Preparing for Graduate School

- Researching and Selecting Programs
- Funding Your Education
- Writing a CV and Personal Statement
- Project Managing the Application
In many fields, earning a graduate degree or certificate is a benefit and competitive advantage. In some, it’s necessary for advancement.

Getting accepted into your preferred program requires research, differentiation, and extreme project management skills.

Here are some tips!
With the amount of time and effort required to apply to attend graduate school—not to mention the cost—it’s crucial to carefully study the many variables to ensure that you choose the right program.

You’ll want to apply to multiple graduate programs to maximize your options, but avoid the scattershot approach. It’s better to concentrate your efforts on a few carefully selected programs. Consider these 10 factors:

- Specialization
- Reputation
- Requirements
- Program Size
- Community
- Faculty
- Resources
- Cost/Funding
- Career Outcomes
- Fit
Researching Programs

SPECIALIZATION

1. Each school and program is strong in specific areas of focus. Do your homework to identify the programs that align best with your interests. Many graduate study concentrations can be completed in a variety of fields and subfields. How much flexibility does each program offer?

REPUTATION

2. You’ll want any program and institution to have an excellent reputation, maximizing the career value of a degree you earn. One way to evaluate reputation is to check with professional associations and other sites such as US News and World Report. It’s also instructive to look at what the program itself emphasizes as differentiators in its marketing and course materials.
Researching Programs

Requirements

1. Carefully review each program structure and number of required courses and seminars, along with their focus. How long does it typically take students to complete the program’s requirements?

Program Size

2. Are you most comfortable attending a program offered at a large or smaller campus? Would you prefer a program with a smaller number of students or a larger group? Are you willing to relocate?
Researching Programs

COMMUNITY/SETTING

Take a look at the on-campus and off-campus communities. Is the on-campus culture—faculty access, social life, etc.—what you’re looking for? Off-campus, does the area have the amenities you want and need? Is it in a city or a small college town?

FACULTY

Your relationship with faculty will be a huge factor in your educational experience. Learn the names, departmental positions and academic credentials of the professors you’d be working with.
Researching Programs

RESOURCES

Research can require significant out-of-pocket costs. Find out about resources available at the institution that can reduce these costs. What kinds of research facilities do they offer? Because research often involves travel, is there a travel stipend?

COSTS/FUNDING

Tuition and fees will be an obvious consideration, but you should also take into account living expenses, which can vary widely by region. What sort of stipends and funding programs are available? What are the work requirements?
As you go through the process of evaluating graduate programs against the above factors and criteria, also take into account your instinct. Which “feel” best? If at all possible, you’ll want to visit each institution, speak to faculty and current students, and contact program alumni —this will provide the best opportunity to ensure that you apply to the programs that fit you and your goals best.

**CAREER OUTCOMES**

- What are the career outcomes for program alumni and how does the program support students and alumni in professional development?

**BEST FIT**

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Whether it's business, law school, medical school, or another profession, all post-graduate education programs share one challenge: Cost.

The good news is there are many options for funding. You'll want to research funding options specific to your needs, qualifications, area of interest, and other factors, but here are four ways to help pay for your post-graduate education.

- Federal Loans
- Scholarships and Grants
- Graduate and Teaching Assistantships
- Research Positions and Grants
Funding Your Education

FEDERAL LOANS

Government-sponsored loans can be an attractive way to help fund graduate or professional schools, with fixed rates and flexible payment terms.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS

There is a wide array of scholarships and grants available through the government, corporations, and private organizations. Qualifications vary from academic merit or income level to special groups such as military veterans, single parents, cultural identities, and many others.

For example, at DePaul, we offer a significant discount on post-graduate coursework for all DePaul degree holders through our “Double Demon” scholarship program.
Funding Your Education

GRADUATE AND TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

Supported by government programs, many institutions waive tuition and offer stipends to help cover living expenses for students taking graduate assistant positions.

RESEARCH POSITIONS AND GRANTS

Some institutions offer grants and other support in return for participation in research programs as an assistant.
Writing a CV and Personal Statement

Your CV and personal statement are important parts of your graduate school application. In the CV you catalog your skills, experiences, and accomplishments.

The personal statement is where you capture in clear, concise and compelling terms why you should be chosen for the program to which you’re applying.

Here are some tips for both!
Writing a Personal Statement

WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Graduate schools often require a written statement—often called a “statement of purpose,” “personal statement” or “letter of intent”—as a part of the application.

Some require fairly specific information. Others are unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of topics. Usually, the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are a distinctive applicant who should be selected.

Make sure everything you include supports the overall purpose of the statement, and remember the audience as you draft it. Your readers are professionals in their field, and they are assessing you for fit, distinctions, self-awareness, and quality in order to make their decision.
# Writing a Personal Statement

## DO'S AND DON'TS

### Some do's

- ✓ Read the instructions carefully. In applications with detailed instructions for the personal statement, not following them can hurt your chances of acceptance.
- ✓ Spend some time reflecting. Think. Jot down some notes. What are your strengths? What makes you special?
- ✓ Be real. Readers can pick up if you're not being authentic. Stay focused on who you are and what you bring to the table.

