

ORPAS: Personal Submissions

Let's take a look at the programs that require personal submissions. Toronto and Western's SLP program, and Western's Audiology program require personal submissions. Western and Queen's PT programs require personal submissions, and Toronto, Western, and Queen's OT programs require personal submissions.

It is important to follow some guidelines for personal submissions. Firstly, answer the questions and tailor it to the institution when possible to show fit or understanding; go deeper: understand the direction of program. But be careful not to quote words directly from the institution's website. Review ORPAS info and websites prior to writing your submissions. All writing must be well written at a graduate level. Talk about your success, motivations, how you will add to the program, and anything else that is interesting and can benefit your submission.

Many students find completing an ORPAS application is like taking an additional course, so you want to start early. The application opens mid October, so prepare a realistic timeline keeping in mind that the personal submissions and activity submissions always take longer than anticipated. It will be important to ensure that you have enough time to review, edit, and re-write! We recommend writing your personal submissions in one sitting and then putting them away for a while. When you re-read them you can reflect on what you want to change with a clear perspective. It might be helpful to get an application buddy who is also going through the same process to help plan your time, and review your writing.

When editing, read your statements out loud as you can often catch awkward sentence structure, grammatical mistakes, and get a sense of the flow better with this method. Make sure to ask someone to evaluate for typos and grammar. When it comes to content changes, remember each person will have their own opinion. There is often many ways to say the same thing. This is your document – you want to go with your own approach and what you will be happy submitting.

In the Further education – Applying section, you will find information on how to develop content for your personal statements, templates and examples. We also have a Letter of Intent binder that is kept behind the front desk of the Centre for Career Action. You can review this binder to see application examples from previous UWaterloo students who have been accepted to rehab programs – with their personal information removed.

The Centre for Career Action also provides Professional/grad school application review appointments. Book your appointment through the CCA website and make sure to bring a paper copy of your personal submission to the appointment.

For your personal submissions, Lettercount.com is a good site to put your statement into as it will count characters for you.

The OT program submissions for Queen's, Toronto, and Western have the same two questions and give you 5000 characters of space for the answer to each question. You need to answer the question in each school's textbox that you are applying to.

Your answers should demonstrate your particular strengths, experiences and abilities. It is important to demonstrate that you have researched the profession of OT to make an informed career choice, and

also that you have had exposure to the profession through paid work, volunteering, and/or shadowing, in various healthcare settings.

Question 1 asks: “Demonstrate your understanding of the profession of OT by identifying 2 current or emerging trends in Canada's healthcare system and discussing how occupational therapists are well positioned to play a leadership role on healthcare teams.” This has a 5000 character limit. Make sure you answer all aspects of the question: current or emerging trends in Canada’s healthcare system, AND discussing how OTs are well positioned to play a leadership role on healthcare teams.

In terms of OT Trends, try to avoid the aging population (as this is very overused and broad) or, if you do want to discuss it, have a unique perspective on it for example keeping people in their homes, or mental health issues. Talk about evidence-based practice, and read the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists website or google OT in the news.

Question 2 asks: “Clearly describe your reasons for pursuing a career in occupational therapy. How have your educational experiences, your professional experiences, and your background contributed to your preparation for occupational therapy as your career choice?” This has a 5000 character limit. Provide enough detail about related experience so admissions directors have a thorough understanding of what you know about the field, what you have experienced, and what you have observed.

For this question, check field-related websites for ideas, the Online Career Guidance Tools, on the Centre for Career Action website, and registration & licensing bodies for current issues and legislation. Check the university websites to research programs & other guidance on forms. In the CCA library, behind the front counter there are examples of Personal submissions & resumes for OT applications in the “Letter of Intent – Professional schools” binder.

The PT personal submission for Queen’s consists of 4 questions. You must provide enough detail about related experience so admission directors have a thorough understanding of what you know about the field, what you have observed, and the types of patients and issues you have experienced. You are evaluated on information in 3 areas: knowledge of PT, any relevant experience, and personal characteristics: for example maturity, adaptability, motivation and initiative, and leadership & communication skills. It is recommended that you watch the video that is available on their website to learn more about what Queen’s is looking for.

