



2002–2003 Edition

# Pocket Guide to Graduate School Admissions



*An informative source for tackling medical, law, business, and graduate school admissions*

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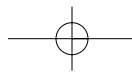
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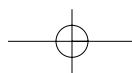
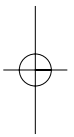
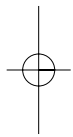
Each year, nearly 500,000 students apply to medical, law, business, and graduate schools. They must choose among hundreds of graduate and professional programs and contend with a wide range of application requirements.

The *Pocket Guide to Graduate School Admissions* will help you navigate through the labyrinth of the application process. Whether your goal is to become a doctor, lawyer, corporate mogul, clinical psychologist, or anything in between, you will find useful advice from insiders who can offer expert tips.

The *Pocket Guide* contains four chapters, each focusing on one of the primary graduate/professional school tracks: medical, law, business, and graduate. The authors of these chapters are experts in their respective fields. Three are serving or have served as deans and admissions directors at their respective institutions, and the fourth has earned three graduate degrees and currently coordinates a master's program in clinical psychology.

Whether you know where you want to go and are looking for advice on how to get there, or you are just exploring your options, this *Pocket Guide* will provide you with a wealth of information to help you with your impending decisions.

Best of luck in your chosen career path!



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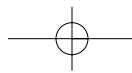
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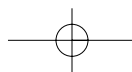
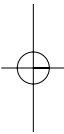


### *Acknowledgment*

This booklet would not have been possible without the expertise, cooperation, and enthusiasm for this project demonstrated by the primary authors. The Princeton Review would like to thank Marie Mookini, Ph.D.; Mark Notestine, Ph.D.; Gloria Rivera, J.D.; and Dawn Terrell, Ph.D. for their support and flexibility through the entire process.

### *The Princeton Review*

# *Introduction*



## Making an Application Schedule

There is an important truth that all applicants to graduate school need to comprehend at the start of the admissions process: It takes a long time to apply to graduate school. Do not underestimate this fact. Most people don't leave themselves sufficient time and end up doing a rush job on their applications. Mailing your tax return on April 15 may work just fine, but mailing your applications right before the deadline is foolish, because it can hurt your chances of getting in, will increase the likelihood that you'll make errors, and you will lose your opportunity to maximize the amount of financial aid for which you are eligible.

Follow this application schedule starting the year before you plan to enter school. This will make the admissions and financial aid process less stressful and more successful for you.

## Admissions and Financial Aid Schedule for Fall Enrollment

### Late Summer

- Right about now you should be deciding that grad school is the right choice for you and thinking about the qualities that you need in a graduate degree program. Do your online research to learn more about the schools you are considering at PrincetonReview.com.
- At this point you should have done some real work in this field in terms of **internships, jobs, research, or assisting professors**. These experiences are not only good fodder for your personal statements but also helpful to ensure that you are making the right decision in going back to school.
- Med school applicants take the MCAT either in April or in August.
- Begin your **personal statement**, also called a statement of purpose or essay. Whatever it's called, it's usually a requirement for grad school applications.
- Start thinking about the appropriate standardized test you have to take and enroll in a **test prep course** now.

### Fall

- Continue your online research by going to PrincetonReview.com and to the schools' own websites.

- Start talking to professionals in your field to learn more about what it's really like to do this type of work and what the long-term opportunities are for you.
- Finalize your choice of target schools. Grad school application fees can be quite expensive; keep this in mind when creating your list.
- We recommend that you **complete your applications online**—figure out which applications are available on PrincetonReview.com and which ones are only on the schools' websites. Either way, it's much faster and easier to complete your applications online than it is to mail away for them and use a typewriter.
- If you are visiting schools and interviewing, make sure to ask about **financial aid** at the same time and meet with financial aid officers.
- Start talking to professors who might **recommend** you; let them know that you are serious about attending graduate school.
- Look into **merit-based grants and fellowships** as possible ways to help finance your education. You can search for these on PrincetonReview.com's Online Financial Center.
- Have someone knowledgeable in your field critique your statement of purpose and then start revising.
- **Graduate, law, and business students should take their standardized tests (if necessary) no later than mid-October.**
- Request **transcripts** from the registrar's office at your college, or have them sent directly to schools.
- Have your **test scores** sent to all the schools to which you're applying. If you're not happy with your scores, register to take the test again.
- Deliver recommendation forms to your recommenders. Make sure they know what they have to do and when they need to do it.
- Start filling out your grad school applications. This will take longer than you think, so allow yourself plenty of time.
- Take note of **financial aid deadlines** at the schools to which you are applying.

- Check in with your recommenders. Make sure they have all the information they need.
- **Print out two copies** of every part of every application for your records.
- **Submit** electronically or mail all the original parts: application forms, essays, transcripts, the works.
- Verify that your recommendations have been sent.
- Calculate your **Expected Family Contribution** using free tools found on PrincetonReview.com's Online Financial Center. This way, you can start figuring out how much money you can expect in financial aid vs. how much money you will need to supply "out of pocket" or get in private loans.

