



# The Graduate School Application Process

# Timeline for Applying to Graduate School

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## **First Year:**

- Begin earning good grades.
- Start cultivating relationships with faculty.
- Consider summer jobs related to your major or career interests.

## **Sophomore Year:**

- Continue accumulating good grades and building relationships with faculty.
- Consider related summer jobs and internships.
- Attend Career Center workshops and programs on Graduate School.
- Look at whether you will need to take prerequisite classes for your desired program and work those classes into your academic plan for the next year.

## **Junior Year:**

### *Fall/Spring* –

- Research areas of interest, institutions, and programs.
- Talk to a career counselor about application requirements.
- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Take preparation courses for the graduate admissions tests, take the tests if necessary.
- Start to obtain letters of recommendation.

### *Summer* –

- Write a draft of your purpose/personal statement or essay.
- Start browsing through graduate program guides, college catalogs, and on-line graduate program materials.
- Take required graduate admission tests.
- Look at on-line application.
- Visit institutions of interest, if possible.
- Check on application deadlines and rolling admissions policies.
- Begin to develop your personal timeline for the application process.

## **Senior Year:**

### *September* –

- Meet with career counselors for information on tests and financial assistance and for a critique of the draft of the statement of purpose.
- Write draft of statement of purpose.
- Meet with career counselors and/or faculty members that you know to discuss your personal statement and learn about possible programs.
- Meet with the Academic Success Center to review your personal statement.
- Determine the schools to which you plan to apply, and request application materials.
- Research financial aid sources, fellowships and assistantships.
- Request recommendations from faculty members. Be sure to give detailed information about your interests and desired programs of study. Allow faculty time to complete letters.

### October -

- Take standardized tests.
- Complete your personal statement, adjusting it for each application's specific needs.
- Order transcripts from all post-secondary institutions (If fall term grades are expected, then check with staff in the Registrar's Office to see if a transcript including fall term grades can be sent in time to meet the deadlines of programs to which you are applying).
- Obtain letters of recommendation.
- Complete application forms (First, complete a draft on a copy of the form).

### November / December -

- Submit completed applications. Apply between October and December (even if the deadline isn't until January) Get the admissions committee to look at your folder before the rush of applicants.
- Apply for fellowships, grants and assistantships.

### January / February / March -

- Contact schools about the possibility of visiting and scheduling an interview. Complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), if required.
- Check with all institutions before the deadline to make sure your file is complete.
- Visit institutions that accept you.
- Send a deposit to your institution of choice.

### April -

- Discuss acceptances, rejections, and other career options with a career counselor and/or a faculty member.
- Notify other colleges and universities that accepted you of your decision so that they may admit students on their waiting list.
- Send thank you notes to people who wrote your recommendation letters, informing them of your success.
- Follow up on graduate assistantships and associateships.

## Is Graduate School the *Best* Next Step for Me?

Take a moment to reflect on these questions and honestly listen to your enthusiasm and reactions.

1. Am I excited about the option of Graduate Study?
2. What are my reasons for attending?
5. Do I like research projects and writing or presenting materials?
6. Do I know what career opportunities are available to me at each educational level?
7. Am I doing this to postpone a job search?

Graduate School and Undergraduate School are very different from each other. The average age of a graduate student is 32. In graduate school, you have to be dedicated, intellectually curious, work very independently, and take initiative. You will get to know your department, faculty, and peers in your program, but you will have much less of a connection to the social scene and the larger campus. Graduate school is meant for individuals who have a passion and devotion to one topic, for you will be researching this area in depth. There will be a lot of writing, research, and intellectual discussion. **Whatever you do, do not pursue graduate school because you are unsure of what else to do with your life and career.**

Factors to consider as you select a program:

Location	Size	Cost	Resources
Reputation	Faculty	Financial Aid	Competition for Admission

## Research Programs

## **Graduate School Information and Testing Resources**

<https://www.gradschools.com/> - Searchable Graduate Schools and Programs

<https://www.petersons.com/> - Searchable Graduate and Undergraduate Schools and Programs, Scholarship Information, Test Preparation Information

<https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools> - US News and World Reports Graduate School Rankings

<http://springfield.edu/academics/graduate-programs> - Graduate Programs at Springfield College

<http://www.ets.org/> - Education Testing Services, GRE and Praxis Information

<https://www.princetonreview.com/> - Princeton Review Test Preparation

<https://www.kaptest.com/> - Kaplan Test Preparation

## **Industry Specific Graduate School Information**

<http://mastersineducationguide.com/> - Master Level Education Programs and Information

