

Cornell Communication Department Graduate Admissions Rubric

This document describes the process of evaluating applicants, including:

- Application materials
- Scoring System
- Rubric

As a reminder, the rubric aims to facilitate our admission discussions by helping us connect the application materials to the qualities we are looking for in candidates.

Please use the whole scale. If too many candidates have a top rating, we will need to assign a further round of reviews.

Score according to your *confidence the candidate meets our criteria* rather than as judgments of candidate qualities, per se. So a candidate with a lower score is riskier, not “worse.”

Distinct, faculty members may use different heuristics for assessing these. So sub-questions and suggested indicators should be viewed as *prompts to help faculty*, not requirements.

Application Materials

Since the academic statement of purpose and personal statement are newly divided in 2021, please review what we asked students to provide:

- Academic statement of purpose (SOP):
 - The academic statement of purpose is your chance to articulate research you’d like to do and to explain how you see our program helping you achieve your intellectual goals. This statement should describe the substantive questions you are interested in. It should also indicate your intellectual interests and any training you have received that you believe has prepared you for our program. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with the research interests of our faculty. Mentioning specific faculty members that match your research interests will strengthen your statement. If any of your research interests relate to important social issues including (but not limited to) diversity, inclusion, access, and equity, you should mention them in this statement. Academic statements of purpose should be no more than 1000 words.
- Personal statement (PS):
 - The personal statement should explain your reasons for seeking a PhD in communication. What motivates you? What are your long-term goals? What important experiences have shaped your perspective to this point? As relevant, your essay should include information on your ability to be both persistent and resilient, especially when navigating challenging circumstances. Additionally, provide insight on your potential to contribute to a community of inclusion, belonging, and respect where scholars representing diverse backgrounds, perspectives, abilities, and experiences can learn and innovate productively and positively together. This is not an academic statement of purpose, but a

discussion of the personal journey that has led to your decision to seek a graduate degree. Personal statements should be no more than 1000 words.

- Resumé (CV)
- Recommendation letters and forms (LOR)
- Writing sample (WS)
- Test scores (language)
 - Important: the faculty agreed in not to request GRE scores in the 2021, which will consequently be blinded this year

Scoring System

We give three scores (one for each criterion). In addition to a score, evaluators will provide evidence for their score in a free-form text field. Scores mean the following:

- 1 = **adequate or less**. Evidence should then be briefly named/described
- 2 = **strong**. Evidence should then be briefly named/described
- 3 = **exceptional**. Evidence should then be briefly named/described

Rubric

The rubric is structured as follows. There are 3 criteria (A, B, and C). Each criterion is accompanied by a set of sub-questions whose answers contribute to the assessment of the candidate. For each sub-question, there are suggested indicators for phase 1 (written application) and phase 2 (interview). These are suggestions—faculty should feel free to devise/discover their own indicators (and explain them to the rest of us!).

Criterion A -- Academic Preparedness and Potential

Why? We want candidates who have the ability and baseline training to succeed within our program. Suggested sub-questions and ways of answering them:

Can this student handle the rigors of PhD work?

Suggested Indicators: Phase 1 – Written

- Do transcripts show high marks in rigorous classes?
- Do LOR indicate they have strong academic capability?

Suggested indicators: Phase 2 – Interview

- Can the student handle challenging questions about their area of interest?

Does this student possess the curiosity/creativity to do original research?

Suggested Indicators: Phase 1 – Written

- Does SOP show an interest in original subject matter, or an original take on well known subject matter?
- Do LOR indicate they have curiosity/creativity, such as innovative ideas/problem solving?
- Does SOP show an interest in contributing to diversity of the field through research and service?

Suggested indicators: Phase 2 – Interview

- Does student show insight when describing their research interests or answering questions?

Does this student have sufficient social science research experience?

Suggested Indicators: Phase 1 – Written

- Does SOP refer to research experiences?
- Does CV indicate research experiences?
- Do LOR refer to research experiences?

Suggested indicators: Phase 2 – Interview

- What were their responsibilities/role in prior research experience?

Does the student have strong writing and speaking skills?

Suggested Indicators: Phase 1 – Written

- Is SOP well-written and clear?
- Is writing sample first-authored/solo-authored? Is it well-written?

Suggested indicators: Phase 2 – Interview

- Does student articulate answers clearly?

Criterion B -- Motivation and Perseverance

Why? We want candidates who will stick with the long, sometimes challenging process of obtaining a PhD. Suggested sub-questions and ways of answering them:

Is student committed to obtaining a PhD from our Field?

Phase 1 – Written

- Does SOP show they have “done their homework” such that they understand what the Field actually does?
- Does PS provide a compelling rationale for research topic (e.g. beyond “fascination”)
- Does PS provide information about their long-term commitment to obtaining a PhD?
- Do LOR indicate student’s motivation for PhD?

Phase 2 – Interview

- When asked “why do they want a PhD in Cornell Comm” do they give a compelling answer?

Does student learn from feedback/criticism?

Phase 1 – Written

- Do LOR indicate student’s ability to take feedback/criticism?

Phase 2 – Interview

- We ask them to reflect on criticism they have learned from

Will student be able to sustain challenging, long-term projects?

Phase 1 – Written

- Has student completed a master’s thesis or multi-year work?
- Does PS indicate challenges overcome in academic or other parts of life path?

Phase 2 – Interview

- We ask them to reflect on an experience where they had to persevere.
- Can student describe the evolution of their research interests?

Criterion C -- Fit with Field Goals

Why? We want students to pick the right PhD program for their goals/interests. Suggested sub-questions and ways of answering them:

Do this student's interests fit with existing faculty interests?

Phase 1 – Written

- Do research goals in SOP excite the reader/evaluator?
- Do research goals in SOP seem to clearly map onto other faculty member's interests?

Phase 2 – Interview

- Do research goals excite (at least one) interviewer?

Do this student's interests lead the field into important areas?

Phase 1 – Written

- Does research goals in SOP identify a growing or interesting area of faculty interest?

Phase 2 – Interview

Is rationale for entering field of Communication clear?

Phase 1 – Written

- Do the SOP and PS demonstrate interest in Comm specifically?
- Do LOR writers have connection to field of communication?

Phase 2 – Interview

- When asked “why do they want a PhD in Cornell Comm” do they give a compelling answer?

Can this student accomplish their goals in our program?

Phase 1 – Written

- Does PS articulate the pursuit of research, teaching, or other PhD-enabled path as a goal? Are there competing goals?

Phase 2 – Interview

- When asked “why do they want a PhD in Cornell Comm” do they give a compelling answer?

Will this student be a good Field citizen?

Phase 1 – Written

- Do LOR indicate student's cooperativeness or collegiality?
- Do PS demonstrate student's contribution to diversity?
- (Phase 1.5) -- Did candidate engage with Joanna and others in professional and appropriate manner?

Phase 2 – Interview

- Questions we might ask...
 - Tell us about a time you had a conflict with a peer? (or with a mentor?) How did you resolve it?
 - What's your communication style, and how do you collaborate with people with different communication styles?

Criterion D — Willing to Mentor and Advise

Are you willing to serve on the committee of this person and contribute substantially to mentoring and supporting them, whether or not you are chair?

Qualitative Evaluation

After reviewing is complete, we will seek feedback via an anonymous Qualtrics survey, which will be summarized into the end-of-admissions report to the GPC.