### Winter

- To qualify for financial aid, you will need to fill out the **FAFSA** as soon after January 1 as you can. You can use PrincetonReview.com's free online **FAFSA Worksheet** to help you understand how best to answer every question so that you can get the most money in aid and complete this complicated form correctly the first time.
- For most of you, this is the waiting game. Your applications have been submitted, and this will most likely be the most relaxing time you'll have for the next several years. Enjoy it while you can.

### Spring

- Use PrincetonReview.com's online **Aid Comparison Calculator** to compare aid packages that the schools give you. But be careful—the one with the highest number is not always the best deal for you.
- You might want to look into **appealing the aid package** if the amount of money does not meet your needs.
- Investigate applying for **alternative loans** if the financial aid package still doesn't meet your needs. You can learn more about alternative loans by visiting PrincetonReview.com.
- Get ready for the exciting **challenges** of grad school!

### Need More Help?

For more advice about the graduate school admissions process, visit [www.PrincetonReview.com](http://www.PrincetonReview.com). Here you'll find tips on how to select and apply to graduate schools, complete winning applications, and finance your education.

# *Thinking about Applying to Medical School?*

*by Mark Notestine, Ph.D.  
Assistant Dean and Director of Admissions  
The Ohio State University College of  
Medicine and Public Health*

### *I must have seen them all.*

In more than 12 years as a medical school admissions professional, I am convinced that I have seen every pre-medical advising manual, guidebook, and Internet resource available. By attending dozens of national and regional meetings and special seminars, I have talked with many of the nation's top pre-medical advisors. I have sought the wisdom of a broad spectrum of physicians and scientists. And I have more than enough gray hair to prove that I have sat through literally hundreds of admissions-committee meetings. So when it comes to discussing proper preparation for applying to medical school, I should have all the answers, right? If only it were that simple.

The process of preparing for and applying to medical school is very complex. Getting the “right answers” or appropriate advising can be difficult because of the unique qualifications and characteristics of every potential applicant. Differing expectations of the 126 M.D.-granting and 19 D.O.-granting American institutions further compounds things. Understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all template for applying to medical school, this discussion attempts to provide a general overview of the key variables in the medical school admissions process. I made an effort to focus on the more common elements that every applicant should know, and to provide several unique qualities that admissions deans and directors look for when reviewing candidate applications.

### *The Ideal Candidate*

My contention is that there is no single “ideal” candidate. And it could be argued that there are many different applicant profiles that are, in fact, “ideal” for a competitive medical school application. For the sake of argument (and space), based on a review of the literature, the typical student admitted to an American medical school might possess the following characteristics:

- *A grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or higher*
- *A 10 or higher on all of the MCAT subsections*
- *Outstanding letters of recommendation from individual faculty or the college or university pre-medical committee*
- *Clinical experience*
- *Research experience*

- *Considerable campus or community service*
- *Strong interpersonal communication skills*
- *Clearly defined motivation for pursuing a career in medicine*

Do the previous credentials present a strong, well-rounded applicant? Sure. Is this the “ideal” candidate? Although this candidate presents very solid credentials, I can hear the voice of one of my more hard-to-impress colleagues saying, “Solid, yes. But I would have preferred the student to have also spent some time working with the Pope and have a publishable theory on the cure for cancer!” This slight exaggeration suggests that some faculty members may hold unobtainable expectations. Most physician and scientist faculty, however, are very committed to the student selection process and are simply trying to ensure that applicants are well-rounded, have a demonstrated ability to handle the curriculum, and have a reasonable idea of “what they are getting themselves into.” Let’s take a closer look at some of the broad categories presented in the above example.

### *Academic Preparation*

In the previous example, the successful candidate had a 3.5 grade point average, which is close to the average for most medical schools. However, GPA is not the sole consideration when evaluating the academic record. Medical school admissions deans and directors consider the overall grade point average, but they also spend a considerable amount of time examining student performance in the specific “BCPM” courses (namely biology, chemistry, physics, and math). These are seen as providing additional predictive value for the student’s future medical school performance. While this is not an exact science, one of my former mentors frequently said, “The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.”

Admissions deans and directors also spend considerable time reviewing the student’s typical course load, the number of credit hours completed in the core sciences, and the frequency of “repeated” course work. In addition, they place significant emphasis on grade trends. Logically, the 3.5 GPA mentioned above will be viewed more favorably if the student’s grade trend moves from a comparatively slow start in the freshman year to a strong finish in the upper division junior- and senior-level course work. Some medical school admissions committees will also factor into their analysis equation the perceived quality of

the undergraduate institution attended. While there is not a universally accepted system for “weighting” undergraduate institutions, many medical schools have developed internal systems to “weight” the value of academic grades and course work at different undergraduate institutions.

Most medical schools, however, do not apply a specific weight or value to the student’s choice of undergraduate major. Students applying to medical school can complete the prerequisite course work within the requirements of almost any major. In fact, I frequently hear undergraduate pre-medical advisors counseling students to major in a subject that interests them, making sure, of course, to include all of the required pre-medical courses in their curriculum. I do believe this is sound advice because the undergraduate academic career is supposed to be a well-rounded learning experience. Once students enroll in medical school, the curriculum is largely dictated by the institution (with some elective flexibility) and is necessarily very focused on the biomedical and behavioral sciences. As a former colleague and admissions-committee member once told me, “We don’t teach a lot of Shakespeare in the first year of medical school.”

