

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS:

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It is advisable to apply to 5 or 6 schools, but highly recommended to apply to up to 10 schools. This is a time consuming and meticulous process and significant planning time is required. Your goal in applying to graduate school is to demonstrate what you will contribute to the program and what you hope to gain.

When Should I Apply?

Application deadlines will vary by school, and can also depend on the individual program within the school. Schools with a rolling admissions policy make admissions decisions as application are received. You should submit your application early, allowing yourself time to respond to incomplete information. An early application can also give the admissions committee a chance to consider your application before they are inundated with other applications.

Typical Application Process:

Your application needs to be as professional as possible, do not wait until the last minute to complete your application. Seek out the assistance of a faculty advisor in preparing your application. If you are in the Pre-Health professions, see the Pre-Health advisor. Be sure to read each school's requirements carefully as the requirements may vary from school to school.

The following materials are usually required.

- Graduate School Application
- Department Application
- Non-refundable application fee, usually between \$35-\$75. This may fee may be waived if you meet certain financial criteria. Contact each school directly for more information.
- Official Transcripts
 - For each institution you have attended at the college-level, an official transcript must be sent; even if, you did not graduate from this institution.
- Standardized Exam Scores
 - Check with the schools to which you are applying to identify which exam is required, if any.
- Letters of recommendation, recommendation forms or both
- Statement of purpose or personal statement.
- Other materials may be required by specific programs, such as resume, writing sample, proof of professional licensing or other materials.

Statement of Purpose or Personal Statement:

Most schools will ask for a personal statement describing your interests and future plans. This is a different type of writing, so you should seek advice on it.

A couple resources that can be helpful:

- Donald Asher's Graduate Admissions Essays: What Works, What Doesn't and Why
- Statement of Purpose.com - <http://www.statementofpurpose.com/>
- Seek out faculty assistance
- SLU Writing Center - <http://www.slu.edu/x13305.xml>
- Career Services Staff

The personal statement should not be taken lightly. It is usually the first (and sometimes only) introduction the admissions committee has to you. It indicates your writing ability and expresses your desire to become a professional

in the field to which you are applying. It also provides the committee an opportunity to understand how you think. Some programs only want a short statement, other may request several separate essays about a variety of topics.

Additional Hints:

- If you feel your academic record has some “bumps” in it, use the personal statement to address these, explaining not just why you faltered, but what you have done to improve your grades since then.
- Tailor your essay to each particular school’s philosophy and requirements.
- Be specific about your accomplishments and goals.
- Most importantly, it should be individual and sincere without being full of clichés.
- Don’t attempt to write your personal statement during one sitting. Plan on revising and adjusting it regularly. It should be a “work in progress” that takes a few weeks or an entire summer to prepare.
- It is important to have high quality, mistake free grammar, spelling and presentation.

Common Mistakes Applicants Make:

- Sloppiness
- Writing one general statement for all schools
- Boring content
- Sounding like everyone else
- Being shy
- Writing what you think someone wants to read
- Dwelling on crises
- Appearing unrealistic
- Providing irrelevant information

(Kaplan Get into Graduate School, 2006, pp. 87-89)

Letters of Recommendation:

Most graduate schools require two or three recommendations. Choose references you know well, who can speak to your academic preparation and future goals and/or work experience, will be a positive recommendation for you, and who are familiar with the field or institutions to which you are applying. Make sure at least one reference is a faculty member, more than one is preferable. Some graduate programs will also seek non-academic recommendations, usually from professionals in the field.

Use three well-written and meaningful recommendations rather than a handful of brief “testimonials” from people who don’t know you well. Having a family “connection” may be helpful for setting up an informational interview, but may not be helpful as a recommendation.

Make sure you request letters of recommendation in plenty of time before the deadline, preferably early in the fall semester of your senior year. It might be a good idea to have a couple of back up references in case one of your main references has a last minute emergency, etc. Provide the recommendation form, a stamped envelope, a reminder about the deadline (it is advisable to set this deadline a few weeks earlier than you really want it to arrive at the school), and other pertinent information such as your personal statement and resume. Follow-up is your responsibility, since most graduate schools will not notify you if a piece of your application packet is missing. Refer to the Graduate School Timeline for the appropriate timeline for requesting recommendations.

