

# Applying to Grad School Tip Sheet:

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## Questions to Answer Before Applying to Grad School:

Why am I interested in applying to a graduate program?

What kind of career do I want when I am done?

What is my area of interest and why is it important?

Are the programs that I am interested in funded? (What is the average amount of funding? what is the tuition? If it is not funded, are there scholarships available?)

## Timeline for Applying to Grad School:

**SEPTEMBER:** Start narrowing down the schools and programs that you are interested in applying too. (If required for your program) Apply to take the Graduate Record Examinations (GREs) in October, and start studying.

**Tip:** Take practice exams and focus on areas where you need the most improvement.

**OCTOBER:** Fill in the attached tracking sheet and contact the graduate chair for each program to see if you can have a campus visit and meeting.

**Tip:** Research individual faculty members and their areas of interest to see if there is anyone that would be a good match for your thesis and then contact that faculty member directly. This is a key factor in whether you get in or not.

**NOVEMBER:** Request that your undergraduate transcripts be mailed to the institutions to which you are applying. Contact your favorite professors and ask if they are willing to write you a letter of recommendation.

**Tip:** Send an information packet to the people who write your letters, including your resume, undergraduate transcript and a list of accomplishments. Be sure to follow-up with a sincere thank you, as writing these letters takes a lot of time and effort on their part.

**DECEMBER:** Write your statement of interest and have it reviewed by the writing centre and a faculty member in the same discipline as the program that you are applying too. Finalize and mail or complete on-line application.

**Tip:** Make a backup copy of your application packet. Consider sending it through registered mail.

**JANUARY:** Confirm that your professors sent their recommendation letters and that all elements of your application have been received by your programs of interest.

**MARCH:** Accept and decline offers.

**Tip:** As soon as you have two offers in hand, pick the one that you prefer and immediately decline the other.

## Dos and Don'ts of Applying to Grad School:

**Do** take the time to visit the school you are applying to and connect with faculty and prospective supervisors. Having that face time with a member of the selection committee or a prospective supervisor can go a long way in helping you to get into a program. Many programs will not admit a student unless they already have a faculty member who is willing to supervise his/her research. If you take the time to research who is out there, and connect with him/her about your area of research interest and he/she seems interested in your ideas and approach then you are half-way, at least, to getting in.

**Do** take time before you start the application process to reflect on what you would like to research while in grad school. The most successful applicants are those that have a clear research interest, one that is innovative, or takes a new approach to an old question. You need to know how you want to conduct your research, what resources you intend to use, what the burning question is that you want to address and why it is important. I know it is difficult at this point in time to know the answers to all of this, but the closer you can get the better. Take time to chat with your

current professors and to get their insights on your research. This is also the sort of thing that you can connect with prospective supervisors on. They can direct you to other resources that may be of use to you.

**Do** write a statement of purpose that is personal and well thought out, not cliché or filled with broad sweeping statements and random flattery of the program to which you are applying. Know what your purpose is? Explain who you are, what you want, and why you want it from where you are applying. Follow the department's directions to a tee. Rewrite, give drafts to your family, friends, etc. Make it punchy, personal and free of TYPOS. Oh, and have a positive and direct lead sentence.

**Do** apply early. Programs get flooded with late applicants who are making sudden life changes or who have just received a rejection letter from law school or med school or dentistry or . . .

**Do** give the people writing your letters of recommendation at least 4 weeks' notice. You want them to be thinking of you positively when they write that letter so the more leisurely and the more prepared they are the better the letter will be. If they are rushed at the last minute they may be feeling frustrated and stressed and that will have a negative impact on your recommendation. Too often, admissions committee chairs said, students received unflattering letters because they failed to ask whether the potential recommendation author would write a strongly favorable letter. To help in getting a good letter, be sure to take the time to get to know your professors: Go to drop in hours, have good attendance in class and be an all around engaged and diligent learner.

**Don't** just apply to a whole bunch of programs hoping that one has got to work out. Students need to learn the key details of a program-including faculty research interests and specific courses offered-before they apply. It is better to take the time and identify the programs that are best suited to you, tailor your application to that program and make connections with people there. Take the time to do your research and know who their faculty members are and what they are known for and play to those strengths in your application.

**Don't** hand in an application that is unclear, disorganized or contains spelling or grammatical mistakes. This will give the impression that you are not clear about your purpose or do not take this application seriously.

**Don't** overdo the flattery. A number of admissions committee chairs have cited distaste for applications that include insincere flattery, such as praising the program in an obsequious manner. Other chairs added inappropriate name-dropping or blaming others for a poor academic record as potential kisses of death.

## **GRE Info:**

The GRE changed its format starting August 1, 2011. The test required for entrance into some graduate programs is the general aptitude (Quantitative, Analytical, and Verbal) component of the GRE. The general GRE exam is offered throughout the year on computer. If you are required to provide GRE scores for your program of interest, it is strongly recommended that you take the test by October (at the latest) in order to get test scores to the admissions committee on time. The test may be taken more than once, but only every 60 days. All scores will be reported to admissions committees. Try not to take the test more than twice. It is recommended that you study for the test and take timed practice exams ahead of time. You can buy GRE study guides and old exams at any bookstore. Your GRE score will improve if you take the practice examinations in a timed format mimicking real testing conditions. Order the software/practice tests from ETS to better prepare for the computer administered test. Go to <http://www.ets.org/gre/> to register for the GRE. Also consider taking a GRE Prep course. The Analytical portion of the GRE is in essay format. For the essays, focus on an analytical response, and back up what you are arguing with logic and analysis. You will need to be focused and succinct.

For students in the humanities, the verbal section is very important. For students in the social sciences and psychology, all three sections are important. The GRE is 4.5 hours long, and the grade scale for the Verbal and Quant. sections is 130-170 in 1 point increments. The Analytical writing section grade scale is 0-6 in .5 increments.