I do, however, advise students a bit more traditionally than do some of my colleagues. While I believe it is perfectly appropriate to major in a subject area of interest, I strongly encourage students to also take some upper division course work in the biological sciences. I have heard some of my medical school colleagues tell undergraduate students, “Why waste your time on biochemistry as an undergraduate when we teach you that in medical school?” Many programs spend less time teaching biochemistry basics and more time expecting students to be able to integrate and synthesize complex material in a clinically applicable way. Additional depth in the biological sciences can only help. I have dealt with many gifted students with great undergraduate grades, strong MCAT scores, and only the minimum course requirements. Such students have had fairly difficult academic transitions to medical school. But in all my years in medical school admissions, I have never had a single student come into my office and tell me, “I wish I hadn’t taken so much biochemistry as an undergraduate.”

The standard course requirements for most American medical schools include the following:

- *One year of biology*

- *One year of general chemistry*
- *One year of organic chemistry*
- *One year of physics*

While these courses will generally be required at all medical schools, some programs also require a specific set of courses in English, mathematics, and even the behavioral sciences. As a student or even as an advisor, you should familiarize yourself with the specific requirements at medical schools of interest. In addition to required courses, other highly recommended undergraduate courses include physiology, biochemistry, molecular and cellular biology, anatomy, and genetics.

### *The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)*

The Medical College Admission Test is a very important part of the medical school admissions process. Almost every admissions dean or director has uttered the phrase, “We don’t make decisions based just on the ‘numbers.’ We’re looking for well-rounded students with a broad range of academic, clinical, and personal experiences.” This statement is very true. But we also want to fill our classes with students who will be able to handle the rigors of the medical school curriculum, successfully manage the exhaustive battery of standardized tests they will encounter, and pass the three steps of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE).

While the MCAT does not tell the admissions dean or director who will be a good doctor, it does provide some valuable academic insight based on an enormous amount of nationally accumulated data. When counseling unsuccessful applicants with marginal or poor MCAT scores, I often hear the comment, “But the MCAT can’t predict whether or not I’ll be a good doctor.” This is very true. Remember, it was not designed to assess your potential as a physician. But MCAT scores do provide considerable information that is useful in the medical school selection process.

The MCAT is not a foolproof predictor. Some of my favorite students and our finest graduates have performed at a far superior level in the medical school curriculum than I would have projected based on their MCAT scores, and I have dealt with several medical students who performed at the 99th percentile on the MCAT and really struggled with the med school curriculum. It is important to understand that these are individual instances, and the MCAT and its

predictive value are based on large-scale collective data.

How schools look at and utilize repeat MCAT scores varies somewhat by institution. For example, while the Ohio State University committee has access to all prior reported scores, our committee members tend to focus on the most recent exam. We also report the most recent exam scores in determining our class MCAT average. Most schools do not “penalize” a student for repeating the exam a single time; in fact, it is quite common. But many faculty members review multiple score results (three or more) with greater scrutiny, and they also are skeptical when students do not report past MCAT scores. While committee members are generally receptive and understanding if a student did not report scores due to an unscheduled disruption in the exam or an illness, most would not be as receptive if a student did not release prior scores simply to maximize the final reported score or to conceal a lower exam score.

### *Letters of Recommendation*

The requirements for letters of recommendation vary by institution. Generally, medical schools will require either a “committee recommendation” from the undergraduate institution or a specified number of letters from individual faculty members. Many schools also encourage a letter from a physician or another healthcare professional who is familiar with the student’s clinical experiences. This type of letter can be beneficial to committee members in assessing the applicant’s commitment, compassion, and interpersonal and communication skills.

How many letters of recommendation are enough? Some schools ask students to submit only the required number of recommendations, while others allow greater flexibility. There is definitely a point of diminishing return (27 letters from different physicians who don’t really know the applicant, using phrases such as “the student is well groomed” really aren’t very helpful!). However, there is no universal limit that applies to all medical schools. Applicants should only submit more than the required number of recommendations if the additional letters are from individuals who know the applicant well and can offer unique insight about the student that is not covered in the other letters of recommendation.

### *Clinical Experiences*

I often tell my admissions-committee faculty members, “Once you are convinced that the student is academically well prepared to complete the

medical school curriculum (based on an analysis of grades, MCAT scores, and faculty letters of recommendation), your job is easy—just pick the best doctors.” Many committee members feel that the less quantifiable variables, such as interpersonal and communication skills, clinical experience, research experience, and community service, are as important, if not more important, as the more readily quantifiable academic characteristics. In evaluating a student’s clinical experiences, faculty attempt to explore the student’s career motivation and knowledge of physician/patient relationships, and to learn about the student’s interpersonal and behavioral characteristics in these settings. Relevant types of clinical experiences might include volunteering in a hospital or medical office, shadowing physicians in various medical settings, or participating in other medically related activities. Some students will also have had the opportunity to work in paid positions in medical settings. Many non-traditional students may have extensive clinical experiences as nurses, EMTs, or other health-related professionals. My personal preference is for students to have been involved in quality longitudinal experiences involving both physician and patient contact as opposed to many one-time, short-term experiences.

