

THE GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

BEFORE YOU START

Leave plenty of time

Many components of the application process take substantial time to effectively complete. Well-informed decision-making requires solid research that requires a great deal of time. Start the research process approximately 16 months before you want to begin the program.

Most general application deadlines fall between December and February; however, check exact deadline dates once you have selected the programs to which you will apply. Schools will not make exceptions to application deadlines.

Deadlines for financial assistance are sometimes different from the application deadlines. In some cases, financial assistance deadlines are earlier. Be sure to check these dates and allow sufficient time to complete appropriate forms.

You may wish to make a schedule similar to the one below to track your progress.

Task	Date
Research completed by:	
Take practice test/prep course for GRE or equivalent on:	
Review & select programs by:	
Transcripts requested by:	
Begin work on personal statement/essays by:	
Take drafts to professors for review & critique by:	
Approach letter writers by (at least 1-2 months before deadlines)	
Materials ready for letter writers by:	
*Deadline for letter writers	
Start filling out applications by	
Applications completed by	

*These deadlines should be well in advance of the actual application deadline so you have time to follow-up and make sure they have completed the letters.

Suggested Timetables

Spring semester of your Sophomore/Fall of your Junior year (for a typical December-February deadline)

- Start building relationships with faculty members who may be potential reference letter writers
- Ask for advice from professors and others regarding what graduate programs you should consider
- Explore graduate programs (consider faculty interests, entrance requirements, and deadlines)

Spring semester of your Junior/Summer before your Senior year

- Begin to draft a personal statement of your academic and professional goals
- Narrow your list of graduate programs (include a few 'reach' schools and one or two 'safe' schools, but make the majority of your list schools that have good programs and that have class demographics that match your GPA, test scores, etc.)
- Contact programs and request answers to any final questions
- If you want to apply for application fee waivers, you can also contact the department or programs to ask about the process
- For the few institutions that still like to see them, review for the GRE (download free software/resources from www.ets.org/gre) or other entrance exams...consider taking your GRE in the summer, so you have time to retake in the Fall if necessary. Keep in mind that preferred locations/dates fill quickly!

Senior Year

September

- Share your personal statement with your professors
- Consult your campus writing center or Career Services office to review your statements
- Finalize your graduate program choices (most reference letter writers prefer no more than 10)

October

- Take your final GRE or other entrance exam (keep in mind scores may take up to 6 weeks for grad schools to receive), if necessary
- Revise your personal statements and tailor them to your chosen graduate programs
- Review your CV/résumé for the application
- Download application forms (or questions) so you can complete a draft...review and edit
- Order official transcripts (always send them straight to the institution – scores sent 'to student' are not considered official)
- Ask faculty members for recommendations (include specific information about deadlines, your personal statements, unofficial transcripts, and copy of your résumé)

November

- Review and fill application forms
- Submit completed application forms
- Follow up periodically with your faculty members to ensure they'll be able to meet deadlines

December-January

- Submit your final application and follow up with the program to ensure all materials are received

February-March

- Visit your prospective programs, if possible
- Submit a FAFSA, even if you expect to receive funding, so you have other options just in case

March-April

- Accept or decline all offers of admission

MAKING THE DECISION

Know Yourself

Know your career objective. The reason for attending graduate and professional school is to prepare for a specific career. In order to be able to present a strong application, it's important that you know what that is (even if you change your mind once you get to grad school).

Knowing your own values, skills, interests, and work characteristics are crucial to choosing which fields and programs to pursue. If you need assistance, visit Career Services.

Research to Select a Degree and Program

Research basic information (requirements, deadlines, etc.) about the university and department and faculty for each institution you're considering. When you go to undergrad, it's important to choose the university wisely. For your graduate degree, look at the department more closely. Some websites that are very helpful are www.gradschools.com, www.graduateguide.com or others. You can also search websites of related professional organizations (ACS.org, for example)

In addition, seek advice from your professors, as well as faculty, students, and alumni of the graduate programs you are considering. Contact people who work in your field of interest to find out what universities they respect or which their employers recruit from.

- Ask people who are in your field of interest what kind of training they recommend you receive and which programs they recommend.
- Find out if you are comfortable with the culture/locale of the programs and schools you are considering.
- Determine how you will be matched with an advisor, and, if you will be working closely with her or him, try to meet before you make a final decision on admission.

