currently associated with your target school?
- What professors are conducting research in your area of interest or expertise?
- Who can you identify to become a possible graduate advisor for a thesis or dissertation?
- What major thinkers, theorists, and authors could you reference?

NAME DROP THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU:

- Who were your influential undergraduate professors?
- What specific professors interest you at your target school?
- Who are the major writers and thinkers in your field of interest?
- What professors have you spoken to or corresponded with already?

THINK ABOUT YOUR SOCIAL LIFE:

- What extracurriculars are you involved with?
- What are your hobbies or favorite past time?
- What helps you soften areas of stress in your life?
- Why do people enjoy being in your company?

CONSIDER THE INCONSIDERABLE:

- What are all of the things you hope the admissions committee doesn't find out about you?
- What is so obvious about you that you sometimes fail to recognize?

RELATE TO THE SCHOOL AND CITY OF CHOICE:

- What do you know about the geographic location of your target school?
- Why would you be happy there?
- What kind of physical, cultural, relational connections have you established?

LOOK INTO THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE:

- What classes will you take between now and arrival at school?
- What research or projects will you complete between now and then?
- What will you try to accomplish at work?
- What are specific post graduate plans?
- How will this graduate program help facilitate those plans?
- What do you want to be doing in 5 years? 10 years?
- What additional education will you pursue beyond the programs you're applying to now?

Adapted from: Asher, D. (2012). Graduate admissions essays: Writing your way into the graduate school of your choice. (4th ed.). Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.