



VERITAS PREP

Presents:

Behind the Curtain of Graduate School Admissions:

*Veritas Prep Admissions Consultants Reveal
Common Mistakes; Tips for Success*

The thousands of individuals who apply to MBA, law and medical school programs each year no doubt understand the process: complete a standardized test, select a variety of schools and submit applications. Then their fate goes into the hands of an elusive admissions committee. But now, Veritas Prep is revealing what goes on behind the curtain. Interviews with the company's admission consultants – most of whom are former admissions officers at top U.S. graduate schools – revealed common mistakes they see in applications and their best advice for getting into the graduate school of your choice.

Common Mistakes

With the admissions rate at top-ranked graduate schools averaging below 15%, even simple mistakes can cost a candidate acceptance. Discussions with Veritas Prep admissions consultants revealed the top application missteps to avoid:

- 1. Brushing over a lack of extra-curricular involvement.** The portion of an application about community involvement is more important than it may seem, and for different reasons than many think. What you have done matters a great deal, but why you have done it matters just as much. Some applicants believe they have nothing notable to share, but all truly goal-driven, ambitious people have some type of passion or outside interest. All the consultants interviewed agreed that listing anything is better than leaving this section blank. You should share your interests and why you are enthusiastic about them – whether or not they relate to your desired future career. Some applicants may find themselves too busy at work to have become involved in outside groups or activities. This is an opportunity to draw on other examples where you have assumed roles and responsibilities above and beyond the expected outside of your professional experience.
- 2. Using the same application for multiple schools.** It's no surprise that a person interested in graduate school will apply to more than one institution. However, if an admissions officer can tell, it's a red flag. This goes deeper than making sure you get the school's name right; it means truly answering the questions asked and giving admissions officers what they want. A cookie cutter approach to essay writing is an error. They are not only looking for strong candidates; they are also trying to find someone who is a good fit for their program. Copying and pasting an essay from one application to another won't allow you to address the unique qualities you would bring to each of those schools or address the different needs of each program. Admissions officers can tell who rushed through an application simply to get it done and who has really invested in the introspection needed to generate an application worthy of admission. One consultant interviewed even recommended going so far as tailoring a resume to match the application submitted as a way to go a step above and beyond to show your interest in and commitment to a particular school.
- 3. Passing off a positive trait when asked for a weakness.** It's a common job interview question in today's competitive market, "What is your greatest weakness?" But, it's also a staple topic in graduate school admissions essays and interviews. Fluff answers simply don't fool admissions officers who have seen it all. Answers such as "I'm a perfectionist" or "I take on too much responsibility" are simply strengths worded as if they are negative. You must pick a real weakness. Then, explain what you have done to overcome this weakness, ideally adding an example to illustrate how you have already made progress. Otherwise, you can appear pretentious – or worse, dishonest. The admissions committee reviewing your application wants to like you, but they also have to be picky. Do not give them an easy reason to pass you over.

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4. Being too boastful. While there is nothing wrong with being proud of your accomplishments and conveying what you bring to the table, arrogance is unattractive. Seek to strike a balance between shining light on your winning attributes without appearing overly confident or egotistical. Self-aggrandizing will do more harm than good: no one likes a braggart. Instead, consultants advise applicants to let their letters of recommendation speak on their behalf – let someone else gush about you. It’ll be more authentic and it will demonstrate another positive characteristic: humility.

5. Lacking self-awareness. Know thyself. The great philosophers got how important it was and you should too. Admissions committees want to get to know you, but they can’t if you don’t first figure it out yourself. Self-awareness is a critical component to the graduate school admissions process. You need to be able to effectively communicate not only your background and what makes you an excellent candidate, but also what you are looking to gain from the graduate school experience and why you’ve selected that particular institution to help you achieve your goals. Spend some time reflecting on what you are passionate about, what makes you tick, what you wish to accomplish both personally and professionally and how graduate school fits into the big picture.

Admission Success

In addition to offering insights into applicants’ mistakes, admissions consultants also provided tips for success.

One tip for success: make your resume a snapshot of your candidacy. Your resume is often the first thing that gets reviewed. Just like everywhere else, in the graduate school admissions process first impressions are important: make sure to not only offer a glimpse into who you are professionally, but provide a full picture of who you are personally and what you bring to the table. Think of your resume like a movie trailer – capture the attention of the admissions committee, give them a preview of who you are as a candidate and then tell the larger story with the rest of your application materials.

Another tip – because it takes a significant amount of time to prepare thoughtful, tailored applications, make sure that you start the process early enough so you don’t have to rush. A good rule of thumb is to start at least eight weeks before the deadline. Consultants said that most applicants are surprised at how long it takes and wished they had started sooner. Learn from their experience.

The admissions consultants also advise applicants to base school selection on fit not name brand cache. While highly ranked schools do carry a certain allure, the ultimate goal should not just be to successfully gain admission to a top school, but to gain admission the school that is going to best position you for future success.

Every consultant echoed one key theme for graduate school application success: Share your story. This is a departure from common assumptions that would say a higher GMAT score or bigger job title are most likely to catch an admissions director’s eye. While both of those are important, applicants tend to focus too much on quantifiable achievements rather than taking personality and values into account.

Admissions committees need to know the “whys”... Why are you applying to this school? Why do you want to be a portfolio manager? Why are you who you are? A big misconception is that schools only want one certain type of student at their campus. But, being distinct is not a negative – it’s just the opposite.



And before you can explain the “whys” to others, you need to be confident in them yourself. Admissions officers will be able to sense your uncertainty. If it’s not your goal to become a portfolio manager, then don’t say it is. Ask yourself, “What do I want my contribution to this world to be?” and build from there. Too often, candidates can be driven by other people’s motivations. Successfully pursuing your passion is the way to create a standout application – and the gateway to a rewarding career once the graduate degree is obtained.

Summary

The Veritas Prep admissions consultants have seen thousands of applications throughout their careers. Now on the other side of the table, they coach graduate school candidates through all facets of the application process – from preparing for tests and selecting schools to acing the application. These seasoned professionals understand what it takes to be noticed at the school of your choice. And, it turns out the advice is often as simple as “be yourself.”

Whether that’s honesty when it comes to your extra-curricular involvements or knowing your weakness, it is in your favor to present yourself as you are. No matter how highly ranked the school or selective their admissions, you have something important to bring to the table. It may be your background, your world viewpoint, your skills or your work experience. When you can clearly explain all of those – and how those traits would benefit your school of choice – admissions committees will take note.

About Veritas Prep

Veritas Prep is the world’s fastest-growing test preparation and admissions consulting provider, offering industry-leading programs to help applicants improve their test scores and gain admission to the world’s best graduate schools. Founded in 2002 by graduates of the Yale School of Management, Veritas Prep now offers live GMAT prep instruction in more than 50 cities worldwide, as well as interactive online courses available everywhere. Additionally, Veritas Prep offers industry-leading admissions consulting services for applicants seeking admission to the most competitive business schools, law schools and medical schools in the world.

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