A Good Process to Request Recommendations:

- Contact the references first to request their assistance. Ask if they have the time and are willing to provide a reference for you. Give them a probable timeline for when you will be making your request and want the recommendation sent in.
- Provide clear instructions, phone number and e-mail.
- Usually each school will provide a recommendation form for each reference to fill out. As a courtesy to your reference, fill out the top portion of the recommendation form and sign the FERPA waiver.
 - FERPA (Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act) Waiver
FERPA provides you the right to see the recommendation written for you by your reference unless you sign the form waiving your right to see this recommendation letter. This is ultimately your decision;

however, many admissions committees view recommendations more seriously and favorably when this right has been waived by the applicant.

- Tell them the program, degree and schools to which you are applying and include the following information.
 - Resume
 - Copy of personal statement
 - Copy of a good paper you submitted in their class
- Provide a specific date by which the information is to be received. It is highly suggested that you send this information to you references **one month prior** to the deadline you want it submitted to the school.
- Provide the reference with a stamped and addressed envelope.
- Follow-up with your references. Call a couple weeks ahead of your deadline to inquire if they have any questions for you.
- After you have received notice of your acceptance and have chosen a program, contact your references, thank them and let them know about your future plans.

Transcripts and Supplementary Materials:

Request your official transcripts from the Registrar, for each school attended, well in advance of deadlines. Some schools may charge a fee for each official transcript you request. For medical and law schools, you will need to submit your transcripts to an application service ([AMCAS](#), [LSDAS](#)) which will coordinate and forward copies of all your application materials to your schools. Supplementary materials should be included only if they support your candidacy. Some schools may require a writing sample, research paper, music tape or art portfolio. Be sure to take time and prepare these materials so they best present your strengths.

As mentioned previously, follow-up with the schools is your responsibility. Err on the side of caution to ensure all your materials arrive on time.

GRADUATE ADMISSION EXAMS:

Most graduate programs require a specific admissions test. The registration deadlines for these tests are well in advance of the actual test dates and some are only given a few times a year. The exceptions to this are the GMAT and general GRE exams which are only offered in a computer adaptive version that can be taken at almost any time. Note: There is usually a limit to how many times you can take the test during a given period of time.

There are many options available when preparing for these standardized exams. Exam preparation courses, materials and computer disks produced by various publishers are all available. Preparing adequately is crucial, since it is often inadvisable to take the tests more than once.

You need to decide what method of preparation will be best suited to your individual habits. If you feel your time management and self-motivation are strong, you may decide a test preparation course is not the most effective way to prepare. If you aren't sure you will be able to set aside the time each week to prepare, or you want additional guidance in some testing areas, then you might want to consider a test preparation course. [Student Educational Services](#), located in the Academic Resources Center, can provide additional information on the tests and review courses offered. The Pre-Law and Pre-professional Health advisors can also provide information and advice.

GRE: (Graduate School Admissions)- www.gre.org

Format: Similar to the SAT, include verbal, math and analytical sections. Some programs require a subject test. (i.e. chemistry, psychology, etc.). A writing assessment was added in October 1999. The general exam is computerized and offered regularly.

Scores: The GRE can be taken more than once; however, you should check with the programs to which you are applying to see what they do with multiple scores. Score reporting is cumulative (all scores during the last 5 years are reported when you request scores to be sent to a school). Scores are good for 5 years.

When: It is advisable that you take the GRE while you are still an undergraduate while your knowledge is still fresh, even if, you are not planning on going immediately to graduate school. The general test is offered regularly, so leave yourself enough time to possibly retake the test if needed. Subject tests are offered in September, November and April.

Preparation Assistance: For assistance with GRE preparation, there are many options such as books from the larger bookstores and on-line resources such as myGRE Tutor <http://www.mygretutor.com/>

LSAT: (Law School Admissions) – www.lsats.org

Format: The three question types are reading, comprehension, analytical reasoning and logical reasoning.

Scores: Score reporting is cumulative. The majority of law schools will average your scores rather than taking the higher score, so it is generally not advisable to take the LSAT more than once. You may consider doing so if you believe extenuating circumstances, such as illness, caused you not to do as well the first time. Scores are good for 3 years.

