

GRADUATE SCHOOL PREPARATION GUIDE

The decision to attend graduate school deserves careful consideration. You will invest in additional semesters of study and financial resources, so it is important to ensure it's a well-researched, thought-out decision. Some questions to consider include:

- Why do I want to attend graduate school? Am I looking for an on-campus, online, or blended program? Should I attend full-time or part-time? Is the location important; am I willing to relocate?
- What are my short and long-term career goals? How will an advanced degree help me?
- Have I researched my chosen career to determine the optimum timing for graduate school? Would I be better advised to work a few years before pursuing a graduate degree?
- Does my chosen field require an advanced degree? Will it make me more marketable in the future? How will I finance graduate school? What is the time commitment?
- Do I understand the differences and benefits between the graduate degree options in my chosen field?

Websites that can help you with your search for the right program:

- www.gradschools.com
- www.princetonreview.com/grad-school
- www.petersons.com/graduate-schools
- www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools

GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSION EXAMS

Know the various standardized tests and whether your desired program requires one. The four most common entrance exams are listed below. **These are expensive tests to take**, so studying ahead will decrease the need to take it more than once. There are many resources available to assist you in preparing for your test(s). Most major bookstores have a large college and grad school prep section. The organizations that own and operate each test have excellent resources:

TEST	RESOURCES
Graduate Record Examination (GRE)	Educational Testing Service
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)	Graduate Management Admission Council
Law School Admission Test (LSAT)	Law School Admission Council
Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)	Association of American Medical Colleges

Additional resources for graduate school admissions exams practice:

- [GoGrad Study Guides](#)
- [Kaplan Test Prep](#)

PAYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

Grants: FREE MONEY from the state & federal government or the university. Commonly **need-based**.

Scholarships: FREE MONEY. Financial rewards commonly given based on **academic achievement**. Some consider financial need.

Assistantships: Part-time positions working on-campus or in a university department/office. Commonly cover tuition, and some positions also provide a small stipend (paycheck).

Loans: Borrowed money designed to help students pay for post-secondary education and the associated fees, such as tuition, books and supplies, and living expenses.

TIMELINE FOR APPLICATION

May (One full year before you wish to start Graduate School)

- Begin researching graduate schools. Graduate school programs are highly specialized, so it is important to do your research on which program will get you closest to your ultimate career goal.
- Look at the professional experience and research done by faculty in your programs of interest. Make sure faculty at your selected university are researching in your area of interest.
- Make a list of your top ten schools/programs.

June

- Research admission requirements for programs on your list. Many have a minimum acceptable GPA and a minimum graduate admissions test score. Some may give a conditional admission for those with below the minimum GPA or test score.
- Start studying NOW for the graduate admission test if it is required by your programs of interest.
- Often schools will also take into consideration letters of recommendation, personal statements, and an interview. Determine due dates for all pieces of each application.

July

- Contact the colleges/universities of interest to get additional information on the program, the college, and financial aid. Inquire about research, fellowship, or assistantship opportunities.
- Start preparing a résumé with your related experiences and accomplishments. Many programs ask for a résumé as part of the selection process.

August

- Narrow your list to the top five schools/programs. Look for open houses/informational sessions, speak with current students, faculty, and admissions representatives. Visit the campus and sit in on a class to get a feel for the learning environment and campus community firsthand.
- Graduate schools *usually* ask for 3 letters of recommendation. Ask primary faculty members, supervisors, and/or staff advisors. Provide recommenders with a copy of your current résumé and an outline of the graduate programs. **Give them plenty of time** (at least 2 months prior to the deadline) and remember to thank them!

September

- Sign up and pay your fees to take any required graduate admission tests. It takes between 10-15 days for your scores to be sent to your designated graduate programs, and you want colleges to have the test results before they begin reviewing graduate applications.
- Most graduate schools require applicants to write a personal statement or cover letter as part of the application. Draft it out according to the instructions and ask a current faculty member and the Career Center to review it.

October

- Non-refundable application fees typically cost \$50-\$100 per application. Application fees can sometimes be waived by attending a graduate school open house or during fee waiver periods.
- Order official transcripts from all post-secondary institutions. The ISU Office of the Registrar can be reached at 812-237-2020 or ISU-ORR@mail.indstate.edu.

November

- Complete the applications by following the instructions exactly and including every item on the checklist.

Late December/Early January

- Submit all your graduate applications no later than January 15 (unless the deadline is earlier). This helps give you a better chance for assistantships, fellowships, and/or financial aid packages. Many graduate programs send out acceptances as early as March for the fall term.

January/February

- It is always a good idea to have a "Plan B," and explore job opportunities if you do not get admitted to the program of your choice.
- Most graduate programs have an April 15 deadline for accepting or declining their offer of admission.

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT / STATEMENT OF INTENT

Personal statements are a top selection criterion used by admission offices and departments when evaluating applicants for graduate school. It is important to represent yourself in a way that gets the reader's attention. The following are guidelines to get you started. Once you have a draft, make an appointment to have a career coach review your materials and run it by a trusted faculty member in a similar academic field.

What criteria are graduate schools looking for?

- Academic ability, experience, and passion for your chosen area of study
- Character (are you the right fit for their program?), ability to communicate, persistence and dedication (will you stick with the program and finish?)

Important questions to answer in graduate school essays:

- Why do you want to go to graduate school?
- Why do you want to study (have a passion for) the field you have chosen?
- Why THIS school, rather than others?
- How does the program fit into your future goals? How do you want to use this discipline to contribute to the community/world?
- Are you ready for the rigor of graduate-level study?

DO'S AND DON'TS OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS

- DO - Have an opening, compelling introduction that is attention-grabbing
- DO - Provide evidence and examples illustrating who you are, how you have developed, and what matters to you. Show how you are unique and what you will bring to the program; show your personality.
- DO - Discuss intellectual and career goals, mention noteworthy and appealing features attracting you to the program or institution, and ***customize your essay for each application***.
- Do NOT restate your résumé or transcript; avoid writing a laundry list of your personal traits
- Do NOT beg or appear desperate; do not think being qualified will automatically get you in
- Do NOT use clichés, excessive emotion/humor, or unusual language
- Do NOT write what you think they want to hear; be genuine and honest

FOUR-STEP PLAN TO WRITING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Step 1: Brainstorm		Step 3: Write	
• What have I done? ◦ Academic career, extracurricular activities, employment, and accomplishments • What have I learned? ◦ Significant life experiences, failure, or setback from which you learned • How does a graduate degree fit into your intellectual and career goals?		• Start the essay strong; the first impression matters • Keep it engaging and interesting but be careful with humor and excessive emotion • Tailor essays to each school and incorporate the department's mission statement • Never blame, brag, beg, or bore • Remember you are selling yourself	
Step 2: Plan		Step 4: Edit	
• Choose the best experiences for each question/application • Create a brief outline for each essay • Tell stories interestingly, yet professionally • Keep an organized structure		• Ask yourself, "How will this sound to graduate schools?" and "What does it say about the person who wrote it?" • Fulfill length or word count requirements • Get feedback from someone who knows you well, someone who does not know you well, someone in the discipline/industry, and the Writing Center	