

# How to Apply to Graduate School

## Search

Graduate school is a lengthy commitment and the search for a graduate program should be taken seriously.

Some factors to keep in mind:

- Programs Available (including internship or co-op programs)
- Quality of education received (consider accreditation and ranking)
- Reputation and Cost (availability of Financial Aid, assistantships, etc.)
- Admission requirements (especially required work experience for MBA programs)
- Completion requirements (check to see if you're even interested in the courses required for the degree)
- Length of Program

All of these factors can help you select the program most suitable for you. Make sure that when searching for programs the *source* of information is taken into consideration.

You can begin your search at <http://www.gradschools.com>, but you should also talk to your academic advisor, career counselor and professors for greater insight into specific programs for your field.

## Timeline

Applying to Graduate School is an extensive process that should not be rushed. It is recommended to start preparing a *full year in advance* or as early as possible.

A sample timeline:

- **Summer/September** - take any standardized test necessary for the graduate program
- **September/October** - Research financial aid available  
- draft your Personal Statement and ask faculty for letters of recommendation  
- schedule campus visits (ask to sit in on a class)
- **November/December** - arrange to have your official transcripts sent as soon as fall grades have been reported  
- apply for financial aid and check the due dates for all applications
- **December/January** - complete the applications for all programs and mail them
- **February** - fill out the FAFSA and prepare for admissions interviews if necessary

## References

Good candidates for reference writers can either be professors or employers. A letter from a professor shows that faculty is behind you and considers you to be Graduate School material.

A few tips:

- Be courteous and polite to reference writers (allow at least 1 week for them to write it) and remember to thank them for their time.
- Provide a résumé and a draft of your personal statement to the writer showing your qualifications.
- Choose someone who knows you and your accomplishments, and who will write a good and not a neutral reference.
- Letters from employers should include the aptitudes that qualify you for that particular field of study.
- Tell your reference writer where you are applying, the program you are applying to, and your goals both educational and career.

## Standardized Tests

The type of standardized test required depends on the type of Graduate School that you are hoping to get into. Generally:

- GMAT is required for Business programs (*measures basic verbal, mathematical, and analytical writing skills that you have developed over a long period of time in your education and work*)
- GRE is required for Economics (except Applied Economics), Education & Psychology (*tests your knowledge in math, reading comprehension and other general knowledge you have learned in college*)
- LSAT is required for Law School (*tests your reading and verbal reasoning skills*)
- MCAT is required for Medical School (*tests your written, mathematical, and knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine*)

It is typically recommended that the standardized test be taken a semester before applying for grad school. Though it is important to earn a score within the admissible range for your Graduate Program, it is not suggested to take a standardized test more than three times because it may give the wrong impression.

The “Princeton Review for GMAT” (etc.) is the best book we’ve found to study for these tests, because it uses old tests and often comes with a CD of practice exams. More information about the various Standardized Tests and practice tests can be found at <http://kaplan.com/TestPreparation/Graduate/>.

## Personal Statements

This is the time for you to introduce yourself and let the Admissions Committee know why you want to attend Graduate School and why their Graduate School is the perfect fit for you. The goal is to be creative, informative and precise while staying in the boundaries of the questions given.

Some tips on how to write a personal statement:

- Research the program you are applying to and explain how their academic programs will be beneficial to you – *and how other students can benefit from your presence in the classroom.*
- Make sure you fully understand the question being asked and that it has been answered completely.
- There is usually a word limit to the Personal Statement and it is important to stay within that limit.
- Try to show your maturity and dedication to Graduate School: Do **not** talk about your life story or be silly.
- Do talk about specific goals and interests in regards to an academic career.
- Do talk about academic accomplishments that distinguish you from other students. This can include maintaining a fulltime job while attending college, studying abroad, internships and campus involvement.

## A Few Last Tips

- If something on the application is “optional,” such as a résumé that means you should include it.
- Work with your career counselor or the Writing Center to ensure correct spelling and consistent formatting.
- Each application should be specific to each program: one-size-fits-all personal statements don’t work.

*This handout is meant to serve as a guide: check with your specific program for the requirements, deadlines, etc. Additional information can be found at <http://csc.dept.uncg.edu/students/gradschool> & [mybryanmba.com](http://mybryanmba.com)*