

GRADUATE STUDIES

7 Tips for Getting into Graduate School

Set yourself apart from other highly-qualified applicants! Here are 7 tips for strengthening your application packet:

1. To prepare for essays and interviews, reflect on your academic and career goals. How do you see yourself making an impact on your profession? On society? Globally? If you intend to pursue a research based degree, do you have a specific problem that you would like to examine? How will a graduate degree help you achieve your goals? The ideas you generate can help you shape an elevator pitch for marketing your abilities to others!
2. Participate in undergraduate research or creative endeavors. Present a scholarly paper or creative project at national/international professional conference. Work with your current mentor to author or co-author a publication in a professional journal or magazine. Document your accomplishments on your LinkedIn profile, and upload examples of your best work.
3. Extend your leadership and community service activities - now. For example, teach, mentor or tutor others – formally or informally. Improve your engagement with underserved or underrepresented groups. If you have an opportunity to study abroad – do it! Once there, try to participate in a volunteer service activity to help others.
4. Establish contact with prospective programs and graduate mentors. Introduce yourself at conferences, call a prospective faculty mentor, ask your mentor to make connections, and arrange to visit other campuses. When you talk with a prospective mentor, tell the person that you are highly interested in their program and when you would expect to begin graduate studies. You will probably be asked about your goals, research experience or creative achievements (depending on your discipline). Learn all you can about their degree requirements, time-to-degree – completion, tuition and fees, funding support, mentoring, facilities, equipment & other resources. Once you decide on a program (or programs), continue the relationship via calls, email or LinkedIn. Students who maintain visibility will garner more attention than those who stay in the background.
5. Contact your campus fellowships office (sometimes called office of prestigious awards.) Ask about possible funding sources for graduate school. Note: The essays you write for fellowship and scholarship applications will help you write better essays when you apply to graduate schools.
6. Develop a compelling personal essay or statement of purpose. Your educational journey is unique - use it to your advantage! Start your essay with a “hook” to grasp your reader’s attention. Then weave a theme throughout your story and build the reader’s interest in you. Write with a passion! The reader must be convinced that you are insightful, candid, reflective and creative. If you are unsure how to begin, find examples on the web or ask to review other graduate students’ essays. Review other’s examples with a critical eye. Determine why the examples they used captured your imagination or left you feeling flat. Once you start writing, share your drafts with others for advice. Write freely and let your ideas evolve!
7. Identify 4-5 faculty members who can serve as reference letter writers. Share your resume or CV. Talk with them about your research interests and intent to apply to graduate school. Ask, "Do you feel that you know my strengths well enough to write a positive letter of reference for me?"

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