

The Dos and Don'ts of Applying to Graduate School

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THREE POINTS I CAN'T EMPHASIZE ENOUGH

- **Do Your Research**

About the different types of graduate degree programs there are out there, who's teaching in them, what the career opportunities associated with them are

- **Ask Questions**

Don't get so focused on what schools want from you that you forget to ask what you want from them - graduate school is a huge investment of time and money so be sure to get the information you need to make an informed choice

- **Budget Your Time**

THE APPLICATION PROCESS IS AN OPPORTUNITY

- **To create a portfolio that reflects your academic and professional background, and any other experience (volunteer work, travel, artistic and/or entrepreneurial endeavors, etc.) that you think makes you a compelling candidate for graduate school**
- **To articulate your professional goals and how pursuing a graduate degree will help you achieve your aspirations**

THINK: YOU, INC.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU APPLY

- **What do you really like to do and excel at, and how can a graduate degree help you do what you want to do?**
- **Are you motivated to pursue graduate work at this time?**
- **Can you afford to go to graduate school?**

SELF-ASSESSMENT: SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU APPLY (cont.)

- **Have you done your research about the programs you plan to apply to?**
- **Have you done your homework about the field you want to get into after you finish your graduate work?**

ASK THE TOUGH QUESTIONS NOW

- Before you devote six months or a year to graduate school and run up student loan debt
- Because graduate school is not in and of itself a career choice but a means to an end
- To clarify your reasons for wanting to go to graduate school

If you can't articulate a compelling reason for wanting to pursue graduate study chances are an admissions committee won't be able to think of a compelling reason to admit you

NUTS AND BOLTS: WHAT THE APPLICATION CONSISTS OF

- **General information**
- **Transcripts**
- **Test scores**
- **Letters of recommendation**
- **Other materials – writing samples, artwork, etc.**
- **Personal statement(s)**
- **Application fee**

GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Only provide e-mail addresses and telephone numbers that you use/check regularly**
- **If your contact information changes during the process, contact the admissions offices of the programs you've applied to and ask that your application be updated**
- **If your name changes, contact the admissions offices of the programs you've applied to and update your materials**
- **Make sure that all the information you provide is legible and accurate**

TRANSCRIPTS

- **Provide transcripts for all the schools you list as having attended**
- **Transcripts must have the official university seal on them**
- **Be aware that there may be fees associated with transcript requests**
- **Some institutions require that transcript requests be submitted in writing, other institutions allow students to stop by the registrar's office and pick them up. Written requests may take additional time to process**

TEST SCORES

- **Depending on the program you're applying to, you may be asked to submit LSAT, MCAT, GRE, and GMAT scores**
- **Do your homework about what tests the schools you're applying to require and what the average scores of admitted students are so you have a goal to aim for**
- **Build in extra time to prepare for the tests, take them, and get them to the schools you're applying**
- **There are fees, in some cases big ones, associated with taking these tests so make sure to budget for them**

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- **Any graduate program worth its salt is going to ask applicants to submit at least two letters of recommendation written by people who can assess your academic work**
- **Consider including a recommendation from an employer but in addition to, not in place of, a recommendation by people in the field**

TIPS ABOUT RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- **Provide your recommenders with a copy of your transcripts, resume, statement of purpose, and any other materials you think will help them write a strong letter for you – even if you know them pretty well**
- **Be respectful of your recommenders time – don't call them at the last minute asking for a letter of recommendation**
- **Ask recommenders who've expressed genuine enthusiasm about you and your work**
- **Thank your recommenders (they don't have to write letters for you) and let them know the outcome of your/their efforts**

OTHER MATERIALS

- **Depending on the program you're applying to you may have to submit additional materials**
- **Make sure to find out what, if any, additional materials are required early on**
- **If additional materials are not required but you feel you've done something that's relevant – publications, exhibitions, etc. – use your judgment. If it relates to the field you want to study then by all means include it**

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- **The statement of purpose is an opportunity for you to strut your stuff, to make a compelling case for why you should be admitted to graduate school**

WHAT ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOU

- **What sparked your strong interest, your passion for going to graduate school?**
- **What experiences do you have – academic, professional, publications, fellowships, prizes, etc. – that demonstrate your preparedness for graduate school?**
- **What do you want to do once you're in the program and what unique perspective do you bring to the table that will enrich the program?**
- **What are your post-graduate school plans? How do you plan to use the excellent training you receive that's going to make you (and the program) look good down the road?**

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- **Be direct (I want to go to graduate school to study this film or that genre of literature or this mathematical theory...)**
- **Be specific (this course, that literary journal, this humanitarian cause, this scientific breakthrough is what inspired me to pursue graduate work)**
- **Accentuate the positive**
- **Tell your story – no one knows it better than you do**

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (cont.)

If you can't make a clear, compelling case for why you want to go to graduate school, chances are an admissions committee will have a hard time making a case for admitting you

A FEW LAST WORDS OF ADVICE

- **Follow the application instructions**
- **Proofread all your materials**
- **Have someone else proofread all your materials**
- **Don't lie on your application**
- **Write your own personal statement/essays**
- **Even after you're accepted to the program of your choice, continue to think carefully about your goals and aspirations and how best to achieve them as they evolve**



Good Luck!