


SUGGESTIONS FOR GRADUATE STUDENT APPLICANTS

Prof. Ram M. Narayanan, Penn State University (ram@enr.psu.edu)

1. It is a good idea to contact individual professors (in your area of interest) at universities you are applying to and get their assistance and blessings for your application.
2. Do **NOT** send a generic letter to ALL professors and use phrases such as “Your university...” and “your research...”. This just indicates you are fishing. When I get a letter like that, I hit the “delete” button!
3. **NEVER** use slang abbreviations and lower case letters used in Instant Messaging. Use proper English. Use “I” instead of “l”, use “you” instead of “u”, and use “your” instead of “ur”, etc.
4. Write to each prof. **INDIVIDUALLY**. This means that you take the time and trouble to look at their websites, try to read some of their recent papers, then write a short email indicating your interest in their specific research topics (which you have read about their work) and asking for possible research assistantship opportunities. Enclose a short 2-page (max.) resume, list technical and research interests, list courses or subjects taken and grades earned, list any papers published or presented, no need at all to list extracurricular activities such as cricket or chess proficiency (who cares?). When you address the email, use the professor’s name, i.e., “Dear Professor Superduper”. If the prof. bites your hook, keep up the correspondence with him/her regularly, but not every week (unless something new comes up, such as getting admission and/or aid at another university).
5. If you decide NOT to accept an offer of RA made by a prof., have the courtesy to send a short email stating this and thanking him/her for help.
6. Recos from Indian profs are very important. They must not only be individually written, but must appear so. The recos must stress the individual interaction the prof has had with the student, and must specifically list the student’s strong points (instead of appearing very generic). It is also good if the prof includes a statement such as “among a total number of about SS students I have taught over the past YY years, YourName ranks within the top PP percent”. In addition, although 3 recos are required, it is better to have more (but not too much more). I recommend 5 recos from professors and if possible, from supervisors if the prospective student had or has a job.
7. Another important document is the Statement of Purpose. Here are some dos and don’ts:
 - (a) Even if not explicitly required, it is advisable to send in one.
 - (b) Keep it about 2-3 pages long (2.5 pages preferred).
 - (c) Do NOT send in a Shakespearean essay. You are applying for technical study, not English. Keep sentences short and to the point. Flowery language is a ‘no-no’. It just causes amusement in Graduate Committee meetings.
 - (d) Indicate how you got interested in the field of engineering that you plan to pursue. Start your life story when you had developed some brain power. Do NOT say “my interest in EE got started at the age of 1.5 years when I shoved a screwdriver into a power socket and received a shock”. Instead, say, “my interest in EE got started when at the age of 10, I realized how much we as a family were dependent on electrical power following a power outage”.
 - (e) Don’t BS and state “after completing my grad studies, I will return to Guduvancheri and help poor villagers attain proficiency in Microsoft Office”. Admission or aid does NOT depend on whether or not the student intends to return to his/her motherland. Do state something like “after completing my grad studies, I plan to further develop consumer applications of low-cost sensor technology for day-to-day use”.

APPLYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL



Professor Ram M. Narayanan
Department of Electrical Engineering
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802-2705
Tel: 814-863-2602; Email: ram@enr.psu.edu

GRAD SCHOOL APPLICATION PACKET

Know and Show

Your graduate school application packet must clearly demonstrate that you:

- * KNOW what is required of you
- * SHOW you have a plan to do it



Grad School Application Packet Contents

- ❖ Completed application
- ❖ Application fee
- ❖ Certified mark sheets (transcripts)
- ❖ Letters of recommendation (3-5)
- ❖ Statement of purpose (SOP),
personalized and specific to university
you are applying to



Before you apply

- Research the department and university
- Identify 1-2 professors in your area
- Send a letter indicating your interest and include your Statement of Purpose (SOP)
- Do NOT send generic letter to ALL professors or use phrases such as “Your university..” and “your research..”
- Write to each professor INDIVIDUALLY



What to write?