<http://www.educationdegree.com/> - Graduate Education Programs, Alternative paths to Certification, and Resources

<http://www.mba.com/us> - Master of Business Administration Information and GMAT Test Preparation

<http://www.lsac.org> - Law School Admission Council, LSAT Test Preparation

## **Campus Visit**

It is hard to select your perfect school from your desk or living room. You should visit the campus. Talk to current students, faculty, and administrators. Sit in on as many actual classes as you can. Ask questions! Walk around the campus - each campus has an intangible feel to it. As an undergraduate your social, emotional, and academic needs were met by different people on campus and you were probably friends with people whose academic interests did not match your own. Once you are in graduate school you will be much more inclined to look to students and faculty in your department for support of all levels. Therefore, make sure you like your actual department. Be sure there are faculty in your department whose research interests match your own.

## **Reputation**

When considering a school's reputation, be realistic. Assess your odds of gaining admittance, generally students move laterally among institutions with similar academic rigor and standing. It is important to go to a school that has a good reputation for your specific program. Do not be lured into a university based solely on reputation. The reputation and prestige will mean nothing if the faculty and department cannot meet your research needs.

## **Required Entrance Exams**

Many programs require entrance exams for admission. Common entrance exams include; The Graduate Record Exams (GRE) for many different graduate programs, the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) for MBA programs, the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) for Law School, and the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) for Medical School. If the programs you are exploring require these, take the time to adequately prepare. The Career Center can assist you to locate test prep resources.

### **Local Testing Centers:**

GRE  
Prometric Testing Center  
59 Interstate Drive  
West Springfield, MA 01089  
(413) 733-2374

[www.prometric.com](http://www.prometric.com)  
[www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)

GMAT  
Pearson Professional Centers  
One Monarch Place, Suite 1110  
Springfield, MA 01144  
(413) 747-5327

[www.pearsonvue.com](http://www.pearsonvue.com)

LSAT  
Test Centers  
<http://www.lsac.org>

## **Funding:**

Colleges tend to offer assistance based on merit rather than need. Explore all potential avenues.

- Fellowships/Grants/Scholarships
- Teaching and Research Assistantships
- Loans (should be your last resource)
- Professional/community associations

### **Resources for Financing Graduate School**

<http://gradsense.org/gradsense> - Financial Education for Graduate School

<http://www.fastweb.com/> - Scholarships for Undergraduate and Graduate School

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/> - Federal Government, Information on Grants and Loans, Scholarship Search Engine, Financial Literacy Information

## **The Application Process**

Be aware of each school's application process. Do not forget the deadline or leave out a crucial piece of information. **You** are responsible for checking to see that all material has been received by the school.

Application policies vary greatly among institutions and even among departments within the same institutions. Make sure you have obtained the most recent information from schools to which you are applying. The way you present yourself and your achievements should be tailored to each specific program. You may be required to supply the following in order to be considered for admission to a graduate program:

- Completed application
- Official undergraduate transcript(s) from the Registrar's Office
- Personal essay/statement of purpose
- Required entrance examination scores
- Letters of recommendations (minimum 3)
- Application fee (usually \$50.00 to \$75.00)
- Personal interview or audition (if they require one)

### **Application Guidelines**

*Be Neat* - Type everything! No exceptions.

*Think before you write* - Be certain to provide a complete, accurate, and thoughtful response to all of the questions. It is better to include a little too much information than to leave the reader "hanging."

*Review Material before Sending* - Make sure everything is accurate. Especially review the transcript. Make sure there are no errors or omissions.

*Send a photocopy of your standardized test scores* (GRE, etc.). While all schools require an official report, the copy will be useful for the evaluator until the official copy arrives.

### **Statement of Purpose/Graduate School Essay:**

This statement is typically an essay that describes the reasons you have selected to study at the graduate level, in your chosen field. You may need to clarify why you have chosen the particular school / program. It gives you a chance to present yourself in the best light and provides a writing sample. Give yourself plenty of time to work on it. The finished product should be the result of four or five drafts. Do not give a dry recount of your life story in this piece. The statement should take the reader on an "intellectual odyssey" of where you are now, where you have been, and where you want to go in the future. You might want to talk about your specific sub-fields in your discipline, experiences that you have had which relate to your discipline, past research experiences, and why and how you want to research your interests addressed at this particular school. Know strengths of the program, faculty, research interests, and unique facilities; show the reader that you know something about the school. Your statement of purpose and letter of recommendation can be the deciding factor to make your application stand out from the group of equally qualified students who are applying for the same limited number of acceptance slots.