### And don'ts

- ✗ Don't use the “life story” approach. Stay focused on the program and why you're an excellent candidate for it.
- ✗ Don't use a catalog of achievements. Approaching your personal statement as an exhaustive list of what you have done tells little about you as a person.
- ✗ Don't lecture the reader. The committee knows a lot about the discipline so don’t make unnecessary claims about the field.
Writing a Personal Statement

WHAT TO WRITE IN YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Some programs provide questions or guidance to help you structure your statement. Analyze them. *Answer the prompts fully and thoughtfully.* Usually, graduate and professional schools are interested in the following topics, although the form of the question(s) and answers may vary.

- Your professional and academic purpose in graduate study
- Your area of specialization
- How you’re uniquely prepared and qualified
- Why this program? Why now?
- Tell them who you are as a person!
Writing a Personal Statement

- **Your professional and academic purpose in graduate study**
  This topic should include the big issues and questions you are especially interested in tackling. It also should include how you intend to apply your graduate study in terms of your future career or other professional goals. The purpose portion of your statement is an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge about the program by referring to faculty, curriculum or other program details.

- **Your area of specialization**
  Why are you drawn to this area and how does this program align with your interests and goals? This is an opportunity to demonstrate deep contemporary knowledge of the area of study. Learn about your area of interest in detail so that you are able to state your preferences using area-specific language, and be sure it aligns with the program’s faculty and curriculum.
Writing a Personal Statement

• How you’re uniquely prepared and qualified
  Correlate your academic credentials and your extracurricular experience with program criteria to show how they combine to make you a special candidate. Present yourself as a distinct candidate based on your background, interests, goals, or passions. Many programs value diversity, so this is also a great place to highlight your background or diverse perspectives.

• Why this program? Why now?
  Research the school and describe its special appeal to you. Refer to the school’s curriculum, philosophy/ approach or faculty. Demonstrate that you know what is involved academically, and that your goals align with the details of the program. Also, make it clear why now is the right time for you to begin this study. Your statement should convince the committee that this is your top choice of any program.
Writing a Personal Statement

Tell them who you are as a person!

Remember, your readers know nothing about you. Give them a strong sense of who you are as a person beyond credentials. In many programs, faculty are selecting candidates with whom they will be working closely for three to six years, making this element of your personal statement especially important. Relate your application to personal experience or passion.

One detail: This is an opportunity to demonstrate that you will be an active and generous member of the learning community.
Writing a CV

Resume comes from the French word for “summary.” Curriculum Vitae, often called a CV, means “course of life” in Latin.

A resume presents a concise summary of your background, including job-relevant information such as education and experience, formatted to fit on one page, two at maximum. A CV is more detailed, designed to provide a full history of your academic credentials, so it's typically appropriate to be longer.

- Is a catalog of academic, professional, and personal accomplishments
- Is used when applying for graduate school, fellowships, grants, and positions in academia
- Includes these sections, when appropriate: publications, conferences, papers, exhibitions, presentations, honors and awards, extracurricular and volunteer experience, teaching, research, certifications and licensure, professional associations, languages
- Always begins with education
Because every application should be tailored to each individual program, you'll want to start researching programs as early as you can—a year in advance.

This will allow you enough time to take any required standardized tests (i.e. the GRE), seek informational interviews with faculty and program directors, tour campuses, interview recent alumni or currently enrolled graduate students, and line up effective letters of recommendation.

Many competitive programs have due dates between mid-December and early February (for fall admission).
Preparing Your Application

While some graduate programs require very specific standardized tests or portfolios, almost all programs require these basic parts of the application:

- **Application form (and fee)**
  
  While this part of the application generally involves inputting basic information about your educational background, take your time to make sure your answers are complete.

- **Transcript**

  The transcript provides evidence of your academic record. If there is something anomalous (like withdrawing from a course in one quarter) or if there is a performance issue that you would like the option to explain for the admissions committee, you can sometimes include a brief explanation in your personal statement.
Preparing Your Application

- **Resume or CV**

  Most graduate programs require a curriculum vitae (CV), which is a more robust, almost catalog-like version of a resume. While the CV can be more than one page long, be sure to frontload the most relevant information earlier in the document, knowing the committee might not read beyond two or three pages.

- **Personal Statement (or Statement of Intent)**

  Some programs have a strict list of questions that need to be addressed in the personal statement, and some are more unstructured. Regardless, write the statement to demonstrate your fit for the program (in terms of your academic interests), your ability to succeed in the program and beyond (providing some context for your short-term and long-term professional goals), and your distinctiveness as a candidate.
Preparing Your Application

• *Letters of Recommendation (or list of recommenders)*

When selecting a recommender for graduate school, it's important to think about who knows you well enough to write a compelling letter that provides evidence of your skills and knowledge. Be sure to line up your recommenders well in advance and provide them with your completed resume/CV and personal statement as a way to help them write a supporting letter. Finally, write thank you notes to all your recommenders!
WHAT CAN THE CAREER CENTER DO FOR YOU?

- **Drop-In Career Coaching** (no appointment necessary!)
- **Virtual Appointments** with Career Community Advisors
- **Email Resume Review**
- Access a **Career Library** of 50+ Handouts and Videos
- Search for opportunities on **Handshake**, our careers platform
- Network with Alumni on (ASK) or **Alumni Sharing Knowledge**

[careercenter.depaul.edu]
The DePaul Career Center recently created a library of 50+ handouts and 14 two-minute videos focused on every career readiness topic, ranging from resume basics to exploration to building your brand!

Check it out here: go.depaul.edu/careerlibrary
Thank You!