

Applying To and Choosing a Graduate School

Applying to Graduate Schools

The Application

Statement of Purpose
Letters of Recommendation
GREs

The Interview/Visit

Meeting with Professors
Meeting with Students
Questions to ask

The Decision

Choosing a School

The Application

Statement of Purpose

- Try and convey your interest in the field you have chosen.
- Tell the reader something about yourself. Put things here that don't fit into the rest of the application.
- Typically this should include a description of at least one research experience.
- Have others read your essay for grammar, substance and style.

The Application

Letters of Recommendation

- Ask all of your potential letter writers in advance (>1 month, if possible) if they are willing to write on your behalf.
- Provide each letter writer with dates/forms/web sites they need in a clear and concise email/folder including a resume/CV and statement of purpose.
- Your letter writers should be persons that know you well and can evaluate your potential for success in grad school (e.g. research or academic advisor).

The Application

Letters of Recommendation (cont.)

- Letters from Professors or Research Scientists that have worked with many students are superior to those from postdocs or graduate students.
- Letters from professors who taught you in a large class and only know you based on your grade are not helpful.
- At least one letter should be from a research mentor.

The Application

GREs

- Required by some graduate schools.
- Try a few practice tests before you take the test.
There are books with practice tests.
- Subject GREs may also be required.

The Interview

Meeting with Professors

- Have a 5-10 minute description of your previous research experience prepared (but not memorized).
- Practice answering questions about your description with a Professor or current Graduate student.
- Think of questions that you might be asked about your project and prepare for them.
- Ask about the Professor's research (if you have a chance). *Listen carefully.* Try and ask questions to show you are listening.
- It is **not necessary** to read all the papers by the Professors in advance!

The Interview

Meeting with Students

- Make sure that you find out about the entire program.
 - Classes
 - Lab choice process
 - Prelims/Qualifying Exams
 - TA requirement/opportunities
 - Thesis Defense
- Ask multiple students the same questions! Every student's experience is different.
- Look for students that have the same interests as yourself. Are they happy?

The Interview

Questions to ask students:

About the program:

- What is the best and worst part of the program?
- Did the lab choice mechanism work for you?
- Are the classes worth while?
- Do you feel that you are well-mentored?

About living in the area:

- Where do you live?
- What is the cost of living?
- Does the stipend cover your expenses?
- How is Health Insurance provided? What is covered?
- What do you do when you aren't in lab?

The Decision

Choosing a school:

- Don't pick a school on the basis of one research project or professor. That professor may not be taking students next year.
- Try and find a school that provides you with many interesting options.
- Pay attention to your feelings. Don't try to be quantitative!
- Make a decision and then wait 24 hours.
- If you still feel good about it 24 hours later then go for it!