

UMSL
Division of Student Academic Support Services

Preparing for Graduate School
Top 10 Questions Regarding Graduate School

1. What graduate program(s) do I want to apply to?

- ⦿ If you are unsure of what you want to do, take electives based on areas of interest.
 - This allows you to make a knowledgeable decision and may help you decide what it is that you would like to do.
- ⦿ If you are interested in a particular area of study, talk with your professor to get ideas as to what careers are offered with that degree.
- ⦿ Just because you have a Bachelors Degree in a particular field does not mean you have to go to graduate school for that area as well.
 - You can apply to other programs, but be mindful of prerequisites for admission

2. When should I start thinking about graduate school?

- ⦿ It is never too early to begin looking into graduate programs.
- ⦿ By researching schools early you have a better chance of making sure you meet all of the requirements.
 - Do not wait until your senior year to start looking into programs (by then it may be too late ☹).

3. What should I look at when researching graduate programs?

- ⦿ GPA Requirement (Strive for a 3.0)
- ⦿ Pre-requisites for admission (which may vary by institution).
- ⦿ Location (city/rural)
- ⦿ Population of university
- ⦿ Admissions Tests (Graduate Record Exam-GRE, Law School Admissions Test-LSAT, Medical College Admissions Test-MCAT, etc)
- ⦿ Retention Rate (How many students admitted graduate?)
- ⦿ Program Requirements (thesis?)
- ⦿ Alternative means to paying for school besides loans
- ⦿ Job rate
- ⦿ <http://www.gradschools.com/>
 - Good starting point

4. What is the graduate school application process like?

- ⦿ How many schools should I apply to?
 - As a general rule of thumb, apply to at least 6 schools (two that you are definitely sure you can get in to, two that you are unsure as to whether you will be accepted to, and two that are your “Hale Mary” schools)
 - It’s always nice to have options
- ⦿ There are several applications that you need to fill out for each institution.
 - Graduate School
 - Program (interested in)
 - Assistantships (if offered)

5. What items are typically required to complete a graduate school application?

- ⊙ Personal statement
- ⊙ Resume (if required)
- ⊙ Letters of Reference (2-4)
- ⊙ Application(s) along with a processing fee
- ⊙ Test scores (if needed)

6. How do I write a personal statement?

- ⊙ A personal statement is typically required for admission to graduate school.
- ⊙ This is typically the first impression you give, so it is important that this document is error free.
- ⊙ Topics to include typically vary from institution to institution, so your personal statement should be tailored for each program or position that you are applying for.
- ⊙ Do not use the same personal statement for all applications. This leaves the employer or committee with the impression that you are not a serious applicant.
- ⊙ Be concise and clear in your writing.
- ⊙ Personal Statement Template
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- ⊙ Things typically included (background information, education, anything that makes you stand out that you may or may not have put in your resume).

7. How do I write a resume?

- ⊙ A resume is also the first impression you leave.
- ⊙ It should be concise and appealing to the viewer.
- ⊙ Typically resumes should be limited to one to two pages.
- ⊙ Not necessary to put references unless the application directly specifies. In cases such as this put, "References available upon request."
- ⊙ Resume templates can be found on the Microsoft Office Website at:
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/CT010362222.aspx>
- ⊙ Good to use to get ideas, but do not solely follow the template. This may leave the impression that you are lazy and do not want to put in the extra effort.

8. When should I ask professors to write letters of recommendation?

- ⊙ Ask professors for these at least three months in advance (professors are busy too)
- ⊙ Being an involved student will help your professors get to know you better which will help when getting letters of recommendation for jobs or graduate school.
 - If you only do what is required of you, you may not get a very persuasive letter of recommendation, or may not get one at all.
- ⊙ **Ways to get involved:**
 - Join clubs/organizations within your perspective department.
 - Sign up for independent study/supervised research.
 - Volunteer to participate in studies.
 - Ask professors questions regarding career options or coursework.
 - Attend class
 - When graduate departments are looking for students to admit into their program extracurricular activities (involvement) are considering deciding factors as well.

9. Which graduate school entrance exams should I take?

- ⦿ Find out early whether this is required for admission into a program.
- ⦿ Start studying early (at least 6 months before the exam)
- ⦿ Take the exam your Junior year
 - If you do not get the score you would have liked, this gives you time to retake it before you officially apply to programs.

10. What is graduate school like?

- ⦿ Typically have all courses with the rest of your cohort (year).
 - Have all classes with the same students
- ⦿ Grades primarily consist of projects, tests, and article reviews.
- ⦿ A lot of reading.
 - At times, the reading may seem like too much
 - Skimming and pulling out main ideas helps with this.
 - Study groups help tremendously when studying for tests or doing projects.
 - Although it may seem overwhelming at times, don't give up. The work is doable.
 - If you are struggling, talk with your professors.