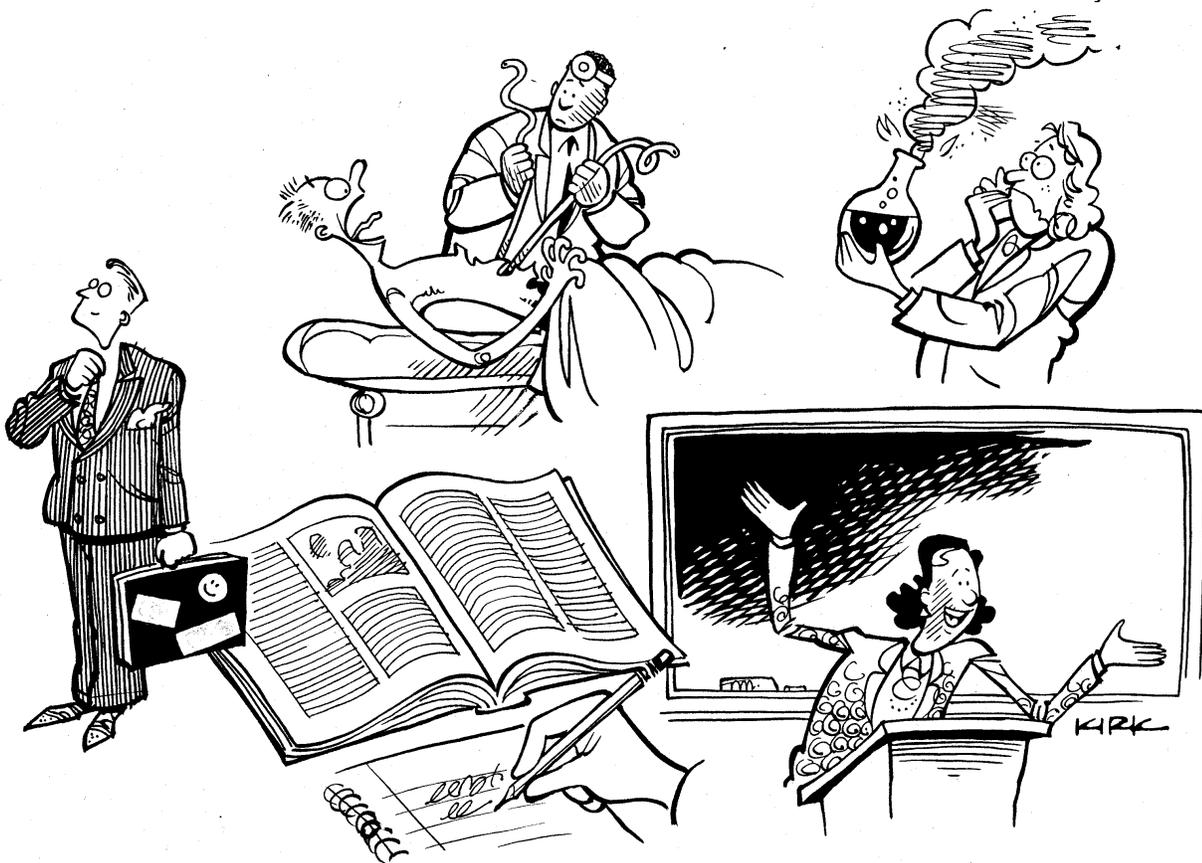


How to Get Into GRADUATE and PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

by Eric R. Anderson



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HOW TO GET INTO GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

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BEFORE YOU START

Go for a good reason

Are you thinking seriously about going to graduate school? Congratulations! Through your undergraduate experience you have developed a desire to specialize further and excel in a particular area of scholarship. At least, we *hope* that's why you're considering an advanced degree.

If you're planning to attend graduate or professional school because you don't want to face the prospect of looking for a full-time job, or because you feel that someone "expects" you to go, you should reconsider your objectives and/or wait until you are ready to attend school for more appropriate reasons.

Prepare

The graduate or professional school admissions process can seem (and be) overwhelming. The process can take as much time as an additional academic course.

Understanding the basic issues and timeline can reduce your confusion as well as help you organize a plan that will work for you! With persistence, you can put yourself at the front of the line of candidates for admission to graduate school.

Part of the preparation process is recognizing that you are making an impression on the schools to which you apply. A good first step is to ensure that your online presence will provide a positive impression. Make sure to "clean up" social networking sites you belong to, such as Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Consider removing any pictures or information you don't want to share with the schools, and /or make these pages private when possible. Also "Google" yourself to see what (if anything) comes up.

IDEAL TIMELINE/CHECKLIST

Assuming you plan to attend school during the fall after May graduation

JUNIOR YEAR	
Entire year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Investigate universities and areas of study. <input type="checkbox"/> Talk with faculty in your department about possible schools/programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Talk with faculty about writing reference letters. <input type="checkbox"/> Check www.petersons.com and www.gradschools.com to help develop your initial list. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a list of recommended schools/programs, and learn when their admission committees begin reviewing applications; this should be your “application deadline.” <input type="checkbox"/> Determine the program application deadlines, as well as deadlines for Assistantship and Fellowship applications. Many are earlier than you would imagine. <input type="checkbox"/> Investigate deadlines for GRE special exams (subject tests).
Summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Find bulletins and applications forms on websites, or email the graduate schools for them. <input type="checkbox"/> Contact the department directly; request information on programs and degree requirements. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for admission test(s); let us know if you need some tips on how to prepare. <input type="checkbox"/> Write your personal statements and essays; have someone review them. <input type="checkbox"/> Possibly arrange a meeting with someone in the department to which you are applying.
SENIOR YEAR	
Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Take admissions test (if not taken in the summer). <input type="checkbox"/> Write personal statements and essays, if you haven’t already. Set up an appointment with a Personal Statement Peer Career Advisor for reviewing; also ask your advisor to read it. <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for Assistantships and Fellowships. <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for scholarships and other financial aid. <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain completed recommendation letters and/or forms from faculty and supervisors. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete and submit the applications. <input type="checkbox"/> Have Registrar’s office send transcripts. <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule interview (if needed).
Fall/Winter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Submit all materials by the stated deadlines (or by January, whichever is earlier) <input type="checkbox"/> Is your file complete? Call to check, unless they have a web-based notification system. <input type="checkbox"/> Call to confirm that your application is being reviewed by their committee.
Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to check on your application status. <input type="checkbox"/> Send required information and/or fees to the institution where you have been accepted. <input type="checkbox"/> Send thank you notes/emails to recommendation writers to inform them of your success.