- ❖ Know the professors' research by reading their papers and website info
- ❖ List upper level (3rd/4th year) courses taken and include any programming skills
- ❖ Do NOT list cricket or chess expertise
- ❖ Keep in touch at regular intervals and respond expeditiously



Completed Application

- Fill in everything in capital letters with black pen (ball point okay)
- “Print” means “write in capital letters”, NOT necessarily “type”
- Note that in the U.S., we put month first, date later (December 10, 2007 is written as 12/10/07 instead of 10/12/07)



Application Fee

- Pay it!
- Preferred method is via credit card
- “Certified check” means “Demand draft” in U.S. dollars (USD)
- If paid via draft, keep a photocopy



Transcripts

- “Transcripts” mean mark sheets
- Preferable that transcripts be “certified” or “attested” by university official
- 1-page maximum explanation (preferably university-generated) of grading policy is desirable
- Indicate class rank and class size (if available)



Letters of Recommendation...1

- Five desirable, although only three may be required
- Letters must primarily be from faculty
- If now or before in industry, one letter from company supervisor is okay
- Must stress the individual interaction the recommender has had with the student
- Must specifically list the student's strong points (instead of appearing very generic)



Letters of Recommendation...2

- Desirable to include a statement such as “Among a total number of about SS students I have taught over the past YY years, YourName ranks within the top PP percent”.
- Okay to show weakness as a strength, such as “YourName occasionally gets bogged down in minor details at times losing sight of the big picture.”



Statement of Purpose (SOP)...1

- ❑ About 1.5-2 pages long for M.S. and 2.5-3 pages long for Ph.D. applications
- ❑ Important to show you have done your homework about the university
- ❑ Show how your background **fits in** with the department and the university
- ❑ Show how your background **supports** the department and the university
- ❑ Avoid “*one letter fits all*” approach



Statement of Purpose (SOP)...2

- Mention any contact to/from professors in your area of interest
- NEVER use slang abbreviations and lower case letters used in IM
- Use proper English. Use “I” instead of “i”, use “you” instead of “u”, and use “your” instead of “ur”, etc.



Statement of Purpose (SOP)...3

- ❑ Do NOT send in a Shakespearean essay with big GRE-type words
- ❑ Keep sentences short and to the point
- ❑ Flowery language is a ‘no-no’
- ❑ Describe how you got interested in your field of interest
- ❑ Indicate and list what you have done
- ❑ State what you plan to do in the future

EXAMPLES TO SHOW GOOD FIT WITH UNIVERSITY

“YYY State University is well known as a leader in the area of ultrawideband radio with an outstanding faculty and student group that would allow me to learn about the latest developments in my chosen field of interest.”

“I believe that the University of XXX offers a good balance between theory and practice and thus will allow me to grow professionally in both areas.”

EXAMPLES TO SHOW *GOOD* AND *BAD* PAST INTEREST

“My interest in EE got started at the age of 1.5 years when I shoved a screwdriver into a power socket and received a shock.”

“My interest in EE got started when at the age of 10, I realized how much we as a family were dependent on electrical power following a power outage.”

EXAMPLES TO SHOW *GOOD* AND *BAD* PAST INTEREST

“My interest in EE got started at the age of 1.5 years when I shoved a screwdriver into a power socket and received a shock.”

“My interest in EE got started when at the age of 10, I realized how much we as a family were dependent on electrical power following a power outage.”

EXAMPLES TO SHOW *GOOD* AND *BAD* FUTURE INTEREST

“After completing my grad studies, I plan to further develop consumer applications of low-cost sensor technology for day-to-day use”.

“After completing my grad studies, I will return to Guduvancheri and help poor villagers attain proficiency in Microsoft Office”.

EXAMPLES TO SHOW *GOOD* AND *BAD* FUTURE INTEREST

“After completing my grad studies, I plan to further develop consumer applications of low-cost sensor technology for day-to-day use”.

“After completing my grad studies, I will return to Guduvancheri and help poor villagers attain proficiency in Microsoft Office”.

POINT TO REMEMBER!



If you decide NOT to accept an offer of RA made by a professor, have the courtesy to send a short email stating this and thanking him/her for help.



THE END

Congratulations! We are pleased to offer you admission into our Graduate Program. We are also pleased to offer you a half-time research assistantship under Professor NiceGuy to work on Latest Developments. As part of the assistantship package, tuition is waived. Please accept our offer on or before Month/Date/Year.