The 4 questions are:

- 1) Please explain your reasons for choosing physiotherapy as a career, demonstrating your knowledge of the profession and scope of practice. This has a 2000 character limit.
- 2) Discuss your activities directly related to physical therapy. Include and clearly outline patient experiences, job shadowing and volunteer opportunities, as well as research, co-op placements and employment. Document the duration (number of hours), names of facilities and locations, and the populations with whom you interacted. This has a 3000 character limit.
- 3) Briefly describe other relevant activities that provide evidence of your involvement and leadership in increasing the well-being of individuals, groups or society in general. Include any awards for community service. This has a 2000 character limit.

- 4) If applicable: Please identify any extenuating circumstances (e.g. major illness or leave of absence from studies) that you would like the Admissions Committee to consider when evaluating your application. Please be aware that you may be asked to submit documentation to support your statement. This has a 500 character limit.

Western, is looking for the same information as Queen's in their PT submissions; however they just ask the questions in a slightly different way, and require different character counts. There is a 2500 character limit, to answer all three questions:

1. Explain why you have chosen Physical Therapy as a career demonstrating your knowledge of the profession and its scope of practice.
2. Explain why you have chosen the Master of Physical Therapy (MPT) Program at Western University.
3. Describe particular strengths, experiences, attributes, leadership skills and/or abilities that you will bring to the profession.

We will discuss the Experiences and Awards and Scholarships entries in the Activity Submissions video.

In the CCA library, behind the front counter there are examples of Personal submissions for PT applications in the "Letter of Intent – Professional schools" binder.

The Audiology & SLP programs at Western and the SLP program at Toronto ask all of the same questions for their personal submission except section d) where you need to focus on the specific school to show an understanding of the program and why you are a good fit for their specific program, and section e). In section e) for Toronto, you need to demonstrate current knowledge of the SLP profession, or for Western, you have an opportunity to explain any irregularities in your application if you need to.

The Statement of Intent should include the following points with emphasis on a, b, c, & d: (Applicants have 3000 characters, including spaces, for both Western and Toronto):

(a) explain reasons for choosing speech-language pathology as a career

(b) highlight specific personal attributes that they bring to the profession. So google competencies for SLP and also look at the link from ORPAS about "Essential Skills & Attributes" which are available for all 4 rehab-related professions. Ensure that you make the link between the competencies required in the profession and the ones that you can offer.

Question (c) asks "emphasize accomplishments in their academic or non-academic careers." So for this answer show your transferable skills.

Question (d) asks you to "outline reasons for entering the Master's program at Western University (or Toronto)". For this question provide details about their program, clinics, placements, etc. and finally question

(e) explain irregularities in their applications (for Western) OR e) Demonstrate current knowledge about the profession of SLP (for Toronto)

Extenuating circumstances can include low grades, low grades in prereqs, low workload, missed terms, retaken courses etc. Sometimes applicants want to send information to the programs to explain these

abnormalities in their applications. The McMaster OT and PT applications have nowhere to convey such information.

For Toronto's PT program, no extenuating circumstances are reviewed unless the applicant makes the GPA cut-off, and even then, extenuating circumstances are generally not taken into consideration. It is up to applicants to decide if they have a case strong enough to submit (however a GPA is rarely, if ever, altered). Admissions has mentioned that sometimes applicants have whole terms or years of low grades due to a personal/medical issue, but that's still not something they would consider. The GPA would have to be high before and after whatever event occurred for it to realistically have a chance of changing something.

If you decide to submit a 1 page letter for Toronto on your extenuating circumstances, you can include this document in your ORPAS application AFTER you submit the application. You will be able to log back into the application after submission and use the Secure Applicant Messaging (SAM) tool to upload documents. Be sure to tell ORPAS exactly what programs and schools you want the document sent to if you are applying to multiple programs as you only want the document to go to some of those programs.

For Queens PT, you can provide extenuating circumstances information in question 4 of the personal submission. For Western PT, there is a form that you can complete, and you must contact the email above to do so. The SLP and AUD program allow you to explain irregularities in the application in section E.

When discussing your extenuating circumstance, keep it brief. Don't just provide an explanation, and certainly don't make any excuses, but instead include the strategies that you used to overcome whatever challenge resulted in your low grades or workload etc. If you have had success, or positive results in overcoming the situation – share it here.