DECIDE WHERE TO APPLY

When you've made the decision to go to graduate school and have a good idea of what you want to study, you can begin to look for schools. You can develop an initial list by using www.petersons.com.

It's best to start by choosing a manageable list using some of the criteria listed below.

Choose the schools using YOUR criteria

Many factors can influence your choice of a graduate school: reputation, size, program that specializes in your area of interest, and so on (see below). It's difficult to evaluate a school's quality because there are so many variables to consider. *US News and World Report* and other publications try to rank schools. They do this because students desperately want to know which schools they should consider attending. Many students want to be told by an "authority" that one school is better than another.

*Consider the following indications of a program that is suited to your needs. **

•**Reputation** – Is the program/institution recognized nationally? Regionally? Locally? (Ask faculty members and practitioners)

•**Faculty research specialties** – Are faculty members conducting research in areas of interest to you? (Ask them directly; read their publications.)

•**Faculty prominence** – Are professors in the program recognized leaders in their field? Are they widely published? (Ask Capital faculty; scan appropriate journals; request faculty biographies or publication lists.)

•**Method of Study** – Does the program emphasize theory? Practice? Research? A combination? (Read and compare program literature; talk with faculty and current students or graduates.)

•**Flexibility** – How much of the program can be tailored to fit your interests? What courses are offered outside the department which would enhance your core curriculum? (Ask faculty members; peruse university catalogs.)

•**Geographic Location** – Do you want to live in this area for the time it will take to complete your degree? (Talk to others who've lived there.)

•**Financial Assistance** – How expensive is the school? What types of financial help are available, and how much could you expect to receive? (Ask faculty members or graduate admissions office staff about likelihood of receiving different types of aid and assistantships; apply for fellowships and loans.)

•**Help with Post-Graduate Employment** – Where do graduates of the program typically find work? How much assistance is offered to job seekers? (Talk to graduates of the program; gather information from their career development office.)

•**Academic Support** – How extensive is the library collection, how up-to-date is the computer or laboratory equipment? (Visit the facilities; talk to faculty members and students.)

•**Campus/Community Involvement** – Are there opportunities for involvement and/or leadership outside the program? (Request information about the community at large; talk to others in program.)

**From Vassar College Office of Career Development. Used with permission.*

MAKE INITIAL CONTACT and DETERMINE DEADLINES

Contact the institution

Ideally, begin asking graduate schools for information at least **15 months** before you plan to attend. You can contact them even *earlier* than that. If you plan to apply to a very competitive program, get information on the school's admission requirements during your junior year so you'll have more time to make yourself a stronger candidate. Also, some programs have deadlines as early as *September*, an entire year before you plan to begin the program!

Request materials

Their web site should have:

- application materials and deadlines
- information on financial assistance (assistantships, fellowships, etc.)

You can also request information on housing.

In addition to contacting the graduate school in general, you should call, e-mail, and/or visit the **particular department(s)** to which you are interested in applying. They will gladly talk with you, and you can get a better idea of whether this area of study, this school, and this community are for you. You will probably learn more from talking with people than you will from reading, just like you'll learn more from a phone call than from an email.

Also, you will want to find out whether you meet specific requirements for admission. If you are lacking any requirement, demonstrate your willingness to work at meeting it. In addition to this, you will also become acquainted with the people who may be reviewing your eligibility for admittance. Show them your interest and enthusiasm!

Pay attention to application deadlines

After you have assessed all the pertinent information from your narrowed down list of schools, you can begin the application process. (You might want to apply only to those schools that you are honestly considering, since applying is expensive! On the other hand, you might consider a *range* of schools -- including those that will likely accept you, the "long shots," and those in-between.)

Application deadlines vary by school. Be sure that you're **early**, and if they accept applicants on a "rolling admission" basis, complete your application by their **earliest** consideration date. In other words, ask them when the committee begins reviewing applications.

Occasionally, the deadline (or rolling admission) will be during fall semester the year before you plan to attend. *Make sure that you check!!* More commonly, the deadlines will be sometime after December. Either way, apply after September unless otherwise instructed. It's best not to apply before the beginning of the current school year; they might assume that you are applying for the current year.

Remember to back up all your application material files in case something gets lost or misplaced!

Sometimes the deadline for application to the **graduate program** is different from the application for **assistantships and fellowships** (both are described later in this guide). A general rule for these is to **APPLY EARLY!** Most schools begin screening for such positions early in February and they usually accept candidates as they go. In other words, if you apply early, you'll have a better chance for financial assistance, and career-related experience opportunities.

MAJOR ROADBLOCK – APPLICATION DEADLINES

- Have you checked the deadlines for the programs you are considering?
 - Medical school applications can be submitted as early as June
 - Some graduate programs are as early as September.
 - Many are in November and December.
 - Most are in January
- What is the truth about the schools with deadlines after January?
- Are you also applying for Assistantships and Fellowships? Are those deadlines different?

For all of these, you really want to find out when the committee ***begins reviewing applications.***

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Components of the application:

You usually need to submit:

- three **letters of recommendation**
- **personal statement** of your interests and goals for graduate study
- application for **assistantships** and **fellowships**, if applicable
- **graduate admission test** scores
- official undergraduate **transcripts** (through the Registrar)
- **Résumé/Vita/CV** (curriculum vita)
*Unlike résumés prepared for jobs and internships, graduate school résumés **do not** contain an “Objective” section or a “References” section.*

In addition, some schools will want to interview you prior to acceptance into a graduate program.

MAJOR ROADBLOCK – COMPLETED FILE

- A complete file is needed before the school begins to review your materials.
- Sometimes pieces of your application fail to reach their destination.
- Call the schools to make sure your file is complete, even if the website says it is.

