Graduate School Application & Preparation

The following recommendations are for applying to *research based* Master's and PhD program. Programs for careers/certificates (Counseling, Teaching) or art (Master's of Fine Arts), may have somewhat different application materials and goals for application essays; however, much of the following still applies.

How to Prepare for a Strong Application to Graduate School:
- Build good relationships with faculty for guidance and future letters of recommendation
- If possible: work with mentor faculty on research (such as through McNair or Biology Dept programs) or apply for a Summer Research Internship at another institution
- Where possible: apply to scholarships, in addition to providing funds that can allow you more time (less work) for applying/preparing for grad school, they also look good on your academic resume (called a Curriculum Vitae (CV))
- Research good fit schools (similar values, interests, alignment with long term goals) and faculty at those institutions who share your research interests (or, in an MFA, similar writing content/values/style)
- Reach out to faculty at these schools who are a good fit and meet with them on zoom/ phone to learn more about their research, program, lab, and school as well as to share your interests and see if there is a connection
  - These meetings, which often function as unofficial interviews (meaning they are not interviews but they give the faculty the same type of information they might seek in an interview), and are <u>one of the best ways</u> to increase the chances of being accepted at a school – if they like you and feel you're a fit for their lab or research, they will champion your admittance
- Prepare drafts of basic application materials 6-9 months in advance of applying and seek feedback on these from faculty (in your field), staff, and student services as appropriate (Writer's Center, Career Center, etc.) – these include: Statement of Academic Purpose, Curriculum Vitae (CV), and sometimes Diversity Statements or Personal Statements, depending on your field, an example of your academic (or creative if MFA) writing such as a research paper (often 10-25 pages in length)
- Request letters of recommendation from 3 faculty at least one month and ideally two months before application deadlines
- When you request letters of recommendation, be sure to provide them a copy of your CV, SOAP, and the list of schools with info on how to submit those letters – ideally, in person ask vs. email
- Transcript (unofficial for many schools, must also have from any community college/other college) – some require official upfront, others only once accepted/attending
- Take free practice GRE test (Math (Quantitative), Verbal, and Writing) and make use of free resources online for preparation - - don't worry as much about this as other parts of the application, especially your research experience, letters of recommendation, and academic writing sample (if applicable); Princeton Review Guide is a helpful tool

- Research and apply to fellowships and assistantships (Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Student Assistant) – these frequently both pay your tuition and set you up with a 20 hour/week job which you are paid an additional stipend for – you can find these both at schools you're applying to and outside (such as Ford Foundation, National Science Foundation)

Typical Graduate School Application Materials Include:
- Statement of Academic Purpose (may also call it an Academic Statement or a Personal Statement)
- And/or possibly: Academic Statement, Personal Statement (can also be different from academic statements, more about your experiences and passion that have led you to pursue the degree), Diversity Statement (about how you'll contribute to the diversity of the program/school and/or understand/are committed to creating inclusive, diverse community)
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Transcripts of all prior colleges (unofficial are usually fine, must look at each school's requirements)
- 2+ Letters of Recommendation
- Possibly: Separate application for assistantship positions due on *or before* the application deadline
- Possibly: Additional application questions or essays
- Possibly: An academic writing sample, usually over 10 pages, in your field

Tools and Tips for Finding Good Fit Graduate Schools
- Use a system for tracking the information for each school (see example spreadsheets/ tracking documents)
- First and foremost, in finding the best experience for you and the increased likelihood of being accepted: find schools with faculty that share your specific research interests (as narrow as both studying lichen in boreal forests or psychological aspects of social media on teens)
- Write out all of your wants/needs and determine which are most critical, examples: shared values (ex. Equity/justice), location (region, urban/rural), cost of living, funding, strong student services, support for communities/identities you belong to
- Include family, partners in your decision making if important to you
- Ask for faculty/mentor's advice on schools, faculty, programs to apply to
- Look at who wrote an article that's exactly on a topic you are most excited about and find out where they work/teach

How to Email Faculty at Potential Graduate Schools

Here's what "Emails to Faculty" are all about and why they are so important:
To have a strong application, you need to have a Faculty Contact in each program to which you are applying. Start by looking at all of the faculty in the programs to which you are applying. Read some of the research that those faculty people have written. Then, compose an email reaching out to the faculty that you think might be good fit mentors letting them know you are interested in their graduate program, ask thoughtful questions about their research and the graduate program, and discuss how their research interests align with yours. Be sure not to ask anything that you can find out for yourself on their website. You should also find out if those faculty members are accepting researchers for the year you are hopeful of joining the program.