When: It is ideal to take the LSAT by July or October of your senior year which will put you at an advantage with law schools that begin reviewing applicants in October and mailing acceptance letters by November. Waiting until December of your senior year could put you at a disadvantage as schools may be more lenient in the initial phase of applications, resulting in fewer spaces for those applying later.

MCAT: (Medical School Admissions) - <http://www.aamc.org/start.htm>

Format: You are tested on areas of verbal reasoning, physical sciences, biological sciences and a writing sample.

Scores: Scores reporting is cumulative. Different schools use multiple scores in different ways; it is generally not advisable to take the MACT more than once. You may consider doing so if you believe extenuating circumstances such as illness caused you to not do as well the first time. Scores are good for 3 years.

When: The MCAT is offered in April and August of each year. It is strongly recommended that your take the MCAT in April of your junior year for admission the fall after you graduate. Waiting until August to take the exam can put you at a disadvantage, given the high number of applicants and rolling admission policies.

GMAT: (Graduate Schools of Management) – www.gmac.com

Format: You are tested in the areas of analytical writing, quantitative and verbal.

Scores: Score reporting is cumulative. It is generally not advisable to take the GMAT more than once; some schools will average the scores or adjust the second score. You may consider doing so if you believe extenuating circumstances such as illness, caused you to not do as well the first time. Scores are good for 5 years.

When: Many of the top business schools will require 2-5 years of full-time work experience before applying to their programs. Some people choose to take the test their senior year in college (while they are in academic mode), and some people choose to wait a few years, so the decision is an individual one. The test is computerized and offered regularly and scores are good for 5 years so there is a great deal of flexibility.

INTERVIEWS AND CAMPUS VISITS:

On-campus visits provide insights into programs, the campus and the community. Getting a first hand look is crucial for you top choices and recommended for your second and third tier schools. Make arrangements to talk with faculty and other students when you are there and ask to sit in on the classes. Explore the campus and surrounding area to get a feeling for what life would be like there as a graduate student.

Whether or not an interview is required will vary, as will the purpose and the format of the interview itself. Medical schools, for example, will usually put applicants through several interviews with faculty and may use the interviews as way to narrow down their pools of applicants. Law schools less often require interviews, and in fact may not allow them. For graduate programs, it will vary.

Ask the admissions representatives what part an interview plays in the admissions process. If they say that it does not affect admission, then the interview is solely for your benefit. If the school does not require an interview, then request one. If they do not allow interviews (some will interview by invitation only), arrange for a campus visit to speak with faculty and current students. A good interview can only strengthen your application. You can use this time to demonstrate that your interests, goals and skills are compatible with and will enhance the program.

Preparing for a graduate school interview is much like preparing for a job interview. You need to research as much about the school, the program and its graduates as possible. You should dress professionally, and come prepared with questions of your own for your interviewers. The interview is an excellent opportunity for you to “sell” yourself to the program, particularly if you are not one of the stronger candidates. You will be asked questions about your professional aspirations, your strengths and weaknesses, what you would contribute to the program and various other topics. Participate in mock interview with a Career Services staff member or your faculty advisor to give yourself some practice answering interview questions.

Additional Interview Tips:

- Interview Early.
- Send a brief letter to the department chair and each professor you would like to meet.
- Provide a range of dates you will be in the area.
- Indicate that you will call to finalize plans.
- Give the faculty at least a week to receive and read your letter or e-mail.

Interview Preparation:

- Research the program and the faculty.
- Read articles they have published; this will also help you decide if you would enjoy studying with this faculty.
- Know the professional association associated with this major – This is another method you can use to research.
- Think about the types of questions you may be asked during an interview (below)
- Develop a list of questions
- Be ready to discuss your goals and interests, how the program fits into your plans and what you can contribute to the program.
- Meet with students. If you cannot, ask for names and phone numbers so you can talk with several students.
- Follow up on your interview with a thank you letter. This should be sent immediately after your interview.

Possible Interview Questions from Graduate School Admissions Interview:

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
- Tell me about a weakness.
- Why should we choose you over other qualified candidates?
- What kind of teaching or research experience have you had?
- What interests you about our program?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What is your GPA? Is this a reflection of your best work?
- What have you learned from your courses of study that helped you prepare for this field?
- With what theoretical approaches do you identify?
- How will you contribute to this field?
- Of what professional organizations are you a member?