

Section H: The Autobiographical Sketch

The purpose of this section is twofold: to get to know you as an individual and your journey toward the social work profession and to evaluate your writing skills. This is sample guideline; I Goggled the article below, you may choose to write using a different outline or style. The choice is yours. I look forward to reading your application – Sandra Gammons, LGSW Director of Admissions& Enrollment Management

A traditional autobiography may be hundreds of pages and can cover dozens of mundane interactions in minute detail. A graduate school autobiographical essay, however, should be much shorter and to the point, highlighting achievements and life events that are relevant to your studies or display an important aspect of your character.¹

Grabbing Their Attention

You need to grab the attention of your readers in the first sentence or two, so steer clear of platitudes, truisms or statements any student could make such as, "XYZ school is the school of my dreams." Instead, try telling a compelling story, introducing an interesting quote or presenting the ideas of a philosopher, writer or politician. The theme in this hook should tie into your essay in some way. If, for example, you're applying to grad school in political science, you might introduce a quote from Thomas Jefferson or present a scene rife with political conflict.

The Thesis Statement

Because you're not writing an argumentative paper, it's easy to forget the importance of a thesis statement. A thesis helps define the scope of your autobiographical essay and makes it easier for you to remain focused on your primary point. Try a thesis such as, "My life experiences have prepared me for graduate school by...." or "I know that I can contribute to the XYZ school community because..." Sometimes the thesis in these essays actually fits better at the end, as a conclusion, but it's typically easiest to put the thesis at the end of the first paragraph.

Elements to Include

Outline relevant information that's not already in your application packet. You might mention charitable work, any hardships you've overcome, lessons you've learned in your job or ways your life has caused you to choose a particular career path.

Completing the Essay

Meticulous proofreading can save you the embarrassment of a typo or misspelling, so read through your essay several times and have another person do the same. Conclude your essay by thanking your readers for their attention, emphasizing the ways in which the ideas you've outlined make you an ideal fit for the school you've chosen and -- if appropriate and if space permits -- including a brief sentence or two about why you're excited to attend the school you've chosen.

¹classroom.synonym.com/write-autobiographical-essay-graduate-school-application-1988.html