

Graduate School ~ Planning Timeline

Finding the right grad program takes planning! Priority number one is that you stay organized. The more energy you invest *now*, the happier you'll be later.

To give yourself enough time, you'll want to start at least a year before you go. It's even better to give yourself two years!

Summer

Define your goals: To find the right program, you need to know what you want to do, specifically. Think about the type of program you are seeking and the kind of research you would like to do.

Ensure eligibility: Students will not be admitted to a graduate program without meeting certain academic requirements. These usually involve a minimum undergraduate GPA (3.0 is common), a related Bachelor's degree or a certain number of undergraduate hours in the field, and the admission exam (GRE for most). Be sure you know what it takes to get in!

Get involved: Join a club. Go to departmental seminars. Read the current literature. Attend local conferences. Sit in on public thesis and dissertation defenses. Talk with current graduate students and faculty in your area. These types of activities will help you learn more about the type of research going on and the expectations placed on graduate students in your field.

Get prepped: Admission exams occur throughout the year. Prep early and make sure you're ready! A practice test is a great place to start — it will help you focus your study time.

Think money: The competition for graduate financial aid is often intense. Research fellowships and assistantships in your field and stay on top of all application deadlines.

Fall

Create your short list: At this point, you want to get a solid idea of where you want to go. Contact each school you're considering and request application materials. Deadlines creep up quickly!

Congratulate yourself: Think about your achievements in the classroom and in your field. Your internship or research project could be the inspiration for a personal statement.

Talk to your professors: Pretty soon, you'll need letters of recommendation. Meet with the people you'll ask to write them. The better they understand you, the more compelling their letters will be!

Meet the graduate faculty: When you enter your grad program, you will need a faculty member to act as your advisor (this role is *not* the same as your undergraduate advisor!). Learn more about the research that is going on in the department and talk with faculty in your area. Find a faculty member that is willing to act as your advisor and think of other faculty that may serve on your committee.

Take your admission exams: The admission exam is an important part of your application. Take the earliest sitting possible. You may be able to take it again if you're not happy with your scores.

Winter

Write away: Your transcripts provide a quantitative evaluation of your strengths. Your personal statement fills in the blanks. Start writing early and edit as much as possible.

Get to work: Most graduate applications are due between January and March. From transcripts and essays to test scores, you'll need to have everything together by then. Applications for assistantships may be due even earlier.

Fill out the FAFSA: To qualify for federal aid you'll fill out the same form for grad school as you did for undergraduate. Get the FAFSA in ASAP after January 1. Keep in mind that all grad students are considered independent for federal aid calculations.

Send your scores: Make sure that your prospective schools receive your complete application (transcripts, test scores, personal statements, recommendation letters, etc.). Keep in mind that you may need to apply with the Graduate College for the University *and* the academic program.

Spring

Compare offers: Keep your eye on your mailbox. Around April, you should start to receive admission offers.

Pick a program: Select which University you plan to attend based on your academic goals, the faculty advisor you will work with, and finances (did you get that assistantship?).

Look into alternatives: If your financial aid doesn't quite cut it, look into alternative loan programs. Remember that each sets its own terms, so compare borrower's terms carefully.

Get ready to go: You're about to start an exciting new part of your educational career. Enjoy it!

Adapted from Petersons.com

<http://www.petersons.com/gradchannel/file.asp?id=910&path=gr.gs.planning&sponsor=1>

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