

GRADUATE SCHOOL PLANNING

Many deadlines for the fall's entering class are between December and March of your senior year. Check with your programs for specific deadlines and adhere to them. Consider the benefits of gaining a few years of full-time work experience before applying to graduate school. In addition, talk with your faculty as they are experts in their fields of study.



JUNIOR YEAR

- Assess your career goals before considering a graduate program.
- Research graduate school programs through websites, discussions with faculty, career counselors and current graduate students.
- Review curriculum, application materials, required prerequisites and financial aid information online.
- Attend USD's Graduate School Fair offered in the fall semester.
- Narrow your graduate school programs through careful evaluation.
- Prepare and register for graduate admissions tests.



BETWEEN JUNIOR & SENIOR YEAR

- Visit the graduate schools that interest you the most.
- Write your admissions essay.
- Have career counselors, faculty, family members and/or the Writing Center review your essay for content and grammar.
- Research loans, fellowships, assistantships and work study options.



SENIOR YEAR—FALL SEMESTER

- Take the graduate admissions test required by your chosen schools.
- Request letters of recommendation from faculty and employers at least several months before they are due.
- Request official transcripts from the One Stop Student Center.
- Apply on time! Submitting them early is highly recommended.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application as early as October 1.



SENIOR YEAR—SPRING SEMESTER

- Call the graduate schools before the deadlines to verify that all of your application materials have been received.
- Schedule interviews and additional campus visits.
- Select a school that has accepted you and mail a deposit.
- Send thank you notes to those who wrote you letters of recommendation and inform them of your graduate school plans.
- Inform other graduate programs that have accepted you of your decision to attend another graduate school.



GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

Graduate and professional schools typically require essays as part of the application packet required for admission. They use this writing sample to assess your writing skills, background, future interests and why their program is the best fit for you. The essay is a piece of the overall application. In addition to application essays, graduate schools may ask for writing samples, portfolios, diversity statements or other materials specific to that field and program.



TIPS FOR APPLICATION ESSAYS

- Be prepared to write multiple drafts. Graduate essays take time and you should start thinking about them well in advance.
- Stick to the length or word count requirements provided.
- If given a prompt, make sure to thoroughly answer all the questions.
- Do not simply restate your resume; remember your essay will be part of your packet and be alongside your resume.
- Consider creating an outline to brainstorm and organize your thoughts, using the prompt or instructions as a guide.
- The purpose of the first paragraph is just like any other essay – grab the reader’s attention and preview the rest of the content. Reflect on the stories and reasons that lead you to this application and what impact you want to make in your field.
- Have your essay reviewed by a career counselor, a faculty member in your field and the Writing Center.
- Be positive, concise, clear, specific and use a professional tone.



MAJOR GRADUATE ADMISSIONS EXAMS

Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

- Requested by many liberal arts graduate programs.
- www.gre.org
- Some graduate programs also require GRE subject exams.

Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)

- Required by medical-focused programs.
- www.aamc.org

Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)

- Required by management programs.
- www.gmac.com

Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)

- Requested by legal-focused programs.
- www.lsac.org



TIPS FOR PREPARING FOR ADMISSIONS EXAMS

- Speak to a faculty advisor or career counselor about the structure and content of the exams.
- Visit the websites listed to learn how the exam is administered and available resources.
- Consider preparation materials such as books, tutoring or courses.
- Try to take a practice exam to determine your baseline.
- Create a study plan based on your timeline and needs.



TIPS FOR RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- Look at program websites to determine number and type of recommendations needed.
- Do not list a reference before getting confirmation that they are willing to serve as a reference.
- At least two to three months ahead of time reach out to potential references.
- If possible ask references in person first.
- Include your resume/CV and graduate school essay in follow up to the reference.
- It is appropriate to check in with references as the deadline approaches.
- If taking time off between undergraduate and graduate school, make sure to keep in touch with faculty members and ideally get recommendation letters before leaving.

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATIONS



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The statement of purpose, also known as the statement of intent, is most typically used in fields with a research emphasis. Unlike a personal statement, a statement of purpose does not focus on personal stories, extracurricular activities or family background. It instead focuses on the program you are applying to, your academic background, why you have chosen the particular field and why the specific program is a good fit for you.

KEY THINGS TO INCLUDE

- Discuss your interest in the chosen field and how you have arrived at that interest.
- Focus on how your related experience has prepared you for graduate/professional school.
 - Major(s) and minor(s)
 - Research or internship experience
 - Professional development: conferences, publications, poster presentations, independent study, capstone projects
 - Accomplishments and honors
 - Skills: language, laboratory, computer, certifications
- Describe why the program is a good fit. Demonstrate your research on the program.
 - Connect your interest to the research, faculty and department at the chosen institution.
 - Speak to how specific classes in the curriculum fit with your goals.
 - Include how the mission or philosophy of the department, school or institution fit with you.
- Explain how this graduate program will allow you to reach your postgraduate school career goals.



PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is most commonly seen in professional school applications. The personal statement allows candidates to explain their experiences (personal and professional), academics, skills, interests, passions and motivations as it relates to the field of study they are entering. Personal statements tell a story that is supported by specific experiences and examples. A personal statement should be compelling, well-written and unique.

KEY THINGS TO INCLUDE

- Share your background or a personal experience and how it developed your interest in the field.
 - Significant or unique qualities or experiences from your upbringing
 - Traits or characteristics that distinguish you
 - A specific experience or “aha moment”
- Connect your background or personal experience to how it led you to pursue this field of study.
- Discuss related experiences such as extracurricular activities, volunteer work, internships, research, leadership positions and independent studies and how they have confirmed your interest and prepared you for graduate school. Remember to select specific experiences; do not just relist your resume.
- Share future career goals and how this program will prepare you to reach those goals.
- Include why this specific program aligns with your interests and is the best for you.
 - Speak to how specific classes in the curriculum fit with your goals.
 - Include how the mission or philosophy of the department, school or institution fit with you.