

Grad School Application Timeline

Graduate school is not something to take lightly. It's a major investment—personally, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and financially. By far, the biggest mistake prospective graduate students make is not doing adequate research and preparation before submitting their applications. You need to give yourself enough time to do your due diligence and get all the information you want and need. **Usually “enough time” is about a year.** This timeline corresponds to a *December application deadline*.

If you follow this timeline, you should be ready to submit your grad school applications in advance of your deadlines. And the bigger the buffer you can give yourself, the better, because you want to have plenty of time to follow up on your materials (whether via an online portal or by phone or email). You'll also have time to resubmit things if something goes awry—not that it will, since you've put a year's worth of time and effort into this process!

12 Months Out (December)	11 Months Out (January)	10 Months Out (February)	9 Months Out (March)	8 Months Out (April)	7 Months Out (May)	6 Months Out (June)	5 Months Out (July)	4 Months Out (August)	3 Months Out (September)	2 Months Out (October)	1 Month Out (November)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online search for graduate programs in intended field of study: <i>LinkedIn, GradSchools.com, etc.</i> Make an alphabetical list of all your options and put them on a spreadsheet. Do some initial research on all the institutions on your list. Eliminate schools that are clearly not a fit. <p>PRO TIP: Try not to let others, or your own, preconceived notions about a given grad school impact your research at this point. Everyone has their own needs, expectations, and experiences; get as much information as possible so you can decide which program is the best for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a closer look at your grad school options. Further expand the spreadsheet you created last month to compare each of the schools on your list. <p>PRO TIP: This is a good time to request information from each institution, which doubles as an opportunity to find out just how responsive or not the graduate admission offices are.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on completing your research spreadsheet. As you go along, eliminate some programs. After reviewing your research, you may find it helpful to do a general rank order of your options. <p>PRO TIP: Don't feel compelled to have a “short list” at this point. You're still months away from applying to grad school, and you will have several opportunities to narrow down your options before then.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start preparing for any graduate standardized tests required by your institutions. Familiarize yourself with logistics and take some practice tests: <i>Peterson's, ETS (scheduling), NoGRE.com, etc.</i> <p>PRO TIP: Study and take practice tests in a similar environment to that of the real exam.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go on some initial campus visits to gain a real perspective of campus culture and climate. Do some additional niche research on your options. You could also read institutional and student-run publications or research how your graduate institutions are ranked against their contemporaries. <p>PRO TIP: Look closely at the methodology behind any grad school rankings; look for trends: e.g., if an institution has been consistently ranked in the top 20.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact a current student or recent graduate from the institutions on your list to get an insider's perspective. You can find them through the LinkedIn Alumni Search feature, or by contacting the graduate admissions office. Do a second evaluation/ranking of your options, considering everything you've learned thus far. <p>PRO TIP: Try to ask every school representative the same questions, so you have consistent information when updating your spreadsheet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go on campus visits if you haven't already or take virtual campus tours. Attend graduate admission information sessions (or open houses or receptions). These may be held on campus or possibly closer to where you live. If an admission interview is required as part of the application process, try to schedule it during your visit. <p>PRO TIP: Evaluate your visits on your spreadsheet as soon as you get home, so your experiences and impressions are fresh in your mind.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Register for any standardized test(s) needed for admission, if you haven't already. Start thinking about whom you will ask to write your letters of recommendation. <p>PRO TIP: If you're not happy with your test scores, you can take them a second or possibly even a third time. This doesn't make you look less competitive in the application process; it often demonstrates that you are trying your best.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's finally time to make your short list! After months of searching, you should have a good idea of where you would like to apply! There is no limit to the number of schools to which you can apply, but you'll likely need no more than 5 or 6 options. Remember that you'll need time to complete each application. Be careful about applying to only one institution, and prepare a backup plan. <p>PRO TIP: Even as you hone in on your final few choices and eliminate options, it's helpful to keep all your research. This way, should you decide to hold off on grad school or if you decide to leave the institution, you won't be starting from scratch when you resume the research process.</p> <p>Contact each school in inquire about Applications Fee Waivers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure you have all required application materials for your intended graduate program(s)—including all necessary deadlines. Come to the CCPD to get your resume reviewed (you will need to submit this). Start your personal statements/application essays and come into the CCPD for review. Ask your recommendation writers. If you are applying to several grad schools, be sure to have more than one or two individuals selected. Remember, they will need time to work on their letters and tailor them to your intended programs; give them all necessary application details, a run-down of your intended program(s), and a copy of your resume. <p>PRO TIP: Make sure you're tracking everything you need for the application process, including deadlines, required materials, recommendation writer(s), admission office contact, decision deadlines, etc.</p> <p>Use an Excel document to keep this information organized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fill out your applications. Work on or complete one application essay each time you work on your graduate applications. Follow up with your recommenders to make sure they're ready to submit their letters/forms and have everything they need. Request transcript(s) from any undergraduate institution(s) you attended. There is typically a small cost. <p>PRO TIP: The Registrar can send transcripts directly to each school if you provide postage and mailing information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fine-tune your applications. Thoroughly proofread your essays. Go over each of the sections of your application to be sure you have accurately and completely answered all questions. Check for mistakes! Prepare your application fees or secure waivers. Enjoy the unique sensations of accomplishment and terror of finally sending everything in!

Grad School Comparison Criteria

You will be the final arbiter of what grad school criteria are most important to you, but this is a good place to start! You'll need to decide what works best for you.

Academics

Program reputation
Research opportunities
Mentoring opportunities

Class formats
School and program accreditation
Length of program (full vs. part time)

Student-faculty ratio
Average class size

Admissions

Application deadlines
Admission requirements: test scores
Admission requirements: GPA

Admission requirements: Interview
Possibility of waitlist

Responsiveness and friendliness of admission staff

Costs

Tuition cost for one year
Total cost for one year

Projected total program cost
Financial aid availability

Application fees
Graduate Assistantships/Fellowships

General

Location/distance from-home if commuting
Number of students at institution/program
Condition of facilities
Housing options

Extracurricular opportunities
Career services/employment placement statistics
Overall school rank/Program rank
Perception during campus visits/admission events

Interaction with current students, alumni and faculty
Usefulness of website/materials/brochures

Based on Donald C. Martin's "Grad School Application Timeline" article.