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS AND FORMS

How to decide who you should ask for recommendations:

Recommendations are written primarily by faculty or internship/research supervisors who are familiar with your work as an undergraduate. Schools *might* indicate that you can include letters from employers. In general, only ask people who have observed you in a supervisory capacity. Don't include "personal" references unless specifically instructed to do so.

The committee members reviewing your application will want to know about your performance as a student, your abilities, and your capacity for doing graduate work. Specific forms are usually required, and they are typically available to download from the school's website.

Procedure for *requesting* and obtaining recommendations:

1. **Make personal contact** with the potential writer (usually a professor). Ask, "Will you write a positive recommendation for me?" If the answer is "no", ask someone else!
2. **Schedule a meeting to discuss the recommendation letter or form** with the writer. Then bring a list of what you plan to provide to them in order to help them write the recommendation, **and ask them what else would be helpful**. Even though they are happy to write recommendations for you, writing can be something of a chore if they have to recall everything about you before they begin to write.

HERE'S WHAT TO INITIALLY INCLUDE ON YOUR LIST:

- Courses you took with them (and your grades)
- Group projects and presentations
- Résumé (and personal statement, if it's complete)
- Possibly a FERPA release form
- Projects/research you completed
- Titles of papers you wrote
- Other relevant experiences

Your professors will appreciate being able to refer to this information while writing, and their recommendations will be more specific and more personal because of it.

Discuss whether you want to "waive your right" to see the letter or form. This option will probably be on your forms (see below). You may want to discuss this option with the person writing the letter for you. "Waiving your right" is often recommended, but it is not always the best option for you. For more information about this, ask us in Career Development.

3. **Compile and provide all materials (including, for example, copies of your papers with the professor's comments) and instructions to the writer by an agreed date.** See example on next page.
4. **Provide the writer with any required recommendation forms,** which are usually supplied on the schools' web sites. Be sure to paperclip a note with your *deadline* (determined by you) to the forms.
5. **If the writers are supposed to mail the recommendations, provide them with stamped envelopes,** pre-addressed to the graduate school departments (or else follow other instructions provided by the graduate school).
6. **Send a thank-you note to the writer at the deadline.** It's important to show appreciation (and if they haven't written the letter or completed any forms by then, your note will jog their memory). You might want to consider following up *before* the deadline, too.

MAJOR ROADBLOCK – LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- Which faculty members will write recommendations for you?
- Have you already made a great impression on them?
- Have you asked them if they will write a **positive** recommendation?
- Remember to provide a detailed interaction summary to each writer.

A sample summary sheet provided to faculty members who are writing your reference letters.

Dan Student, Recommendation Letter materials summary, October 20, 2020

FOR: Professor Alee Portside

Interaction History

Music History I and II, *Professor*, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020

- Grade: A
- Conservatory tutor
- Research: Early 16th Century Perfection: A Study of Aesthetics in Josquin des Prez' *Missa de Beata Virgine* and the Château de Chambord
 - Effectively researched and presented original ideas in accordance with assignment guidelines
 - Analyzed music's historical context, tonal and melodic structures

Undergraduate Research Symposium, *Research Advisor*, Spring 2020

- Presented research using PowerPoint with score excerpts, audio clips, and pictures
- Edited abstract and refocused research topics based on faculty advisor's suggestions
- Prepared presentation script and outline with timing
- Used various sources to improve quality of information
- Answered audience questions about history, research methods, and general topics

Senior Recital, *Faculty Panelist*, Fall 2020

- Grade: A

Instructions

For each letter, please use Capital University letterhead and include my full name and the name of the specific program to which I am applying.

Please mail each letter (and form, where requested) using the pre-addressed, stamped envelopes that I have provided.

Institutions

School	Program	Reference Type
The Ohio State University	M.A., Higher Education and Student Affairs	Form + Letter
Bowling-Green State University	M.A., College Student Personnel	Form + Letter
Indiana University	M.S., Higher Education and Student Affairs	Letter

Deadline: Week of November 16, 2020

WRITING “PERSONAL STATEMENTS”

Also called “Autobiographical Statements”, “Statements of Intent (or Purpose)”, or just “Essays”

These short essays, usually 1-3 double-spaced pages, provide an opportunity to share your goals and reasons for considering a particular program, as well as to demonstrate to the committee that you are a person who will be a valuable asset to their program. They take time to write; they’re not a “weekend project”.

TYPES OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS

1. Guided Statements (When the program provides very specific guidelines/directions)

For statements requiring you to respond to specific essay questions or follow specific guidelines, it is very important that you don’t just cut-and-paste from your typical personal statement, and don’t include a lot of details that they don’t ask for. Also, some law schools will ask you to write “about anything”, which makes the essay more of a general writing sample that provides insight into the kind of person you are.

In these cases, you might **not** want to follow the guidelines below!

2. Typical Personal Statements (When the program provides only general direction)

Typical statements are about your interests and experience as they relate to a specific program.

If the program simply requests a “personal statement” (or if the program uses a similar term), you **will** want to follow the guidelines below.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN WRITING

Allow plenty of time to write and revise your statements. It is not a weekend project. Start by brainstorming. You will need to tell your career/academic story, so think about your own personal experiences that are **relevant to the graduate or professional program**.

Some possibilities include:

- Relevant internship experiences that made your career path clear to you
- Relevant skills that you have developed
- Mentors or supervisors who have influenced you
- Events that have shaped you
- Obstacles to your professional goal that you’ve overcome (rarely used, but possible if relevant)

MAJOR ROADBLOCK – PERSONAL STATEMENTS

- This is not a weekend project, and it’s not like other essays you’ve written. Take time to review:
 - Past-Present-Future structure
 - Opening paragraph
 - Closing paragraph

These provide potential material for the general personal statement and are often relevant for responses to specific essay questions.

It’s also important to examine your future goals. For example, why are you pursuing graduate study and why this particular degree? When you have completed a thorough assessment of where you have been and where you want to go, it’s time to begin the actual writing.

YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH

Skip this for now! Go to “THE MAIN PART” (just below this)

Skip this for now, really. This paragraph and the conclusion are usually the most difficult, so it will likely be easier to start with the main portion of your essay/statement. This opening paragraph will typically naturally emerge from the main part, so be patient.