### *Research*

It is important for medical school applicants to demonstrate a reasonable knowledge of the role and importance of research. Most students applying to medical school have at least had introductory academic research experience. At a large comprehensive medical complex like Ohio State, many undergraduate students bring significant research experience to the application process, such as undergraduate summer research programs or other related fellowships. While research is not generally a stated requirement (unless the student is applying to a combined M.D./Ph.D. program, for example), it can serve as a significant bonus to the student’s application. Many admissions-committee members are involved in basic science or clinical research. If a student can discuss his or her research experiences in an articulate way during the interview, then that student can make a natural connection in the interview setting. It is important that students be honest and not “overstate” their experiences, since this usually becomes apparent during the interview.

### *Service*

Most medical school admissions committees also feel it is important for students to have an extended record of service, leadership, and extracurricular

activities. These activities include organizational involvement and leadership in programs such as Habitat for Humanity, student government, fraternities and sororities, and varsity and intramural athletics. These activities often demonstrate not only a sense of altruism, but also time management and organizational skills. The ability to handle multiple activities and responsibilities, in addition to meeting the necessary academic criteria, demonstrates the ability to successfully multi-task. This is an important characteristic of successful, happy medical students.

### *The Application Process*

While there may be exceptions to the rule (particularly as they relate to repeat applicants), it is generally a good idea for students to submit their American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) or American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS) applications early. While I have never been convinced of the need to have an overnight camp-out at the post office to submit your application by 8 a.m. on June 1, submitting your completed application early does increase its potential for exposure to the medical school admissions committee. Make sure to take the time to complete your application thoroughly, confirming that all responses are accurate. Admissions committees tend to have a negative view of a poorly prepared application or an application that contains a great deal of “corrected” information.

While much of the information on the primary application is demographic or academic in nature, the AMCAS personal statement provides the opportunity for students to express their thoughts in a unique way. There is no single correct way to complete the personal statement section of the application. I recommend putting the space to good use by providing information you deem unique or useful in the evaluation of your application. In my view, the personal statement is a positive opportunity, not a penalty. Yet completing the personal statement seems to be a point of consternation for many students. I have had numerous students tell me, “I would have sent my application in weeks ago, but I’m still working on my personal statement.” My general response is, “Go home, finish your personal statement, and get your application in the mail.” Yes, the personal statement can be an important piece in the consideration of your application. But it is rarely a “matter of life and death” in the deliberation of your application. (Of course, I have seen a few exceptions to this rule!) Most students opt for a fairly conservative approach, discussing why they have

chosen medicine as a career or detailing an event that lead to this decision. I have seen a number of very creative approaches, which I applaud since I review thousands of personal statements each year. Such approaches have evoked everything from tears to laughter—and sometimes both. In my opinion, it is okay to use drama or humor in your personal statement as long as you do it well. I have also seen some unconventional responses, including everything from Haiku poetry to text in extremely small type, that have left a less favorable impression on my already bespectacled reviewing-committee members.

Once the admissions committee has reviewed the student’s primary application, secondary application, letters of recommendation, and any other required documentation, the applicant’s file is considered complete. At this point the applicant is generally considered for an interview. The interview process varies considerably by institution, with formats ranging from one-on-one interviews with faculty to group or panel interviews. In addition, some schools will utilize current medical students as part of the selection process. The interview provides the admissions-committee members the opportunity to meet with and talk to the candidate face to face. It is an opportunity not only to “fill in the blanks” concerning any information that was unclear or not included in the written application, but also to assess a student’s interpersonal and communication skills. The format of the medical school interview varies greatly and so do individual interviewers. I have heard countless “horror stories” about inappropriate faculty questions, stressful scenarios, and uncomfortable student experiences. Most medical schools, however, conduct interview training sessions to ensure that the faculty understand the goals and objectives of the process, and what is and is not appropriate in the interview setting. I tell my committee members that regardless of the decision outcome, every candidate should have a fair and professional interview experience on our campus. The interview is a great way to get to know each applicant better, and it enables us to make a good match between the student and the medical school.

While each institution approaches the selection process in a unique way, once the interview has been completed, the committee has generally collected all of the necessary information to make the admission decision. Admissions committees handle the decision-making and notification processes in different ways. Students and advisors should feel free to contact the admissions staff at specific medical schools of interest to inquire about their particular process.

## Summary

Hopefully the preceding tutorial provided not only an overview of the general requirements of the medical school application, but also some more specific insights on how applicant credentials are viewed by medical school deans and directors. It should be clear that there is no universally “ideal” candidate and that medical schools differ greatly in how they approach the admissions and selection processes. But there are also some clearly identified requirements, qualities, and characteristics that are found in strong medical school candidates.

