



UC SANTA CRUZ CBSE RESEARCH MENTORING INSTITUTE

Guide to Applying to Graduate School

Selecting a Graduate School

- Begin your research on graduate schools early in your junior year.
- Talk to faculty and professionals in your fields of interest.
- Attend grad fairs and conferences where grad programs will be represented.
- Review graduate school guides, websites, directories and catalogs.

Considerations

- Quality of graduate program, not just the institution.
- Reputation, depth and diversity of faculty in your area of interest/study.
- Availability of faculty
- Student to faculty ratio
- Retention and success rate of students in program
- Job placement assistance and placement rate for graduates
- Program accredited and by whom
- Check program and curriculum to ensure it meets your needs and interests
- Quality of research facilities such as labs and libraries
- School size consistent with your needs
- Admission requirements
- Required admissions tests
- Philosophy of program consistent with your needs
- Degree Requirements: Residency, Total Unit Requirements, Language Requirements, Examinations required, Candidacy Requirements, Dissertation or thesis
- Location & Cost

Graduate School Preparation Time Line

Junior Year: September through December

- Attend Graduate School Fairs
- Talk to Faculty & Advisors
- Review Graduate School Catalogs and Programs
- Determine Admissions Requirements
- Make a tentative list of schools
- Begin collecting ideas for Statement of Purpose

January through March

- Research Schools
- Begin drafting Statement of Purpose
- Preparation course and study for GRE or other required tests

April through August

- Narrow your list of schools
- Revise Statement of Purpose
- If practical, visit schools
- Take the GRE or other required tests EARLY (December tests may still be possible but results may not be available for early deadlines; taking the GRE early gives you time to re-take the test if you don't like your scores)
- Request Letters of Recommendation

Senior Year: September through October

- If you haven't taken required tests, do so NOW
- If you don't have a completed Statement of Purpose, finish it NOW
- If you haven't asked for Letters of Recommendation, do so NOW

November

- Fill out applications and submit; don't wait until the last minute.
- Request transcripts from the Registrar (not all schools require official transcripts with your application, but you should obtain the most current transcripts available). Remember that it can take up to two weeks (and sometimes longer) for official transcripts to be mailed, so plan accordingly

December through January

- Standard deadlines for receipt of Graduate School Admission Application (some schools consider applications as they arrive so early applications may be advantageous)

April 1

- Standard date for Financial Aid Awards

April 1 - 15

- Standard date for notification of admission

April 15

- Date by which Financial Aid must be accepted or rejected

Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose, also known as a Personal Statement, or Statement of Interest, is an extremely important factor in determining your admission to graduate school.

- Expect to write and rewrite your personal statement many times—start writing your first draft several months in advance of the deadline.
- Personal statements range in length from short paragraphs in answer to specific questions to lengthy autobiographies of 5 pages or more; make sure you have read and understood the guidelines for each program to which you are applying.
- In general, most personal statements are 1-2 pages in length, and contain the following:
 1. Your reasons for pursuing graduate school
 2. The area in which you wish to specialize
 3. Your career goals and future plans
 4. Your intellectual interests, talents and special abilities
 5. Your background, experience, preparation and accomplishments
 6. Your fitness for graduate study
 7. Explanations of problems or inconsistencies in your record
 8. Special conditions or circumstances
 9. What has influenced your decision
 10. What led you to apply to *this* particular program? This final point is very important, and can be the watershed in the admissions process; when admissions committees are weighing dozens of very qualified applicants, all of whom have good scores and even similar research interests, the department “match” is often the final determining factor.

Letters of Recommendation for Graduate School

- Admissions committees rely heavily on letters of recommendation to present information about an applicant that cannot be conveyed through test scores and GPA
- Most schools request 2-4 letters of recommendation
- The letters should specifically address your application for graduate school (do not send general character references from family or community members)
- You should ask faculty, mentors or employers who know you and your academic achievements and capabilities well enough to write your letters of recommendation
- You should provide those you ask to write letters with the following:
 - Your Statement of Purpose
 - Relevant background information such as your resume
 - Samples of academic work such as papers, research, etc.
- Don't be afraid to prompt and guide your letter writers: suggest areas of academic performance or special skills you would like them to discuss, and let them know your career and educational goals.

Letters of Recommendation Should Include:

1. How long and in what capacity they have known you
2. Your suitability for graduate school
3. Relevant academic research and/or work experience
4. Special skills relevant to your area of study
5. Your potential to succeed in graduate school and make a contribution to your selected discipline

When Requesting a Letter of Recommendation:

1. Requests should be made in person, when possible.
2. Ask your prospective letter writer whether she/he feels they can write you a strong letter of recommendation; if someone you ask appears ambivalent or reluctant, ask someone else!
3. A good letter takes time, and faculty are usually very busy—**approach recommenders about letters *at least one month* advance.**
4. Indicate a deadline prior to the official one, and politely remind recommenders of the deadline a few days in advance.
5. Provide a stamped, addressed envelope and all appropriate forms.
6. **ALWAYS** send a thank you letter!

Ways to Develop Professional Relationships with Faculty:

- Visit during office hours
- Coursework
- Visit during office hours
- Propose an independent study
- Visit during office hours
- Participate in honors sections
- Visit during office hours
- Internship or volunteer work
- Visit during office hours
- Join relevant student groups
- Visit during office hours
- Teaching or Research Assistant positions
- Did we mention that you should make a habit of visiting your professors during office hours?

Admissions Tests for Graduate School

Various admission tests may be required depending on your discipline and the particular graduate school to which you apply. The most common tests are listed below:

- **GRE** Graduate Record Exam - required for most graduate programs
- **MAT** Miller Analogies Test - required by some psychology and education programs
- **LSAT** Law School Admission Test
- **GMAT** Graduate Management Admission Test
- **MCAT** Medical College Admission Test
- **GSFLT** Graduate School Foreign Language Test
- **DAT** Dental Aptitude Test
- **OAT** Optometry Admission Test
- **PCAT** Pharmacy College Admission Test (not require for CA schools)
- **TOEFL** Test of English as a Foreign Language
- **VCAT** Veterinary College Admission Test

Many companies publish preparation test books and are available at most bookstores. A few of the better known include:

- ARCO: Graduate Record Examination Test
- Barron's: How to Prepare for the GRE
- REA: Graduate Record Examination General Test
- ETS: Practicing to Take the GRE
- Princeton Review: Cracking the GRE

Asher, Donald. Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice (What Works, What Doesn't, and Why). Ten Speed Press, rev. 2012.

Peters, Robert. Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide To Earning A MAster's or Ph.D. Noonday Press, 1997.

Peterson's. Peterson's Guide to Graduate and Professional Programs. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Inc. (published yearly)

Seltzer, Richard. How To Write A Winning Statement For Graduate and Professional School. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's, Inc., 2000.

Please contact our office for more information
and assistance with preparing for graduate admissions:

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www.cbse.ucsc.edu/diversity/rmi