The Springfield College Career Center can review your personal statement and give you advice about content and application strategies. The Springfield College Academic Success Center can provide writing support for all other aspects of the writing process.

## **Tips for Writing a Graduate School Essay** - Graduate Admissions, Springfield College

**Use “Word Count” to determine the length of your essay.** You’re not fooling anyone by using fancy fonts with small print. If a minimum or maximum amount of words is provided, stick to the limit. If you are not sure how long your essay should be, feel free to call the Admissions Office. They will be happy to let you know!

**Use plain fonts and paper.** You may be tempted to use bright colored paper and interesting fonts to stick out. Don’t. This is distracting and takes away from your essay.

**Be an individual.** Admissions personnel read a LOT of essays. What makes you different from the many others who are applying to the same program? Focus on that and you are sure to get some attention!

**Don’t self-promote.** Rather than saying you are smart, savvy, different, a leader, etc., SHOW the committee by giving examples. Tell a story that highlights these attributes. Everyone has a time in their lives when they accomplished something that made them proud. Tell this story!

**When in doubt, tell your “success story.”** Your success story illustrates a time when you struggled with something: a situation, a person or a decision. After a difficult time processing the situation, you decided, planned, and acted in order to prosper. Everyone loves a good underdog (don’t you??), so tell the admissions committee about how you succeeded, despite a difficult situation. This also shows humanity and humility!

**Take the editing process seriously.** While you can use Word Count and Spell Check on your own, don’t forget to have at least one other person read your essay and check for possible errors. A second set of eyes can be infinitely helpful.

**Answer the question.** While some schools let you pick your essay topic, some have very specific requirements. You may end up writing a different essay for every graduate school, but this will be in your best interest, if every school asks for different information.

**Research the school.** Admissions committees love hearing how great their schools are. Really, we love it. We love our places of employment, and we want to hear that you love them too. If you apply to Harvard Law School, make sure that you mention how great Harvard is. Bonus: mention your interest in their mission statement (but be genuine and honest – not over-the-top). You can never go wrong with this tip!

## **Letters of Recommendation:**

Consider these early. The people who will be writing these for you will need advance notice. Sometimes they are required to use a specific form given in the application packet. Usually 3-4 letters are submitted to the school. Think carefully about who you will ask to write your letters. Most of the letters should be from an academic focus. Potential recommenders should be able to:

- 1) Talk about you as a student and your scholarship in your particular area of interest.
- 2) Assess your abilities as they relate to graduate school expectations.
- 3) Have credibility in their field.

Your letters of recommendations should complement your statement of purpose. Do not overwhelm your application with a lot of extra letters; one extra letter may be fine.

## **Tips for Getting the Most out of Your Letter of Recommendation** - provided by Graduate Admissions, Springfield College

### **Who to Ask**

Someone who knows you well as a person (not just as a student)  
Use a variety, if possible  
Advisor      Teacher      Coach      Internship Supervisor

### **When to Ask**

Early! Give a month, if possible

### **What YOU need to provide to your reference**

Statement of Purpose  
Description of program/school to which you are applying  
Current resume  
Current college transcript  
List of accomplishments you want highlighted  
Reference form, if applicable  
Sending instructions, to include an addressed envelope with postage, if applicable  
A recent project you want highlighted

### **Follow Up**

Send thank you letter to reference  
Call school(s) to make sure that letter(s) got there in due time

## **Evaluate the Responses you receive from the Schools:**

If you are accepted to more than one program you will need to prioritize your choices.

If you are rejected, you are encouraged to find out why. This can help you in the reapplication process, or with other applications to be sent. Be respectful and sincere. State your regret in not having been accepted in a professional manner. Be humble in listening to the rationale they offer and don't give excuses or try to explain. Even if the information is difficult to receive it can only help you in making yourself a stronger candidate, whether that's for the next application, your professional field, or elsewhere. Clarify action steps you can take in order to succeed next time. Send a thank you note after speaking with the admissions staff.

Graduate Admissions staffs cite these as the most common reasons candidates are denied admission.

#### **The Candidate:**

Did not have enough experience in a relevant field  
Missed the deadlines for submitting the application, test scores, transcript, or recommendations  
Did not score high enough of the standardized test  
Did not have high enough undergraduate grades  
Did not explain well enough why they were a good fit for the school  
Had typos, misspellings, or grammar problems in the application  
Gave the Admissions Office reason to believe they were not serious about enrolling at the school

Most of the reasons cited are areas that you have direct control over and could improve upon if you should choose to apply again (to this school or any other school) in the future.