This information was also directed more at the traditional pre-medical student than at the nontraditional applicant. This does not mean the nontraditional student is considered any less competitive an applicant to medical school. In fact, many medical schools view nontraditional candidates, and candidates with special qualifications, as providing the added benefits of maturity, life experience, and diversity to their entering classes. Many qualified non-traditional students and students making re-application are admitted to medical school each year. However, these students generally have very specific advising needs that are beyond the scope of this article.

## About the Author

Mark A. Notestine, Ph.D., is the Assistant Dean and Director of Admissions at The Ohio State University College of Medicine and Public Health. He is also a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Division of Health Behavior and Health Promotion, with an emphasis in Social Marketing. Although his wife might contend differently, he doesn't pretend to have the “right answer” for every situation, but he has worked toward that goal in thousands of individual student-counseling opportunities.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. When is the best time to take the MCAT?

Take the MCAT when you are best prepared to be successful. Sounds rather obvious, but I mean to convey that there is no universal right time for all students. Many sound sources suggest the optimal time to take the MCAT is as soon as you have completed the prerequisite coursework (for some students this may be the end of the sophomore year; for most it will be by the end of the junior year). My experience suggests that most traditional students choose to complete the MCAT in April of their junior year. However, in some cases, if the student has not completed the prerequisite course work or is taking an intensive summer course sequence to complete the requirements, it is advisable to wait until the August MCAT. While this may be late in the application cycle at a select few medical schools, most are still able to give your application appropriate review, especially if you do well on the exam!

## 2. What can I do early in college to put a professor in a position to write a good letter of recommendation?

It is important to get to know the faculty member beyond the point of regular classroom interaction. With little interaction, the faculty member can write the letter based only on limited available information. From the perspective of the admissions officer, it isn't terribly helpful to get a letter of recommendation

consisting of two generally supportive sentences, followed by your performance rank in the class. It is helpful, however, to get letters from faculty who are familiar with you as a student and your academic abilities, career goals, and aspirations. Take the time and the initiative to get to know your faculty. When I am asked (in my faculty capacity) to write letters of recommendation, I agree to write the letter only if I really know the student. Even then, I require the student to schedule an appointment and visit with me personally, so that I can also ask questions to supplement any written materials that the student has provided, such as transcripts or a résumé.

### ***3. Do admissions officers become more selective as time passes within an admission cycle?***

The use of the words “more selective” is subject to interpretation. Admissions officers use many criteria when making interview decisions. Academic variables, such as GPA, BCPM (biology, chemistry, physics, and math), grade trends, and test scores, tend to be weighted very heavily in the pre-interview analysis. Accordingly, students with unusually strong academic records and test scores tend to be invited to interview earlier in the process than are those with less outstanding credentials. In this sense, admissions officers are more selective from the academic perspective earlier in the process. I believe admissions officers become more selective in terms of evaluating broader experiential credentials as the process unfolds. They are still attempting to confirm the student’s ability to successfully complete the academic curriculum if selected, while placing increased emphasis on other equally important variables such as clinical experience, research, leadership, and service.

### ***4. To how many schools should I consider applying?***

This depends on several variables, including your academic record, application costs and personal resources, and state of residence (especially if you are a resident of California). I advise students to “do their homework” and apply to schools that they would really be interested in attending and schools at which they would appear to be reasonably competitive academically. Despite a steady national applicant pool, admission to medical school is still very competitive. As a rule, most students’ best chance of admission (in terms of being given some evaluative priority) is at their home state public or private schools. In Ohio, for example, there are five publicly assisted M.D. programs, one “private” M.D. program, and one publicly assisted D.O. program. All of the publicly assisted programs accept primarily Ohio residents (although most will take

between 10 percent and 20 percent of their class from states other than Ohio), and even the private program takes the majority of its students from Ohio. Many students may also choose to consider out-of-state private institutions, where residency may not be a significant selection variable or where programs meet a unique interest. Out-of-state public institutions are generally very difficult to get into for nonresident students, except for those students who have truly exceptional academic characteristics.

### ***5. Is contacting a school before applying viewed as a good thing?***

Within reason, contacting a school before applying is perfectly acceptable. One of the many defined roles of a medical school applicant is as a consumer. As such, many students choose to visit one or more medical school campuses prior to applying. Most make these visits in the summer after their sophomore or junior years; others, shortly after submitting their application. It is also possible to visit many campuses by visiting their websites or by requesting written literature about the program. At Ohio State, for example, we welcome student visitation and schedule counseling sessions for students. Because the number of students who take advantage of this option is large and the number of professional staff available to meet with the students is small, we do try to schedule these visits between April (when the interview process concludes) and August (when the new students enter). While visiting the campus and talking with school representatives is appropriate, it is not considered appropriate to ask the medical school admissions officers to assist you in the preparation of your application.