THE MAIN PART OF YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Tell a story about the development of your professional interest that will make sense to the admission committee. Be specific as you identify events and experiences that demonstrate your professional interest and motivation. Share the experiences that have reinforced your interest. Discuss your plans for the future as they relate to this advanced degree. If your background includes relevant internships or work experience, make sure that you emphasize their relevance, or how they affected your decision to pursue an advanced degree. Life experience is valued.

Most students use a **Past-Present-Future** approach, which typically begins (**Past**) with an experience that got you interested initially in the field you are pursuing. Or maybe you changed your mind during college, so you could begin by writing about the major you started with. Then (**Present**) you will continue writing about the experiences and activities (typically during college) that have reinforced that initial interest (*making sure that your stories about these internships, work experiences, and research projects reflect your continued desire to pursue this area in graduate study*). Finally (**Future**) you write about your long-term interests and how this degree program will prepare you for those interests.

If you are beginning your statement using a specific event (likely from your years in college), you can continue by describing how you first became interested/engaged in this field, and then discuss your career-related activities and how they have affected your career path.

OKAY, NOW WORK ON YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH

Since you are trying to capture committee members' attention, the opening paragraph is very important. Be creative and relevant; try to find an angle that portrays you in an interesting way. In addition to being professionally relevant, your story's beginning should make people want to keep reading; you need to make a lasting impression, too.

You might choose to open by describing an event (like a particular interaction during a service project or research experience) that affected you and your decision to pursue your chosen field. The experience might have helped to clarify your direction, or solidify your inclination.

EXAMPLE:

One morning during my sophomore year, I was teaching a social studies lesson in a tenth-grade classroom. During that lesson, I realized that the most meaningful part of my day was not relating facts about George Washington, but rather the discussion I had with a student whose father did not return home the previous night. She was devastated and was willing to confide in me. As I reflected on this experience, I began to realize that my true passion did not lie in the teaching of social studies but rather in my desire to assist people in overcoming obstacles and discovering light in otherwise dark areas.

Instead, you might choose to open by describing *the culmination of many events* (like your long-term experiences with a specific profession) that have had a profound impact on you and your decision to pursue your chosen field.

(see example on next page)

EXAMPLE:

My passion for research first became clear when I began working on an independent research project at Capital University concerning the presence of Genetic Modification within commercial corn products. The excitement of investigation had me hooked. I later worked on a research project during a service learning experience in Panama; additionally, I studied at a Research Experience for Undergraduates at Iowa State University in Biotechnology and Genomics, and this January I will conduct research on the coral reefs of Cozumel, Mexico. My various active research experiences have inspired me to obtain my Ph.D. in Genetics from the University of Agora, and later to work as a Principal Investigating Scientist.

If you choose to take a developmental angle (like the **Past-Present-Future** approach), start by showing how events throughout your life have shaped your interest in this graduate or professional school program. For example, you can initially look at your past experiences and write specifically about how they led you to an interest in your field (*making sure that your story will make sense to the admission committee*). This opening would look like the first example above, but it might be an example from earlier in your life. Parts of this paragraph may make more sense to move into “The Main Part of Your Personal Statement” to help clarify your past-present-future approach.

YOUR CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

Ideally, you should conclude with some details about your “fit” with the specific program to which you’re applying and your interest in working with specific faculty (exceptions to this include medical schools, which use one generic statement for the first application process). This should be written in a way that demonstrates your understanding of specific aspects of the program (*without sounding like you’re just “reporting” on those aspects, or complimenting the school on their high quality*).

If the program is very research-oriented, make sure your conclusion summarizes your research experiences and interests. Also, it helps if your research interests coincide with the interests of at least one faculty member, and this will require you to investigate the program in great detail.

If the program is more "hands-on," you'll probably want to summarize your internships or field experiences. You should also demonstrate your familiarity with any similar experiences that are available through the program. Just as in the example above, this strategy requires that you know what the program emphasizes and will require you to investigate the program in great detail. This hard work will make a difference.

Finally, describe what you think you'll do with your completed degree from this program.

EXAMPLE:

Attending Agora University would provide an unparalleled opportunity to develop my career as a scientist, to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of genetics, and to grow as a person. Having previously researched the genetics of primary open angle glaucoma, I plan on continuing to focus my research in the field of genetics. During correspondence with Dr. Jane Smith, it has become clear that Agora University and her laboratory would provide myriad opportunities to conduct novel genetic research. I am also very interested in the research of Dr. John Jones and Dr. Janet Williamson. Understanding genetics provides a basis for many biological studies and I plan on exploring those areas. My ultimate goal in life is to become a distinguished and respected member of the worldwide scientific community whose research would benefit humanity while inspiring and mentoring the next generation of scientists. The Integrated Biomedical Science Graduate Program at the Agora University can provide the best education, mentors, and support for me to reach these goals.

WHAT TO AVOID

Clichés

Statements like "I want to be a doctor (lawyer, psychologist, social worker) because I've always enjoyed helping people", or "I've always wanted to be a _____" are overused, and aren't unique to you. For instance, if helping others is truly your motivation, give examples of people you've helped and their impact on you, and open the essay with a compelling story about a person you've helped.

Controversial topics (like religion and politics)

Chances are that someone on the committee will hold the opposing viewpoint.

Bragging

It's difficult to write about how amazing you are without sounding like you're bragging, but there are two main ways to do it. You can focus on your deep interest, curiosity, or passion regarding interests and experiences. You can also write about how much you've learned, or how far you've come [since you first became interested], which can then illustrate your current level of skill or accomplishment. For example, rather than write about winning a research award, you would focus on the actual research experience, your curiosity about the topic, and the insights that you gained.

High school accomplishments

You would never mention National Honor Society or other academic accomplishments/activities in a graduate school admissions essay, for example, but you might write about volunteering for a suicide hotline if it shaped the beginnings of your interest in the mental health field.