If it seems intimidating to write and send such an email - you can get feedback on a potential email from faculty or student services. Making a connection is one of the most crucial steps in your application process. Do not apply to an institution without making a connection with at least one professor. This is slightly less important if you are applying to a program that is for a certification; however, it can only help you by doing so, so it is still recommended.

Timeline for application process:

1. **(Sophomore-Junior Year, or earlier)** Visit faculty office hours, engage in classes, build relationships with faculty (for future letters of rec and mentorship); participate in research projects as an assistant or being mentored in developing your own project, look for paid research opportunities such as McNair, and Summer Research Internships/Opportunities across the country; look for work in research or being a teaching assistant; work to achieve a strong GPA and at least a 3.0; take advantage of all university resources to strengthen your academic skills and give yourself lots of people you can ask for assistance throughout the application process (Writer's Center, Career Center, Tutoring, Academic Coaching, etc.)
2. **(April/May of Junior Year/Year before your graduating year)** Prepare for the GRE if important to you and the schools you're applying to
3. **(June-August)** Research schools and programs that interest you. Decide what criteria are important for you in a school. Consider reputation, curriculum, workload, location, research facilities, admission requirements, funding, etc.
4. **(June-August, or earlier)** Begin drafting Statement of Academic Purpose (SOAP) and Curriculum Vitae so you can get feedback and revise several times before the fall
5. **(September)** Decide where to apply: Finish research schools and programs that interest you. Decide what criteria are important for you in a school. Consider reputation, curriculum, workload, location, research facilities, admission requirements, funding, etc.
6. **(August/Sept)** Take the GRE and subject tests required for admission to the programs and schools you are planning on applying to.
7. **(August-Oct)** Contact faculty at the schools and programs to which you will be applying: familiarize yourself with their research and ask insightful, relevant questions.
8. **(October/ November)** Start application process:

      a. SOAP (Statement of Academic Purpose)

      b. CV

      c. Departmental application and graduate school application (know the deadlines for each application, as graduate school application deadlines are often different from the departmental application deadline).

      d. Order the appropriate number official transcripts per application

      e. Complete fellowship applications

9. **(October/November)** Apply for fellowships. Most fellowship deadlines are in the middle of November

10. **(September - November)** Letters of Recommendation: Talk to your professors early if they will write you a letter of recommendation, no later than 1 month in advance of the deadline. Ask people you know relatively well and provide them with enough information to write a good letter:

      a. Give them a "packet" for each school, at least one month before deadline. Indicate the deadline date.

      b. Ask how he/she likes to be reminded, and then make sure to remind them before the letters are due.

      c. Include a stamped, addressed envelope, if they are to send it independently of you and/or e-mail instructions.

      d. Include the name of the program (Molecular Biology, Medieval History) and degree (Ph.D., MA, MS) and the University.

      e. Include a copy of your personal statement (at least a good draft) and information about your goals, with whom you want to work and what type of research you envision.

      f. Include an unofficial copy of your transcript, noting the classes you have taken from that professor.

      g. Follow up to ask if they've sent it, as the deadline approaches.

11. **(November/December)** Submit Applications

      a. **Follow up with each graduate school AND department** to confirm that you application has been received and is complete before the deadline.

Additional Docs to share: AdviceGrad.School.pdf, Tips on Preparing for and Applying . . . pdf, Building your CV.pptx, Curriculum Vitae UD_Redacted, SOAP Rubric, Timeline for application process