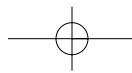
### ***6. What is the quickest way for a good potential medical student to become a bad applicant?***

There are many ways for a student who appears to have competitive credentials to become a bad (unsuccessful) applicant. Two major points include poor application preparation and a bad interview. Suffice it to say that until you are invited to interview, your application is your presentation to the admissions committee. If an application is poorly prepared, contains numerous errors (either grammatical or factual), or is incomplete, it reflects very poorly on the student. Likewise, an incomplete secondary application or one that shows minimal effort or knowledge of the institution can be a major turn-off to admissions officers.

Once invited to visit the medical school, you can go from a qualified candidate to an unsuccessful applicant with a bad interview. Almost every single interview day (and I personally sit through nearly 50 each year), I see students with competitive academic characteristics either interview themselves out of a seat in the class or into a lower position on the alternate list. A bad interview can consist of everything from interpersonal issues (poor eye contact, condescending attitude to the interviewer or admissions staff, etc.) to concern about career exposure (the inability to craft responses in a coherent fashion or to clearly articulate motivation for a career in medicine). Case in point, during one very painfully frustrating interview, I finally asked a student, “So tell me again, why is it you want to go into medicine?” The student responded (while looking straight into his tie), “Ummmm, money I guess, and prestige?” This was not an award-winning response from my perspective. But it did bring the interview to a natural point of closure.

# *Thinking about Applying to Law School?*

*by Gloria Rivera, J.D.  
Former Assistant Dean of Admissions  
St. John's University School of Law*



### *Applying to law school is a daunting task; do not let anyone tell you otherwise.*

However, there are tried and true ways to make successful application easier. I will begin with the basics: the numbers (undergraduate grades and LSAT scores). Then I will outline the application process, from selecting the law schools to which you will apply to choosing which school you will attend. Here, we will begin the process of finding the right law school for you!

#### *Academic Record*

A major consideration in the admissions process is the undergraduate transcript. Please note that I did not simply say the undergraduate grade point average (GPA). Although that number is significant, admissions committees are more concerned with whether you challenged yourself academically, as indicated by the courses you selected and the trend in your performance. For those who can still affect their GPAs, be mindful that an upward trend, excellent performance in your major, and a strong finish will be significant to admissions committees. Also be mindful that taking a series of introductory courses in which you receive A's will be less impressive than a series of upper-division courses in several disciplines in which you earn B's and B+'s.

Just about any undergraduate major is suitable for law school. If you have yet to select your major, select something you enjoy a great deal because you will be more likely to perform at your academic best. While many applicants think that a pre-law or law-related major is the best to pursue, I disagree. Admissions committees generally prefer to see a major in a specific discipline such as government or computer science rather than a catch-all major. Of course, a major in criminal justice and paralegal studies with excellent transcripts will also be well received.

If you have already completed your undergraduate degree and have a less-than-stellar record, don't despair. If you received your degree more than five years ago, admissions committees will probably be more interested in what you have done in the years since college than in your GPA. A graduate degree or significant employment experiences will help compensate for a low GPA.

If your GPA is below 2.7, you should consider pursuing some additional undergraduate course work, no matter how long ago you received your undergraduate degree. The service that reports your numerical credentials to

law schools, the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), will not include grades received after the undergraduate degree is conferred in its calculations. However, you can bring later undergraduate course work to the attention of admissions committees and, in essence, say to them, "That was then (when I was an undergraduate), and this is now."

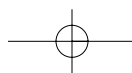
In particular, I recommend taking two senior-level courses in each of two consecutive semesters in English, history, or philosophy. While any major is suitable as a precursor to law school, provided you have taken at least one course that required a lengthy research paper, these three disciplines are generally thought to be the most demanding among the humanities. You must then be sure that you earn A's in each of the four courses (not B+'s or even A-'s, but A's!).

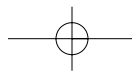
#### *The Law School Admission Test (LSAT)*

In preparing for the LSAT, the most important thing to do is to practice. Since preparing for the LSAT requires significant discipline and focus, a review course can be very helpful. I have seen many individuals dramatically improve upon a (frankly) awful score after taking a review course.

At the very least, you should buy or borrow old examinations, take them under simulated conditions, and carefully review your performance on them. The amount of time you should spend preparing depends to a certain degree on your state of mind with regard to the LSAT. If the thought of taking the LSAT has absolutely no impact on your cardiovascular system (honestly), then you should probably take four or five exams. If, on the other hand, the mere thought makes your heart race, makes your palms sweat, and gives you an almost uncontrollable urge to run and hide under your bed, then you should take up to 15. To mimic testing conditions, you should take the old exams within the allotted time, without interruptions of any kind since the idea is to simulate, as closely as possible, the experience of taking the actual examination.

If you have any unusual circumstances on the day of the examination, stay home no matter how much money you spent for that administration or how desperately you want to begin law school the following term. Utilize good judgment. I could not begin to enumerate the applicants with awful LSAT scores who have tried to explain away those scores with explanations ranging from a 102-degree, flu-related temperature to a sleepless night spent in a hospital emergency room keeping vigil over a nearly fatally wounded sibling.