USING YOUR STATEMENT TO EXPLAIN APPLICATION ISSUES

Students often ask if they should address points from their application that may reflect poorly on them (low GPA or test scores, for example). If this fits in with your story, you can probably include it. For example, if your grades improved markedly during your later college years (but your first year is still affecting your overall GPA), you might choose to construct your story around a career-related event or experience that motivated you to perform better.

When deciding if there's a shortcoming from the application that you'd like to include in your personal statement, ask yourself if it seems as though you are making excuses (like stating that you were tired on the day of the GRE, or that you never do well on standardized tests). It's important to keep the tone of the personal statement positive, so if you can't put a positive spin on it, don't include it. A better approach would be to talk with people who are writing your recommendations and ask if they are willing to address the issue. A letter from a professor stating that your test scores aren't a good reflection of your scholastic ability is more convincing than your stating it yourself.

THE HEADING FOR YOUR STATEMENT

In the absence of any guidelines provided by the graduate school, your heading should include the name of the document you are submitting (e.g., "Personal Statement"), the school and department for whom you are writing it (e.g., "Ohio University College of Education"), and your name. These can be centered, left-justified, or arranged in any format that looks professional.

OTHER RESOURCES for PERSONAL STATEMENTS

These recommendations pertain to personal statements in general. There are many internet sites that offer tips for writing personal statements for particular fields of study, and many provide some sample statements. Simply type "personal statement" into a search engine. Look for ".edu" domains.

Purdue University has excellent resources on this web site:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>

(Type "personal statement" into their search function)

HOW TO GET HELP WITH YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

1. Use this guide to write a draft of your personal statement (you can also meet with a PCA (see below) just to discuss ideas for your personal statement, and then use the guide to write your draft).

2: Meet with a Peer Career Advisor (PCA)

- **Schedule an appointment** with a Peer Career Advisor using Handshake.
You can also call 614-236-6606, or email CareerDevelopment@capital.edu

Personal Statement PCA:

Joyce Barr

Always provide guidelines, directions, or prompts from graduate or professional school programs so we know which kind of personal statement you're writing!

3: After your personal statement is reviewed by Joyce, revise your statement and ask for it to be reviewed again to make sure you made the appropriate changes. Make sure to save your first draft and new draft as two separate documents.

4. Email CareerDevelopment@capital.edu to schedule an appointment with Jenny Vrobel or Eric Anderson to talk about your revised personal statement.

5. When you schedule your appointment, send both drafts (your original and revised personal statement), along with the guidelines you received, at least 2 days prior to your appointment.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

ASSISTANTSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS

Something that very few students seem to know is that you generally don't have to pay your way through *graduate* school. There are some exceptions, but most students have their tuition waived and receive a monthly "stipend" while going to graduate school, typically through an assistantship or a fellowship.

This is NOT the case for most *professional* schools (Law School, Medical School, Veterinary School, MBA, etc.). You must seek out other forms of financial aid (see below).

What are assistantships and fellowships?

These are excellent forms of financial assistance, and you don't have to pay anything back! Usually your graduate application form is the same form by which you will indicate your preference for these awards, although some programs require separate applications.

Assistantship:

Sometimes this is also called a Graduate Assistantship or a Graduate Associateship. The details vary with the field and the school, but the general idea is that you work for a certain number of hours per week, and in turn you have your tuition waived and you receive a monthly stipend (an amount of money that should be enough for you to live on). It's a great deal both from a financial standpoint and from an experiential standpoint. These positions are often Teaching Assistantships (TAs) in which you teach entry level undergraduate courses. Other alternatives are Research Assistantships or Administrative Assistantships. It's best if you work in a position that relates to your future career!

Fellowship:

These are given to the most outstanding students. Fellowships are identical to assistantships in terms of the financial benefit; tuition is waived and you get a monthly stipend. *The difference: fellowships do NOT require you to work for your money.*

If you attend graduate school on a fellowship, consider getting some work experience on your own, through an internship or "practicum" in whatever area you hope to be employed. Remember that although recommendations from your graduate professors will carry weight in your job search, work experience is often important too.

OTHER KINDS OF FINANCIAL AID

There are other financial aid benefits available to students pursuing graduate study. Special fellowships, scholarships, and grants may be awarded nationally in your field; these are awarded for special merit or talent and are very competitive. Ask a Reference Librarian in Blackmore Library to show you financial aid (grants and scholarships) databases and other resources.

In addition, three major federal loan programs are available for graduate students: Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, and Supplemental Loans for Students (SLS). Ask the graduate school for the name of the appropriate person or office on their campus whom you should contact regarding these loans. It is generally recommended that you stick with federal loans over private loans, since federal loans can sometimes be deferred or forgiven.

ADMISSION TESTS

See following pages for overviews of GRE, LSAT and MCAT

These are standardized measurements of knowledge and ability. Often the department to which you are applying has established a set score as one criterion for entrance into that department. *It is important that you prepare for these tests in advance; admissions committees take scores seriously.*

GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION (GRE)

The GRE "General Test" (the main test) is the most common examination for graduate school. It measures your abilities in three areas: verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing. The specific department to which you are applying may request that you also take a GRE Subject Test. This is a separate test that measures your abilities and knowledge in a specific academic area, like psychology or chemistry.

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST (LSAT)

This consists of five test sections including "Passages" (reading comprehension), "Relationships" (analytical), and "Arguments" (logical reasoning), along with one writing sample. Capital provides assistance as you prepare for Law School, including LSAT prep classes and "Mock" LSAT. In past years, the Political Science or History department has coordinated this.

MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST (MCAT)

The test consists of physical sciences, biological sciences, verbal reasoning, and a writing sample (essay). It is administered multiple times a year from late January through early September. Also get an AMCAS packet for distribution of your materials to medical schools. Your advisor should know when you are taking it so that he/she can help you prepare. This will give you practice and will ease your anxiety when you have to take the real thing!

GRADUATE MANAGEMENT ADMISSION TEST (GMAT)

This test is generally required for admission to graduate schools of business and management. It is similar to the General Test of the GRE. The GMAT measures verbal and mathematical skills and is broken into seven timed sections. The test does not measure specific knowledge, but rather, it measures verbal and mathematical skills developed over a long period of time.

NOTE: It is usually a good idea to pursue work experience before applying to MBA programs.

