



APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

FORMS AND DEADLINES AND ESSAYS, OH MY...

BY ALLYSON BYERS

YOU'VE DECIDED TO ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL, but just thinking about the application process makes your head spin. While the process can be time-consuming and confusing, we show you how to handle it with skill and ease.

THE APPLICATION

First, determine what application materials are needed at each university to which you're applying. Suzanne Depeder, assistant vice president of Graduate and Adult Recruitment and Admission at DePaul University, recommends using a school's website and an admissions counselor as resources. Each school's admission process is slightly different, so be mindful of this when applying.

Many graduate programs have minimum GPA requirements, even for students who haven't been in a classroom in years. "If your GPA wasn't as strong as you would have liked, talk to an admissions counselor about strengthening your application," Suzanne recommends. Work experience won't entirely make up for a poor GPA, but it will give you a needed boost. Vanessa Georg, associate dean of students at the University of Chicago's Graham School of General Studies, says, "Some people are applying with 10 years of work experience, so we'll look more at that and especially the reasons why they're returning to school." Vanessa stresses that a poor grade in an English class 20 years ago won't do irreparable damage to your admissions chances.

ENTRANCE EXAMS

The most common graduate school entrance exam is known as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), and contains quantitative, verbal and written portions. Be sure to verify if it's a requirement for your chosen program, as not all require it.

If you must take this daunting exam, get prepared. Bruce Lindvall, assistant dean for Graduate Studies at Northwestern University's McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science, recommends visiting www.ets.org to learn about the test, find free preparation materials and register. Ali Beheler, a graduate student at DePaul Uni-

versity, spent an hour a day after work for a month and a half going over exam preparation books. She notes that most books include a compact disc containing sample tests, so you're able to measure your progress. Suzanne says, "Once someone takes a refresher course or looks over a preparation book, they realize they'll do just fine."

PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is the part of the application you have the most control over, but it may also be the most difficult. Carrie Brubaker, a graduate student at Northwestern University's McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science in the Biomedical Engineering Department, says, "You need to tailor your essays to each school rather than copy and paste." Gail Zelitzky, a graduate student in DePaul University's School of New Learning, says she was clear on what her objectives were for graduate school, which made the writing process easier. Writing your personal statement is not something that can be done in an afternoon. Give yourself enough time to write and revise your essay multiple times. Both Carrie and Gail recommend having others look over your writing for grammatical errors and clarity. If you feel you need to brush up on your writing skills, Carrie recommends seeing if a community college offers a writing class or seminar.

SUBMITTING MATERIALS

You'll spend a long time completing your application, so make sure you actually turn it in by deadline! Each school's calendar varies, so be aware of this when completing each application. Graduate admission is decentralized at some universities, so you may need to send your materials to your program's department rather than an admissions office. Vanessa recommends planning on having all of your materials into the university at least two weeks before the deadline, because some materials may take longer to be completed than expected.

Applying to graduate school is easier than you think, but it does require time and effort. Start early and stay on top of things to prevent a stress meltdown. ■