While I have believed most (though certainly not all) such accounts, they only further jeopardize a candidate's admittance. The decision to take this important test under such conditions calls into question the candidate's judgment. That is a red flag that you do not want to send up to me or to any other member of an admissions committee. You see, most of us are lawyers ourselves who are chagrined by all the lawyers with bad judgment who are out in the world already; we do not want to graduate any more.

Similarly, you should not take your chances to "see how you do," because everyone that matters (the members of the relevant admissions committees) will also "see how you do." You do not have the prerogative to choose which score(s) to send to your desired schools; all of your scores will be sent.

### *How to Decide Where to Apply*

So, now that the numbers are out of the way, let us talk about the actual applications. First, notice that I wrote "applications" and not "application." In my opinion, you should apply to more than one school. Those who are sure that there is only one school they are willing to attend are the only exception to this statement. To those individuals, a few words of caution: You may have to choose another career. Why box yourself in? Why not explore a few possibilities and thereby more reasonably assure admittance into at least one law school? I suggest that you apply to five or six schools, unless you are applying to schools in more than two cities, in which case you should apply to about three schools per city. If you see the cost of applying to multiple schools as an impediment, you should be aware that the LSDAS and every law school offer a certain number of fee waivers. Avail yourself of these by applying for them at least five months before your first application deadline.

How do you choose the schools to which you will apply? Do not leave your preferences behind, but be realistic. While I do not want to burst anyone's bubble, the vast majority of persons with LSATs in the 60th percentile with GPAs of 2.7 will not be admitted to Yale Law School. If this is your profile, you could include Yale in your list of schools, but the balance of the schools probably should not be national schools.

Think about the locale(s) in which you would like to study law. Going to school where you plan to practice is helpful because you can start making contacts and building relationships in that area. However, it is not necessary. As long as alumni of a school are practicing in locales of interest to you, that school can be on your list. The main question for you at this point is: Where do you want

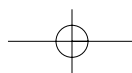
to (or have to) spend the next three or four years?

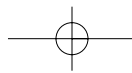
Once you have answered that question, you should do some research. You can use the many reference books available to obtain raw information that will enable you to formulate the questions that are of importance to you. Having such complete information will enable you to make appropriate comparisons.

Two key pieces of information you can find in these books are the schools' median LSAT score and their median GPA. (You can also request this information from the relevant admissions offices.) You should use these numbers to select the schools in the locale(s) you have chosen. Your "safety school(s)," the one(s) that you can be almost certain will admit you, should be fairly easy to determine. These are schools with LSAT medians more than five raw points below yours and with GPA medians one-half of a point or more below yours. For example, if you had an LSAT score of 157 and a GPA of 3.25, a school with medians of 151 and 2.75 would be a "safety school" for you. Your "high-probability schools" would be those with median LSAT scores of no more than five raw points below or four raw points above your score, and with GPA medians of no more than one-half of a point below or two-tenths of a point above your GPA. The "reach school" is the one with an LSAT median of more than five raw points above yours and a GPA of more than one-half of a point above yours. If the example above describes you, a school with medians of 164 and 3.8 would be a "reach school" for you.

I recommend a 2:3:1 (safety: high-probability: reach) ratio with regard to these categories. For many of you, your statistics will not fit neatly into these categories. If that is the case, do not disregard the medians, but also refer to the ranges of LSATs and GPAs in recent classes for further guidance. If you are still in doubt, contact the respective admissions offices. There are also law school fairs at colleges and cities throughout the country, principally during the fall, that you can attend to gather such information.

When selecting a reach school, try to select one with which you have some tie-in that you can emphasize on your application. If you have a healthcare background, for example, apply to the school that has a well-developed and well-known selection of courses in the medical area. You can do this even if you are going to law school to get away from the healthcare arena. Use this link to try to gain admission, then after you are there you can pursue whatever elective courses you like.





Finally, if possible, try to visit the schools that interest you before applying. Most schools will host open houses and/or tours for prospective applicants. Often you will meet alumni and current students at these events. This is a great opportunity to meet lawyers who are in practice in areas that interest you. Ask them what they think about the different schools in which you are interested. You should ask about their personal experiences and also where colleagues whose professional skills they respect attended law school. (Though these alumni and students will exhibit some bias, you can learn a lot from both what they say and what they do not say.) If you know any lawyers personally, you can explore these issues with your acquaintances.

### *Preparing the Applications*

With regard to the actual preparation of your applications, bear in mind that timeliness and neatness count. The vast majority of schools have rolling admissions. That means that it is generally easier to gain admission earlier in the admissions process. Therefore, make every effort to submit each application at least one month in advance of the actual deadline. Since most schools offer an electronic means of applying, and there are services that facilitate the preparation of multiple applications, I strongly urge you to prepare your applications on a computer. Be sure to treat your applications like the formal documents that they are: Go through at least two drafts and be sure to answer all the questions that you are asked. Be especially mindful that you must report any academic disqualification statuses and any criminal record. If in doubt, disclose the matter. If you graduate from a law school to which you did not disclose a criminal background, depending on the severity of the offense(s), you may never gain admission to a bar of law. Even your law degree could be in jeopardy.

