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 SELECTION WORKSHEET

Determine your “Criteria for Evaluation” which could include Location, Assistantships, Length of Program, Class Size, Class Profile, Internships, Faculty, etc.
List your top criteria and target schools in the grid below and rate for each school against the noted criteria
Suggested ratings:
   + (the program meets this criteria)
   - (does not meet my needs)
   ? (unsure; explore more)

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<th>MY CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION</th>
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## GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION CHECKLIST

| Task                                                                 | 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:  
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<td>If rejected, ask how to might strengthen a future application...this provides concrete feedback</td>
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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.wwu.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](http://www.findamasters.com)
- [www.gradschoolsabroad.com](http://www.gradschoolsabroad.com)
- [www.educationuk.org](http://www.educationuk.org)
- [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)
- [www.marshallscholarship.org/studyuk/](http://www.marshallscholarship.org/studyuk/)
- [www.prospects.ac.uk/search_courses.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/search_courses.htm)
- [http://acrossthepond.com](http://acrossthepond.com)

**RESOURCES**

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

- 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]

Career Services Center

a unit of Academic & Career Development Services

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