Other tests:

In addition, special tests are sometimes used (e.g., Dental School (DAT) and Pharmacy School (PCAT). For information on these, ask in Career Development.

Check with the library; they have recent publications about these tests that will help you in preparing for them.

GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION (The “GRE”)

Introduction

- The majority of graduate schools use GRE scores as a significant factor when selecting applicants for their programs.
- The test is composed mostly of standardized, multiple-choice questions used to assist graduate schools in finding a common measure to compare applicants.
- Although most schools use the GRE *general test* in their application process, only some schools require a *subject test*.

Testing

- The General Test is offered only online (in this part of the world).
- You will be able to navigate an entire section, skipping and returning to questions and responses within that section. Your performance on one section may affect the questions on a subsequent section.

Test Sections (General Test)

Verbal

- Consists of sentence completions, sentence equivalence, and reading passages
- Contains twenty multiple-choice questions per section (2 sections, 30 minutes each).

Quantitative

- Consists of quantitative comparisons, problem-solving questions, and data interpretations.
- Contains twenty multiple-choice questions per section (2 sections, 35 minutes each).

Analytical Writing (this is typed using a basic word processor with no spell-check)

The writing assessment focuses on your critical reasoning and analytical writing skills.

It is composed of two tasks:

- Present your perspective on an issue (30 minutes).
- Analyze an argument (30 minutes).

YOU MIGHT ALSO SEE ONE OR BOTH OF THESE SECTIONS:

Experimental

This section is used to evaluate future test questions and *will not* be scored. It may be a verbal, quantitative, or analytical writing section and can vary in length. This section *will not* be identified as experimental, so you need to do your best on every section!

Research

Some general tests include a research section. This section may be verbal, quantitative, or analytical writing and *will not be scored*. If included, the research section will be at the end of the general test, can vary in length, and *will* be identified as a research section. You do not need to complete the research section if you don't want to. They'll provide a small incentive.

Subject Test Information

- Subject tests are offered in biology, chemistry, literature in English, mathematics, physics and psychology.
- Don't assume that a subject test offered in your academic area is an entrance *requirement* for every graduate program. See your prospective school's application information before you register for a subject test.

Registration

The GRE *General test* is administered by computer and is available year round.

In the Columbus area, three sites are available. Register online at www.gre.org for one of the centers below:

- Worthington (two Prometric Testing centers at this location), 431-2083, 933 High Street, Suite 130 B
- Ohio State University, 292-2241, 281 W Lane Ave, 585 Student Academic Services Building
- General Information, 1-800-GRE-CALL

When you go to take the test, be sure to bring a list of the schools you're applying to, and whether scores are sent to admission or to the graduate program. You get four score reports included in the price of the test, which you will enter upon completion of the test.

Cancellations and reschedules must be at least three days prior to your scheduled date. You can retake the GRE once every 21 days up to five times in any 12-month period.

Subject tests are administered only on scheduled dates and are given in paper and pencil format. Normally test dates fall near the beginning of November, December, and April. To register for a *subject test* on-line using a credit card, visit www.gre.org. To register by mail, pick up a registration packet in the Career Development office.

Scoring

- Scores for the verbal and quantitative sections of the general test range from 130 to 170 (in 1-point increments). There is no penalty for incorrect answers. Mean scores are around 150-151.
- The analytical writing section is scored using a six-point holistic scale (in half-point increments). Each test is reviewed by two trained evaluators. Mean score is 3.7.
- Individual *subject test* scores can range from 200 to 990 (has a penalty for incorrect answers)

On-line Resources

- www.gre.org This is the official GRE website. It provides comprehensive test preparation resources, including free software (PowerPrep) with 2 full actual GRE tests.
- www.petersons.com Peterson's provides a sample questions as well as tips and strategies. They also offer a fee-based practice test. Go to test preparation and then download free software and look for the GRE practice test information.
- www.kaptest.com Kaplan's site includes a free practice test. It also provides some good information on the subject tests, especially psychology.
- www.princeton.com Like the others, Princeton offers information, tips and strategies and has free online practice tests as well as fee-based courses that will help you prepare.

Printed Resources

- *Princeton Review's Cracking the GRE* - Included are two full-length GRE CAT exams on CD-ROM, plus additional practice questions and test-taking strategies in the book.
- *Peterson's Master the GRE* - This book includes 9 full-length practice tests (3 on CD-ROM), review of all subject areas, and a review of the format and structure of the Revised GRE.
- *Kaplan's New GRE* - Kaplan provides its readers with six full-length practice tests (1 in book, 5 online), as well as 400 additional practice questions and answer explanations on CD-ROM.

Information sources include: www.gre.org, www.kaptest.com, www.review.com, www.amazon.com



LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST (LSAT)

Introduction

- The LSAT is *not* a knowledge-based test. It will not require you to recall specific information. Instead, it will assess your ability to think logically, quickly, and thoroughly. Determining your critical reading and analytical skills is the test's main objective.
- The LSAT is required for consideration to any law school that is a member of the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). Many law schools require the LSAT to be taken by December for admission the following fall. Earlier is advised.

Test Sections

Logical Reasoning

- Consists of two, 35-minute sections. Each section contains approximately 25 questions.
- Assesses your ability to understand, analyze, evaluate, and manipulate arguments.
- Comprises approximately 50% of your total score.

Reading Comprehension

- Consists of one, 35-minute section. This section contains approximately 27 questions.
- Assesses your ability to work with main ideas, details, inferences, logic, and extrapolation. Requires an ability to handle complicated text.
- Comprises approximately 25% of your total score.

Analytical Reasoning

- Consists of one, 35-minute section. This section contains approximately 23 questions.
- Assesses your ability to focus on multiple facts simultaneously. Requires ability in sequencing, grouping, and matching.
- Comprises approximately 25% of your total score.

Experimental

- Consists of one, 35-minute section. The number of questions in this section varies.
- This section is not scored. It is used to evaluate future test questions.

Writing Sample

- This section is not scored. Your writing sample is sent to each school to which you apply.
- Consists of one, 35-minute section. This section requires you to compose one written essay. You will be given two writing prompts to choose from.
- Assesses your ability to write effectively and create a sound and persuasive argument.

