

# GRADUATE SCHOOL



For some professions, a graduate degree is required before you can even begin a career. In other industries, it can help you secure a better position or a higher salary. If you are thinking about continuing your education beyond a baccalaureate degree, this resource guide will help you research programs, submit a competitive application, and be financially prepared for graduate school.

## PRO TIPS FOR YOUR GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Apply only to the graduate schools you really want to go to – consider school rankings but do not focus on them as the only criteria to determine your list of options.
2. Visit the campus of any graduate school you plan to apply. Apply only when you're ready to move forward.
3. Every interaction with the Graduate Admissions Office and Program Directors/Professors counts! First impressions are lasting impressions.
4. Follow directions, be truthful, send complete information that you proof-read, and make sure you addressed everything that was asked of you without making excuses.
5. Ask questions that demonstrate you did your homework and are really interested in the graduate school. Don't ask questions you can easily answer yourself.
6. Write a cover letter with your application that is sent by mail just before (or just after) you submit your application online.
  - a. Paragraph 1: Express your enthusiasm and let them know you have just applied to X program.
  - b. Paragraph 2: Show you did your research and tell them 2-3 unique reasons this program is a great fit for your professional goals (i.e. special programs, faculty research, special concentrations, etc.)
  - c. Paragraph 3: Express your hope to be admitted. Invite them to call you to talk more about your interest in their program.
7. Use good recommenders
  - a. They've known you long enough and well enough
  - b. They don't just check "Superior" for all questions
  - c. They provide credible examples of your strengths and experiences
  - d. They need to be able to talk about an area of growth as well
8. Do not take your entrance exam more than three times, as submitting test scores that often can cause the school's admissions committee to perceive you as desperate, obsessive, or both.
9. Keep your cool no matter what happens. If something goes wrong in the application process (this happens), handle mistakes or technical difficulties with professionalism and helpfulness to resolve the issue.

**“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”**

**NELSON MANDELA**

# 16 MONTH APPLICATION TIMELINE FOR FALL ADMISSION TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

There are so many things to keep track of when applying to graduate school! Follow this schedule to stay organized.

## APRIL/MAY/JUNE

- Take a practice GRE/GMAT/LSAT and see how you score.
- Order your GRE/GMAT/LSAT study materials, create a rigorous study schedule, and/or enroll in a course.
- Consider any other tests you'll need to take, such as subject tests or the TOEFL, and register for them. Order any necessary materials and create a study schedule.
- During the spring, create a list of professors you'll approach for recommendations and set up a meeting with each of them to talk about your interest in graduate school. This will allow the faculty members to get to know you and to anticipate that they will prepare a letter for you in the fall.
- Students applying to medical school should start studying for the MCAT fall of junior year and take the official MCAT exam in spring.

## JULY/AUGUST

- Create a list of schools that interest you at the beginning of this time period, and finalize the list by the end.
- If using hard copies of applications, order them now.
- Begin to research fellowships, assistantships, scholarships and grants. Applying to schools that offer funding to graduate students can be a big part of the decision-making process in the arts and sciences.

## SEPTEMBER

- Continue with your study schedule.
- Request faculty letters of recommendation by the end of the month. Don't forget to provide them with supplemental materials such as your résumé. Be sure to have at least one backup in case someone falls through at the last minute.
- Draft your essay and other responses to short-answer questions.
- Contact the schools that interest you. Speak with current students, alumni and professors. Arrange a campus visit if possible.

## OCTOBER

- Have your undergraduate school send transcripts to the graduate schools of your choice.
- Check in with professors about your recommendations.
- Request feedback from trusted professors and the Bellarmine Writing Center on your essay and short-answers.

## NOVEMBER

- If you haven't taken your GRE/GMAT/LSAT yet, do so now!
- Take any necessary subject tests.
- Submit your applications, keeping a copy for your records.
- Confirm that your recommendations were sent.
- Finalize your essay and short-answers.
- Apply for scholarships, grants and fellowships.

## DECEMBER

- This month is the latest you can take your tests and still be considered for fall admission.
- Most Ph.D. applications are due by the end of December or early January at the latest. Check your application packet for details. Master's applicants may have some more flexibility, but the earlier you apply, the better your chances of getting in, so plan to have all applications in the mail by the holiday season.
- Confirm that your applications were received.

