

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

A step-by-step approach

Step 1: Identify graduate schools with programs that interest you through:

- Family, friends, acquaintances, etc.
- Professors/college staff
- Professionals in your field of interest and professional associations
- College guide books-Peterson's Guides are exceptionally good
- Citations—find out where authors of journal articles teach

Step 2: Consider what graduate school is best for you. Evaluate...

- Length of time to complete a program. Are there multiple options?
- The faculty; their specialties and their availability
- Recent class profiles: age ranges, gender, ethnicity, work experiences, etc.
- Completion and job placement rate of graduates
- Financial assistance, including procedures and deadlines for applying

Step 3: Rank/categorize schools of interest

- Word of mouth—ask people (start with your professors)
- Peterson's Guide or other college guide books
- Magazines—*US News & World Report*, *Business Week*, etc. (note: they may differ from yours)
- Call schools to inquire about their criteria for admission
- Put schools into 3 categories and apply to at an equal amount in each:
 - Reach** = *(hopeful admission)*
 - Maybe** = *(possible admission)*
 - Safe** = *(admission may be a sure thing)*

Step 4: The application process

- Gather tangible materials—catalog, applications, etc. (Many resources are now available via websites)
- Obtain a name to contact when requesting and confirming materials, information & procedures
- Be professional and courteous to everyone you contact—impressions at all levels matter (and are shared)
- Make a time-line of all deadlines and apply one month early for improved consideration
- Research each program and incorporate what you know in your essay
- Write directly to professors who teach in the program; review their published articles
 1. Comment on articles
 2. Request a reading list
 3. Propose a study topic that you may correspond about

Step 5: Know what schools look for in candidates

Their decision-making involves reviewing & evaluating combinations of:

- Grades & test scores
 - Essay & application
 - Recommendations
- Optional criteria*
Résumé or curriculum vita (CV)
Interview

□ **Grades and test scores**

These serve as an initial screening. One **may** be excused, if low. Programs occasionally admit candidates who are *marginally* below the 'minimum' standard. If either of these is low, make direct contact to the program advisor to discuss your options.

Grades—never fudge on an application

- *If concerned about grades, present them in a positive light (Example: grades continually improved through college, or, first year difficult but good grades achieved after that).*
- *Once you graduate, your GPA is set and unchanged. However, classes taken after graduation (particularly graduate level classes) feature your "post-baccalaureate" GPA. If you do well, this may help to demonstrate your graduate-level ability.*

Test Scores—study and take practice tests [300-350 hours test prep is recommended]

- *On average, a person does 10% better the second time tested but no marked improvement beyond that*
- *Computerized testing typically does not allow you to go back and review the exam or change your answers*

□ **Applications and essays**

- Leave nothing blank; make nothing up
- Take research seriously—get published, look for student journals
- If you have overcome adversity, address this in the essay
- Don't go over in length; and don't make the font so small that it is difficult to read
- Send something extra if it directly relates to the program (a research paper, lab project, etc.)

Essay Tips

- *Develop an enticing opening without quoting others*
- *Substantiate your interest*
- *Profile your preparation—feature what you can do (what you have to offer) and how you are prepared (not just by grades)*
- *Have a vision—address your career goals*
- *BE PERFECT—proofread to make sure there are NO grammar or spelling errors*
- *Customize essays for each program you apply to*

☐ Recommendations from others

Confirm these early as you must depend upon their schedules to write them. Select one extra person to write a recommendation (in case someone else does not come through).

- Target people who can offer a good reference: professors, employers, college staff, etc. (no family members)
- Ask, "Can you make a positive recommendation for my application?" They need to be strong and favorable!
- Help writers develop their comments: provide them your personal statement, transcripts, résumé, recent papers
- Supply names and addresses for returning completed materials (and stamps and envelopes for those to be mailed)
- Give writers adequate time to respond to your request; most need 4-6 weeks to write
- Make sure they know your deadlines; prompt them weekly if needed until they finish
- THANK them (in writing)! They are busy people; acknowledge their time and support on your behalf

Step 6: What to do if you end up on a waiting list

- Apply again, including more "safe" schools
- Pursue an intermediate degree
- Take classes in your interest area—your GPA might then be based on post-baccalaureate classes
- Volunteer or work in your career interest area to gain more experience

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

Spring & summer one year in advance to the one of matriculation (*This could be in the junior year*)

Discuss your interests with faculty and professionals in the field. Evaluate programs from literature and web information. Determine admission requirements and application deadlines. Prepare for tests by reviewing content and taking practice tests. Identify people agreeable to write letters of recommendation. Draft a statement of purpose. Register for standardized test.