Test Registration Information

The LSAT is administered four times per year, usually in February, June, October, and December.

To register go to www.LSAC.org, click on REGISTER, then choose your date and location.

Registration with the Law School Admission Council (LSAC)

- Registration with the LSAC is required for application to any ABA approved school.
- LSDAS sends a report to each school where you apply.
Each report contains:
 - an undergraduate academic summary
 - copies of your transcripts from any undergraduate, professional, or graduate schools you have attended
 - your LSAT scores and writing sample
 - copies of your letters of recommendation
- To register by *e-mail*, go to www.lsac.org and click on Applying to Law School

Scoring

- You will receive the following score information:
 - An overall score ranging from 120 - 180.
 - A score band indicating a range of scaled scores above and below your overall score. This band is meant to assist law schools in determining statistically where a test taker's score would fall approximately two out of three times with a 68% level of confidence. The score band normally ranges plus or minus three points from the overall score. For example, a student who scores a 145 would have a score band of 142 – 148.
 - A percentile score which ranks you among a large sample of other LSAT test takers.
 - More than 50% of test takers score between a 145 and a 159. Scoring above a 160 can often significantly increase your percentage rank. A September 2014 article in The Atlantic reported that statistically it is unlikely that someone with an LSAT score below 145 will ever pass a bar exam.
- Your scores are valid for five years after you take the test.
- If you take the exam more than once, Law Services reports the average score, each separate score, and each cancellation. Most schools will not question one (or maybe two) cancellation(s) on your record, but will question multiple ones. Also, be aware that you cannot take the LSAT more than three times in any two-year period.

On-line Resources

www.lsat.org - This is the official site of Law School Admissions Council. It offers information on registration, dates, deadlines, preparation, and a free practice test. It also includes resources for your law school search and information regarding LSAC.

www.kaptest.com – (Go to LSAT under the “select a test” option) Highlights from Kaplan’s site include detailed information about recent tests, descriptions of each test section, and details regarding scoring.

www.review.com – Princeton Review provides articles discussing your law school search process and the transition into your first year. Median LSAT scores from well-known law schools are also included.

Printed Resources

- Cracking the LSAT (From the Princeton Review) – This resource includes two full-length tests as well as study strategies and test taking tips.
- Kaplan’s LSAT – Highlights from Kaplan’s resource include five full-length tests, (four of which are on the included CD-ROM) as well as study strategies and test taking tips.
- Master the LSAT by Jeff Kolby and Scott Thornburg – This book contains a practice test composed of actual LSAT questions. Study strategies and test taking tips are also included for each test section.
- The Peterson’s Guide: Graduate Programs in Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law & Social Work – This volume of the Peterson’s Guide includes general information and contacts for many law schools. Some schools include average LSAT scores in their profile.

★Capital Law School typically offers Princeton Review LSAT practice tests each year.

Check on dates at <https://www.princetonreview.com/law/free-lsat-practice-test#!practice>

Information sources include: www.gre.org, www.kaptest.com, www.review.com, www.amazon.com



MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST (MCAT)

The newly redesigned MCAT has introduced a section on the behavioral and social sciences. The writing sample has also been replaced with a section on critical analysis and reasoning. The MCAT's duration has been increased to 7 hours and 30 minutes. Wow.

Test Sections *(The MCAT is separated into four new categories, and includes two ten-minute breaks and lunch)*

Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems

- 59 multiple choice questions, 95 minutes
- Questions are a combination of passage-based and individual questions
- Assesses knowledge of biological and biochemical concepts as well as knowledge of processes that are unique to living organisms.
- Biochemistry (25%), Biology (65%), General Chemistry (5%), Organic Chemistry (5%)

Chemical and Physical Foundation of Biological Systems

- 59 multiple choice questions, 95 minutes
- Questions are a combination of passage-based and individual questions
- Assesses knowledge of chemical and physical foundational concepts as well as testing your understanding of the mechanical, physical, and biochemical functions of human tissues, organs, and organ systems.
- Biochemistry (25%), Biology (5%), General Chemistry (30%), Organic Chemistry (15%), Physics (25%)

Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior (this is the key change in the test redesign)

- 59 multiple-choice questions based on the topics listed in the next item below; 95 minutes
- Assesses knowledge of foundational concepts as well as understanding the ways psychological, social, and biological factors influence perceptions and reactions to the world; behavior and behavior change; individuals' self-perception as well as their perception of others; the cultural and social differences that influence well-being; and the relationships between social stratification affects access to resources.
- Questions are a combination of passage-based and individual questions
- Psychology (65%), Sociology (30%), Biology (5%)

Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills

- 53 multiple choice questions, 90 minutes
- Assesses reading comprehension, analysis, and reasoning skills related to success in medical school
- Questions are all passage-based
- Humanities (50%), Social Sciences (50%)

Registration Information

- The MCAT is administered several times per year, from late January through early September, at the same Prometric Testing Centers listed in the GRE summary.
- You can register online at: www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/reserving

Registration with Application Services

- Registration with AMCAS and AACOMAS is a common practice. These services facilitate the application process by distributing your application, official transcript, and two most recent MCAT scores to participating schools of your choice.
- Students choosing not to participate with AMCAS or AACOMAS must independently contact prospective schools for application information.
- Applicants may submit their information using AMCAS-E or AACOMAS online. A traditional paper application may be submitted also. (The paper application is less common.)
 - The AMCAS-E® can be downloaded at www.aamc.org.
 - AACOMAS can be downloaded at <https://aacomas.aacom.org/>.
 - AMCAS begins accepting application materials each year on June 1.
 - AACOMAS' application cycle begins each year on June 1.

Scoring

The scoring scale has also been reformed. You will receive five scores from your MCAT exam: one for each of the four sections and one combined total score

Section Scores: Each of the four sections is scored from a low of 118 to a high of 132, with a midpoint of 125. Test takers will receive scores for each of the four sections.

Total Score: Scores for the four sections are combined to create a total score. The total score ranges from 472 to 528. The midpoint is 500. In general, it's important to score above 500, but your whole application really does matter.