- Find out how faculty/departments support their students (financially and otherwise...what services are available?).
- Ask what percentage of the students in the past five years have graduated from the program and what the average length of time to complete the degree was.
- Inquire about jobs secured by graduates from the program in the past several years.
- If possible, visit the campuses; visit with faculty who specialize in your area of interest, meet with student services staff, and find out more about the program/research/requirements.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Clustering

Apply in clusters. Apply to programs where the average test score/GPA for the most recent entering class is lower than yours is. Apply to programs where the average score/GPA is on par with yours. Apply to programs where the average score/GPA is above yours. Do not rule yourself out of a program you really want--you do not know how the admissions committee will weigh the different components of your application.

Application fees

The graduate school application process can be expensive with application fees ranging from \$50-\$120. In addition, there will be additional fees for registering for standardized tests, sending official scores as well sending transcripts. See if you are eligible to apply for fee waivers in your graduate program. You can contact the department to which you will be applying and inquire about the fee waiver application process. It never hurts to ask!

Statements of Purpose/Personal Statements

Most graduate/professional schools will have specific questions they wish you to address. Be sure to respond directly to those questions. Commonly asked questions include:

- What are your immediate and long-term career goals?
- How will graduate/professional school help you obtain these goals?
- What unique skills or aspects will you bring to our program?
- What experiences, research, demonstrated skills and accomplishments have made you decide on and prepare you for this program?
- How will this specific program assist you in reaching your goals (you may mention specific faculty, research, program emphases, courses, etc.)?
- Discuss your background only by directly tying it in with the above

Allow sufficient time to write the statement and have revisions of it reviewed by many people. Customize each statement to each program. Follow the "show, don't tell" rule-- describe experiences you have had that demonstrate your abilities instead of just listing them. Do not include your entire life story, unless specifically requested to do so. Stick to word count or page limit requirements.

Graduate Admissions Exams/Tests

Many institutions no longer require (or even allow) GRE or other exam scores, so be sure to check each institution's requirements first.

If you need to take them, take a practice test, study extensively, or take a prep course. Unlike the SAT's, programs will see the scores of any graduate test you have taken within the last 5 years. Although you can take it again, schools may know your first score. Treat these exams as though you only have one opportunity.

Some students do better on exams if they take them while they are still students, when course material is fresh (this is especially true for medical programs). However, other students perform better when they have had some time away from school and have a clear objective for attending a graduate or professional program. Although your GRE

scores are held for five years, some programs will only accept scores completed within the past three years. Take the test when you will be best prepared, but no less than 8-12 months before you plan to start school.

Letters of Recommendation

Most graduate/professional programs require three letters of recommendation. The following are commonly asked questions regarding letters of reference.

1. Who should write my letters?

People who can comment on your experience and abilities relevant to graduate study in your chosen field. Generally, it is best to have some letters from professors in your academic major. Research-based programs prefer letters from professors who can attest to the applicant's academic potential or research abilities. The strongest letters of reference grow out of an established relationship. Start early! Visit your professors so they know you early, rather than from 1-2 meetings the semester you're applying.

2. What materials should I give my letter writers to help them write a well-informed recommendation?

Include a copy of your personal statement, unofficial transcripts, papers you have written for them (with their comments), your résumé, etc. Even provide a brief outline of what points you would like the letter to include.

3. Is it better to have a high prestige/status instructor write the letter even if they do not know me as well, or is it better to have a lower-ranked instructor write it if they know my abilities better?

Professors are best, but it is better to have a strong letter from a junior faculty member or a graduate student Teaching Assistant (TA) who knows you well than a mediocre letter from a senior person who does not really know you or your work and abilities or who does not take the time to write a thoughtful letter.

4. Is it better for me to waive my legal right to see the letters of reference that are written about me?

You should discuss your decision with your letter writers. While some people who serve on graduate admissions committees prefer waived letters, feeling they have more credibility, others give equal credibility to all letters.

Follow Up

Even if schools say they will send postcards/emails to let you know what pieces of your application are missing, it is still your responsibility to make sure all your materials have arrived. Check early enough that if something is missing, you have time to get it in by the deadline!

Interviews and Graduate School Visit

Doctoral programs in the sciences may interview prospective candidates. This may happen before you get admitted or often happens during your graduate school visit week (usually paid for by the program). Prepare for interviews by researching the school and being clear about your goals. Be prepared to ask well-informed questions whose answers could not be easily found elsewhere. During your visit, network with current graduate students and faculty in the program. Ask graduate students about the expectations of the program, their experience, questions about faculty advisors, graduate student life, etc. Current graduate students are a great resource as they have been through the process themselves, and they have first-hand information about the faculty, department and the program.