September/October

Take standardized test. Continue refining personal statement, utilizing feedback from advisors. Search for financial support via assistantships and fellowships. Request that authors write their letter of recommendation.

November/December

Order official transcripts (pay off all campus fines!). Finalize your statement of purpose. Submit applications (submit a month ahead of the posted deadlines). Apply for assistantships, grants and fellowships.

January-March

Check with all institutions before their deadlines to assure your file is complete. Inquire about scheduling visits/interviews. Fill out Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

April

Discuss results and options with advisors, career counselors and family members. Send thank-you notes to all people who wrote recommendations for you; inform them of your outcomes.

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION CHECKLIST

School Name & Codes (for GRE/LSAT/etc.)			
Program contact			
Request applications / fee waiver			
Inquire about financial assistance options			
Application deadline (note if rolling)			
Financial application deadlines			
Request transcript			
Request letters of recommendation (provide draft of your essay)			
Mailed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application(s) • Transcript(s) • Letters of recommendation 			
Networking: Contact w/faculty			
Confirm school's receipt of... (transcripts, test scores, letters, financial aid appl.)			
Deadline for selection			
Interview date (if applicable)			
Accept or Reject; Determine follow-up <i>If rejected, ask how to might strengthen a future application...this provides concrete feedback</i>			

WEBSITES

FINANCIAL AID

www.finaid.org
www.fastweb.com

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION INFORMATION

Peterson's guide to graduate schools

www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx

Graduate school guides

www.gradschools.com
www.Gradprofiles.com
www.apa.org
www.phds.org (use ranking section to identify schools and programs by your selected criteria)
<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>

General graduate school & test preparation information

www.wvu.edu/assess/testprep.shtml (available through WWU's Testing Center)
www.gre.org
www.princetonreview.com/graduate-school.aspx
www.mygretutor.com
www.number2.com
www.freerice.com
www.GradHacker.org (a graduate student blog)

Business school information

www.mba.com
www.gmac.com

Law school test prep information

www.lsac.org

Professional Health Schools- Medical

www.aamc.org
www.aacom.org
www.studentdoctor.net
www.aspiringdocs.org

International grad school search [some serve as an application service involving fees, but not all charge fees]

www.findamasters.com

www.gradschoolsabroad.com

www.educationuk.org

www.ucas.com

www.marshallscholarship.org/studyuk/

www.prospects.ac.uk/search_courses.htm

<http://acrossthepond.com>

RESOURCES

(Available for reference within the Career Services Center, OM 280)

- American Psychological Association. (2009). *Graduate Study in Psychology*, APA: Washington, DC
- Asher, D. (2008). *Graduate Admissions Essays, Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice*, Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, CA
- Innes, J. (2012). *The CV Book*, Prentice Hall/Pearson Education Limited: Great Britain
- Ivey, A. (2005). *The Ivey Guide to Law School Admissions*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Inc.: NY
- Kaplan Publishing (2008). *Get Into Graduate School: A Strategic Approach*, Kaplan Publishing/Simon & Schuster: New York, NY
- Mumby, D. (2012). *Graduate School: Winning Strategies for Getting In*, Proto Press Publications: Quebec, Canada
- Peterson's (2014). *Graduate & Professional Programs*, Peterson's Publishing/Lawrenceville, NJ [a six-volume directory of graduate programs and degrees offered at more than 2,300 institutions]
- Peterson's (2009). *How to Write the Perfect Personal Statement*, Peterson's Publishing/Lawrenceville, NJ
- Whitmore, T (2012). *How to Write an Impressive CV & Cover Letter*, Rupa Publications: India



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