Example: If an examinee scored 128 on the Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems section; 125 on the Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems section; 129 on the Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior section; and 127 on the Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills section, the total score would be 509.

The components of understanding your MCAT score are broken into 3 sections:

Percentile Ranks: Percentile ranks show how your scores compare to other examinees who took the new version of the MCAT as you. You will receive percentile ranks for each individual section score and for your overall total score.

Confidence Bands: Confidence bands show the accuracy of your section and total scores. Similar to the past version of the MCAT exam and other standardized tests, scores from the MCAT exam will not be perfectly precise. Scores can be affected or influenced by many factors. Confidence bands mark the ranges in which your "true scores" likely lie. Confidence bands help signal the inaccuracy of test scores and are intended to discourage distinctions between applicants with similar scores.

Scoring Profiles: Score profiles are included to show you your strengths and weaknesses across all four sections of the exam. This section of the score report can be used to help you determine areas to focus on, should you decide to retake the exam.

Resources

On-line

- www.aamc.org - This is the official website of the American Association of Medical Colleges. For MCAT and AMCAS information, select the "Medical Schools" section.
- www.aacom.org - This is the official website of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine. For direct information about how to utilize this application service, select the "Apply to Medical School" section. To learn more about AACOM select "About AACOM" to obtain this information.
- www.review.com - Princeton Review provides articles discussing your medical school application process, a customized medical school search feature, information on the MCAT, and a free on-line practice test.
- www.kaptest.com - (Choose MCAT under the "Test Information"- "Select a Test" option). Kaplan's site provides an overview of each test section, information about recent tests, and details regarding scoring.

Print

- *The Princeton Review Complete MCAT: New for MCAT 2015* –Gives a concise, yet comprehensive review on each section of the MCAT
- *Kaplan MCAT Complete 7-Book Subject Review (Second Ed.)* – Arguably the best MCAT study review guide as it provides an extensively updated revision of the redesigned MCAT. Filled with hundreds of practice questions, three full-length practice tests, and access to multiple online resources, this set provides students with the tools to be completely prepared to succeed on the MCAT.
- *Princeton Review MCAT Subject Review Complete Set* – A complete and detailed review of the revamped MCAT test with over 2,600 pages of content geared to prepare students fully for each test category
- *Sterling Test Prep MCAT Practice Tests* – Provides the student with detailed practice tests for the science categories of the MCAT
- *NextStep MCAT Psychology and Sociology: Strategy and Practice* – Focuses on the new Behavioral Science category that has been recently been introduced into the MCAT
- *Medical School Admission Requirements* – The AAMC publication provides admission criteria information for each medical school in the United States and Canada.

This section was developed using the AAMC and Gold Standard MCAT Prep websites as well as from the *New England Journal of Medicine* article "Building a Better Physician—The Case for the New MCAT"

FOLLOW-UP

Solve the mystery of your application file

Generally, the graduate admissions office collects information and maintains your file. When your file is complete, they send this information to the graduate department you request. However, the specific department to which you are applying may require a separate application as well as a writing sample, a portfolio, or even a separate essay about your intent for graduate study. Be sure that you know and understand all admission requirements for both the graduate school in general and the particular department. Remember, your application will **not** be reviewed until **all** criteria are met and **all** information is received in the appropriate department.

Ensure that your file is complete, and that you have the "green light"

Make sure your file at the schools of your choice is complete before the end of January (or earlier, if a school has an early deadline). Check the on-line application system so you can check to see what is missing from your file. You need to track down those missing components and have them sent to the school! If the school isn't contacting you, it is likely that your file is incomplete. Don't sit shyly at home, afraid that they don't like you, while your chances for graduate school fizzle. Don't assume that all items which are mailed (or items which people TOLD YOU were mailed) actually arrived at the graduate school! *Personally make sure that your file is complete.*

The possibility of an interview

Most graduate schools do not require an interview, although they are likely for specific programs, and for assistantships and fellowships.

Initiating informational interviews can demonstrate interest, and differentiate you from other applicants. Many students are reluctant to request an interview. It's important that you understand the opportunity you can create for yourself by visiting the schools. Many students don't realize that graduate school faculty choose who they want to admit as their advisees--naturally, if a faculty member knows who you are, you have an advantage over someone known just on paper. This can tip the scales in your favor. In addition, make sure you are aware of the preferred dress code for interviews. Most graduate schools will prefer (or require) a suit, while other schools may allow you to dress more casually.

Interview preparation

If you are applying for a fellowship or assistantship you are more likely to be *asked* to interview. Prepare for the interview by finding out what you can about the university and the department of study to which you are applying (graduation rates, reputation, enrollment, names of faculty and their areas of interest, who you want to work with, etc). Know solidly what your aspirations are and be prepared to verbalize your goals, interests, and enthusiasm for graduate study! Give some thought to what you want to do **after** graduate school; you might be asked about your plans. For some programs, the interview is also a time to show that you are well-rounded and aware of current events. If *you* are initiating the interview, make sure that you prepare a list of questions (see page 2) which will help you to evaluate the school and its program(s). Either way, read our ["How to Interview"](#) booklet and contact our office to set up a mock interview to help you prepare.

WHAT IF YOU ARE NOT ACCEPTED?

Don't be discouraged. Don't give up.

- Contact the admissions committee or department.
- Learn their reasons for rejecting your application.
- Don't immediately take "no" for an answer (unless their "no" is very adamant). If you're rejected, but you feel you can do the work, offer to attend with "conditional acceptance." This usually means you must maintain a "B" average (like everybody else). [Don't advertise that you are conditionally accepted...faculty and fellow students may expect substandard work from you (and find it a self-fulfilling prophecy)].
- If their "no" **is** very adamant, ask if they will reconsider your application if you correct deficiencies, etc., and apply again the next year. Ask what you can do to offset their reasons for rejection.

Maybe you should work for a couple of years first

If you feel that you are not ready for graduate study, or haven't decided exactly which program you want to pursue, it's okay to work for a couple of years first. There is nothing wrong with this, and it has been the best alternative for many people (including me).

Many MBA schools require two years of work experience before they will accept you!

You can still use Career Development after you graduate

If you need assistance, just call or email us.