## JANUARY

- Complete the FAFSA online.
- Prepare for and conduct grad school admissions interviews.

## FEBRUARY/MARCH

- The hardest part, in some ways: try to relax as you wait.

## APRIL

- This is the month you will likely receive your letters of acceptance and/or rejection.
- Start contacting the schools to which you've been accepted and consider a visit. If you were rejected from or waitlisted at a school you had your heart set on, contact their admissions department for feedback.

## MAY/JUNE/JULY/AUGUST

- By now you've made a decision as to which school to attend. Woo-hoo!

## AUGUST

- Begin school, and congratulate yourself. The grueling application process is over.

# KEY COMPONENTS OF YOUR APPLICATION

## ENTRANCE EXAMS

GRE tips generally apply to other exams as well

**1. Start general:** You should start studying for your GRE about 9 months before you plan to take the assessment. At this stage, focus on a broad review of all GRE subjects.

**2. Practice:** Be sure you take multiple practice tests. This is the time to get comfortable with the format of the test – time yourself and answer questions in the same sequence you would as the real test. Concentrate on developing specific test taking skills and strategies for the GRE, and perfect them by taking GRE practice exams.

**3. The logistics:** A couple of weeks before the test, start taking care of logistical considerations – arrange for your scores to be sent to the institutions you want to apply to and make sure you know how to get to the testing location. Your preparation should help you know what to expect from the test and give you a sense of how you will perform.

### Free Online Tests

There's no reason not to take advantage of these. Practice makes perfect (or hopefully close to perfect), and if you don't have to open your wallet, all the better. Google "free online GRE tests" to find several different options.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

A personal statement is an essay intended to show who you are as a person, your personal and academic goals, and why you might be a good fit for the program.

### Formatting Your Personal Statement for Graduate School

**Introduction:** Anywhere from a sentence to a paragraph, the introduction creates context for the reader. Generally speaking, it should provide an overview of the topics you'll be discussing. But, depending upon the style of your essay, it could also serve as a dramatic lead-in, setting the stage for a story you'll be telling.

**Body:** The body of personal statement, will likely consist of two to four paragraphs. These paragraphs should be sequenced logically – one should naturally flow from the next – and contain the bulk of the essay's important information. Usually, these paragraphs will begin with a "topic sentence" summarizing the paragraph's content, but again that may not apply if your statement has a more narrative style.

**Conclusion:** Rather than introducing new ideas or supportive arguments, the conclusion is where you tie it all together. Close out your essay by making clear what your argument is and what you want the reader to take away from it.

### Personal Statements Should:

- Answer all the questions asked
- Be honest and confident
- Develop a thesis statement early in the essay and argue it throughout
- Be a coherent and interesting essay with an attention holder first paragraph and 2-4 main ideas
- Have perfect spelling and mechanics
- Demonstrate knowledge about the school/program
- Demonstrate maturity, professionalism, and intellectual readiness for the program

## RÉSUMÉ/CV

**Résumé:** A resume, or résumé, is a concise document typically not longer than one page as the intended reader will not dwell on your document for very long. The goal of a résumé is to make an individual stand out from the competition.

**CV:** A CV (Curriculum Vitæ, which means course of life in Latin) is an in-depth document that can be laid out over two or more pages and it contains a high level of detail about your achievements, a great deal more than just a career biography. The CV covers your education as well as any other accomplishments like publications, awards, honors etc.

### What to include in your CV?

#### Contact Info:

- Contact Info (no photos)

#### Education & Work History:

- Full list of degrees
- Thesis or dissertation information
- Work history (including internships)
- Teaching experience
- Research experience
- Laboratory experience
- Field experience
- Leadership experience
- Related volunteer work

#### Skills:

- Languages
- Software programs and technical skills
- Specialized knowledge (i.e. lab skills)

#### Accomplishments:

- Honors/Awards
- Grants/Scholarships
- Fellowships

#### Other possible sections:

- Publications and Presentations
- Professional Associations/ Memberships
- Study abroad
- Exhibitions
- Professional licenses
- Consulting work
- Professional development

### What about formatting?

- Organize it using topical headings and be considerate in how you lay it out and order it.
- Make sure your CV is clear of any and all grammatical and spelling errors.
- Make sure your font is readable and you are consistent with formatting you decide to use.
- Bring your résumé or CV to the Career Center for review.

## COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why do you want to go here, instead of other schools?
  - What you like best about that program and university
  - How, specifically, that program could support your goals and interests
2. What are your research interests?
  - Your specific topic (This should be fairly narrow!)
  - Your background and experience with that topic (This includes research you've already done, prior coursework, work experience, and similar accomplishments.)
  - Why you're interested in that topic (Did a mentor inspire you? Or did you have a personal experience that led you to this topic? Make it personal!)
3. How will you contribute to our program?
  - The school is also looking for students who could bring something to the table!
  - Your answer could have to do with your diverse personal or academic background, unique skills, driven personality—whatever you see as your strongest asset.
4. What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
  - Draw a connection between the degree you're pursuing, your area of research, and your specific career goals.
  - If you can, anchor your goals in the school or program you're applying to.
  - Point out why your goals are important, not just for you, but for the world, your field, and your community.

**TIPS:** Use [bellarmine.biginterview.com](http://bellarmine.biginterview.com) to practice for your interview. Also, set up a Mock Interview appointment in the Career Center at least a week in advance of your scheduled graduate interview.

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Here are a few things to keep in mind if you want your potential graduate school to be impressed with your letters of recommendation:

### FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS

Before you contact anyone about writing you a letter of recommendation, make sure you understand exactly what the school is looking for and who can best address their questions.

### DON'T PUT OFF ASKING

Once you find the right people for the job, be sure to reach out to them and ask as soon as possible. Some educators may have committed to writing as many as 30 letters of recommendation. Wait too long to ask someone and admissions officials may end up reading a rushed letter that lacks the details they're looking for.

### GIVE SOME REMINDERS

It's a smart idea to have a conversation with your recommender that reminds them why you were a great student or worker. Talk with your faculty about your experience in their class. Remind them of any challenges you overcame, projects you're proud of and supply any information he or she may need to write an effective letter. Taking these steps will prevent your letter from reading like a stranger wrote it.

## SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION

Graduate school admissions officials may never learn about this last tip, but it's pretty essential. After your recommenders have submitted their letters, give them a thank-you card or even a gift. It's a small amount of work on your part in recognition of letters that could help you get into your dream program.

## FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL

One of the many challenges of graduate school is obtaining the funding needed to pay for tuition, fees and living expenses.

## GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

Graduate fellowships are a great way to finance part-or all-of your graduate school education. While you're obligated to pay back loans, plus interest, fellowships offer an opportunity to work in your academic field for pay. Some fellowships even offer financial assistance with no work obligations, only academic ones. An institutional fellowship is awarded by the school itself, while a portable fellowship is issued by the government or an independent organization, and can be applied to any institution.

## GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Professors at colleges and universities not only teach their students, but conduct innovative academic research and write scholarly articles for professional journals. Typically, graduate assistants are hired by each department in order to help these professors with the grunt work. Graduate assistants typically work part-time for a professor in return for full or partial tuition and a stipend. Graduate Assistants often take on many responsibilities such as assisting with research, writing journal articles, teaching, grading and other administrative tasks.

## GRADUATE SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP SEARCH

Given the amount of scholarships that exist, and the lack of a single, comprehensive listing, you'd be wise to start searching for awards as soon as possible (around Oct/Nov). Collect application forms and information. For certain, the Internet has become the fastest and easiest way to access a free scholarship search, but don't underestimate old-fashioned networking.

## TUITION REIMBURSEMENT BENEFITS

If you are already in the workforce, a common way to earn money for graduate school is through tuition reimbursement benefits. In fact, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, 59% of companies offer graduate tuition reimbursement benefits to their employees.

## WORK AT A COLLEGE

After college some graduates might seek work in college admissions offices recruiting potential students and reviewing their applications as admissions counselors. Individuals working for a college or university might discover opportunities to take advantage of free tuition at the university for which they are employed.



[careerdev@bellarmine.edu](mailto:careerdev@bellarmine.edu)

502.272.8151 | [www.bellarmine.edu/careerdev](http://www.bellarmine.edu/careerdev)