

# THE PROFESSIONAL ESSAY

*This essay is NOT the same as the 'Personal Statement' (Item #22) on the university application form, requested by the Graduate School, nor the Goals Statement required as part of the MATC application. Those statements are important parts of your application file, and faculty do review them with your application. However, we also request a more extended writing sample, the "Professional Essay," which is an essential component of your application to this program.*

## **Purpose of the Professional Essay**

Here are some of the reasons we are asking you to write this essay and the criteria we will use when reading your response:

1. At this early date, we genuinely want to know what and how you personally think about education. These questions require your personal voice or point of view and considerable reflection, and they are not easily addressed with a pat answer or *others'* opinions on such topics. We want to know what *you* believe and think, and what personal/professional experiences and arguments you can bring to bear on the question you choose to address.
2. If you are admitted to MATC program, this essay and other materials submitted in your application file (e.g., your Goals Statement and Resumé) may become a permanent component of your professional portfolio. You may be asked to revisit and reflect on your essay or other application materials in subsequent courses. If admitted to the program, you will learn more about the portfolio requirement in TE 807 (or TE 808), the first required course in the program. Therefore, we consider this essay as both a benchmark for the MATC candidate and a source of information in your admissions review.
3. The review committee is interested in applicants who demonstrate the following qualities in their essays:
  - a. the degree to which an applicant is able to focus, construct, and sustain a well-reasoned argument in an integrative, coherent fashion;
  - b. the applicant's ability to draw on personal experience to make an argument, using his or her own voice and point of view;
  - c. the applicant's ability, through the skillful application of the mechanics of writing and proofreading, to express his or her ideas with clarity and grace; and
  - d. evidence of thoughtful, critical reflection and depth of analysis versus a casual, shallow response.

## **Directions**

Please use a cover sheet with your name on it, identifying which option (below) you selected and your own original title. Type your response, double-spaced with adequate margins, and do not exceed 5 pages in length. However, be sure to write at least 3 pages (shorter essays may be returned for further expansion). To expedite the completion of your application file and its review, promptly submit your Professional Essay as an e-mail attachment or fax to the MATC Program Secretary: [matc@msu.edu](mailto:matc@msu.edu) Fax: 517-432-5092.

## **The Choice of Questions for Your Professional Essay**

Choose *one* (1) of the two options below and respond in a well-crafted essay with the above purposes and criteria in mind.

### **Option #1: Examining a “Problem of Practice”**

“Problems of practice” occur regularly in teaching. These “problems” are difficult and reoccurring classroom situations that have no “ideal” solution. Magdalena Lampert, for instance, describes recurring times in her mathematics classroom where she has to choose a course of action, usually in the moment—trying to accommodate individual needs while also weighing the effects on the class as a whole (Lampert, 2001). Yet, frustrating as they may feel, “problems of practice” are also opportunities for learning to become a better teacher.

In your professional essay, please examine a “problem of practice” that you have encountered directly in your teaching or observed during your teacher preparation fieldwork or internship. Use the following as a guide for structuring your essay:

(1) Describe a “problem of practice” you encountered or observed. Provide as detailed an account as possible with examples to illustrate the problem. (*Please do not use actual names of students, teachers, administrators, etc.*).

(2) Since problems of practice can be opportunities for learning, both in the short run and for the longer term, what did you learn right away from the problem you described, and what does that problem indicate you might need to learn as a teacher in the longer run? Why?

### **Option #2: Deepening One’s Understanding of Subject Matter Content**

Understanding the discipline and the content that one teaches is an important ingredient of teaching. While teachers learn much subject matter knowledge through content course work and teacher education courses, there is a great deal about content that teachers learn in preparation for and even in the midst of teaching it to students. In fact, many teachers often state that they did not really understand particular content until they had to teach it to their students.

In your professional essay,

(1) Describe in detail, and with examples, a teaching experience in the classroom, tutoring, or as a classroom assistant you have had in which you found yourself re-learning, understanding more deeply, or questioning the depth of your understanding about a particular concept or big idea in what you have taught to students; and

(2) Write about the lessons that you took away from this experience about yourself as a teacher and about the intellectual work that is involved in teaching subject matter to students.