

# Physics and Astronomy graduate admissions essays

# Purpose

- This is a statement of purpose or intent
  - **Not** like a college application essay
- Typically around 1 to 2 pages
- From the committee's perspective:
  - Do you know what research is?
  - Do you have some direction?
  - Can you communicate and write well?
- Your opportunity to address things not evident in the other materials (i.e. CV, transcripts)
  - Address a few things in depth, not everything briefly

# Content

- What you are interested in
  - Area of physics
  - Theory, experiment, observational, computational?
  - If you're not sure exactly what field yet, say so, but make sure you sound like you have some direction
    - Know “why” if you don't know “what”
  - How does your previous research relate?
- Why **this** school and department?
  - Do your homework on research groups
  - Have you contacted professors? Some forms will have a place to list these
  - How does your previous research relate?
- Highlight your teaching and/or outreach work (maybe)

# Don't Be Vague

- For the past two years, I have steadily worked my way up from a hostess to server and bartender at a restaurant well known to your company, Pasta Jay's. My work here has *led me to fully understand the requirements and expectations of working in an environment dedicated to customer service and satisfaction.* Dave Query once said that "running a restaurant is like juggling ice cubes on a hot day: you have to be quick and precise." *This motto is something that I have worked for in the past and truly believe in.* And while I have enjoyed my experience at Pasta Jay's, I often find myself looking right across the street at something greater.

# Be Specific

- Working in an organization dedicated to customer service, I learned to quickly evaluate customer body language and voice tone to provide individualized service. When someone seems rushed, I don't waste time on small talk. I provide them with the meal they want in a timely fashion. However, if someone appears relaxed and comfortable, I take time to involve them in conversation and make them feel comfortable. Dave Query once said that "running a restaurant is like juggling ice cubes on a hot day: you have to be quick and precise." My ability to quickly read customers and provide them with what they want sets me apart from others.

# Structure

- Open with a quote, an anecdote, a personal experience
  - Don't use clichés or platitudes!
- Area(s) of interest
- Interest in **this** school and department
- Past research in detail
  - Also publications, conferences, talks, etc.
- Graduate or unusual coursework
- Teaching, outreach, other jobs
- Unusual circumstances
  - Returning student, career change, family interruption
- Close with a bit about the good fit between the school and department and you

# Tone

- Remember your audience
- Sound like a real and interesting person, but be professional
- Avoid clichés and platitudes
- Be honest, be realistic
- Don't try to impress (i.e. you aren't a professional, yet)
  - You're not expected to know everything
- Be clear and concise
- Physics is fun!

# Style

- Decide if you need *that*
  - This argument is one argument **that** can be linked to religion.
  - I believe **that** I am a great fit for Harvard.
- Avoid ending sentences in prepositions (maybe)
  - Physics is a subject I have a knack for.
  - Physics is a subject for which I have a knack.
  - I have a knack for physics.
- Avoid vague pronoun use
  - These miners took little to no interest in the lives of the people living on the land. *They* contaminated *their* water supply.



# The Dreaded G-Word: Grammar

- Review Most Common Grammar Errors

1. Missing comma after introductory element

During the evening news reached us of the fire.

2. Comma Splices (run-on sentences)

I have a dog, his name is Blue.

I have a dog; his name is Blue. (←Yes)

3. Review how Semi-Colons work:

He's a good dog; which makes me happy.

He's a good dog, which makes me happy.

# The Dreaded G-Word: Grammar

- Colons: “for example” or “such as”
  - I tried a number of majors: film, philosophy, political science.
- Verb Tenses
  - **By age six, I learned calculus.** (had learned)
- Pronoun Trouble
  - When a person loves something, **they** should do it.
  - Avoid “you”.
- Wrong word/spelling
  - Everyone is **effected** by physics!
- Where Can You Get Help?
  - E.g. **Easy Writer** website



# CU Writing Center

- Schedule an appointment online:

<http://www.colorado.edu/PWR/writingcenter.html>

- [wrtghelp@colorado.edu](mailto:wrtghelp@colorado.edu) or (303) 735-6906
- Norlin Commons; E111 (near east entrance Norlin Library)
- Fall 2011 Hours: through December 13<sup>th</sup>
  - Mon- Thurs      10 am - 6 pm
  - Friday              10 am - 1 pm