### *The Personal Statement*

The most important element of the application, and the one that makes the most people nervous, is the essay, variously termed the personal statement, the personal essay, or the statement of intent. I think it should be called the interview substitute, and that is how you should think of it. A well-written essay can make a tremendous difference in the evaluation of an applicant. A poorly written essay can be damning.

Since law schools receive thousands of applications each year, it is impossible to grant interviews. Therefore, the essay you submit must speak for you. Please

make sure it speaks in grammatically correct sentences, properly used vocabulary, and a well-ordered format. In most instances, you will be given a question to answer or a topic to discuss. If that is the case, discuss what the admissions committee wants you to discuss. Whatever you write should accentuate the positive. The interview substitute is not the place for a tale of woe! While you should inform the admissions committees of any difficulties that are germane to your application, these explanations (not excuses) should be very brief (no more than four sentences) and presented in addenda to the relevant questions. You should outline your answers carefully and go through no fewer than three drafts in preparing your essays. Be sure to run a spell-check and to proofread carefully. Finally, be sure to have someone who is a good writer read them through and give you general comments.

### *Letters of Recommendation*

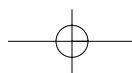
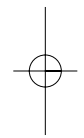
The other elements that can be extremely significant are your letters of recommendation.

With these you must be sure not to be “damned by faint praise.” By that I mean that your letters of recommendation must recommend you highly. There are a few ways to ensure this.

The first is to ask the right people to write for you. Recommenders must be capable of speaking to your capacity to be a good law student. A letter from the federal court judge who is your grandfather’s best friend, but who cannot address your potential as a law student from personal experience, will hurt your application more than it will help it. Your request for and inclusion of such a letter shouts out to an admissions committee, “I have bad judgment!”

Admissions committees look favorably upon faculty recommendations. While other qualities such as your strong work ethic, excellent moral character, initiative, and maturity are important, the most important considerations are your analytical and writing abilities. In most instances, faculty members can best assess those qualities. If you have been out of school too long to get a meaningful recommendation from a faculty member, or if you did not cultivate a relationship with any of your professors, do not despair. Strong recommendations from employers will go a long way.

The second way to ensure the quality of your recommendations is to be sure to meet with any prospective recommenders in person, if at all possible. You must



explain to them that in order to gain admission to the law schools to which you are applying, you will need very strong letters of recommendation that convey contextual information. To enable them to do that, you must give them samples of some of the work you have done for them and ask them to refer to those items in their letters. If the recommender is an employer, you should provide him or her with a copy of the last few reports or analyses that you have prepared. If nothing else, you should provide copies of your last two written evaluations. If the recommender is a faculty member, you should hand him or her copies of research papers or reports you have produced for class(es). Then, as you hand them the materials, you must look into their eyes (I am not kidding) and ask each of them the following questions, verbatim: 1) Do you feel comfortable writing me a very strong letter of recommendation? 2) Can you send it out by (state a deadline that is at least one month before your earliest application deadline)?

If a prospective recommender so much as blinks when you ask that first question, you are to turn on your heels immediately and run in another direction. (That is a person who probably will “damn you by faint praise.”) If the person is noncommittal in response to the second question, you are to do the same. Of course, with regards to the second question, you should not ask anyone for a recommendation on December 15 that has to be sent out by the following January 1. If you need a recommendation out by January 1, the very latest you should ask for it is that preceding November 1. In fact, with that deadline, the ideal request date would be before October 1, especially with faculty members who will have to prepare and grade midterms in October. As to the waiver of your right to see your recommenders’ letters, I recommend that you waive your right in writing. For whatever reason, most people feel more comfortable if you are willing to waive your right.

Even schools that do not require letters of recommendation like to see one or two strong ones. Of course, follow the guidelines given to you. If you are told that one or two letters are either optional or required, do not submit six!

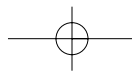
### Conclusion

My final comments are brief, though divergent. First, process any requisite financial aid forms concurrently with your applications, if at all possible. Under no circumstances should you wait until you are admitted to a particular school to process those forms. Second, be patient with the process. Though it is reasonable to expect a decision within three to four months of your application’s completion, it never aids your cause to badger an admissions office. You should insist upon a decision only when deadlines at other schools necessitate it. Third, be sure to revisit each of the schools to which you are admitted and seriously considering. Take a good hard look at them. Talk to current students, faculty members, alumni, and administrators. Look over the facilities and the services each school provides to its students and alumni and what it offers you. Then close your eyes, make a choice, and make the most of that choice. Try not to agonize over your decision too long. Remember that you can receive a good legal education at any ABA-accredited law school.

Good luck. A legal education will enhance the rest of your life!

### About the Author

Gloria Rivera, J.D., was formerly the Assistant Dean of Admissions at St. John’s University School of Law. Ms. Rivera graduated from Harvard Law School and practiced in corporate law firms in both New York and Los Angeles. Ms. Rivera is an outspoken advocate for fostering higher education in the Latino community and currently serves as chairperson of the Student Outreach Committee for the Puerto Rican Bar Association.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. Is there a preferred major for pre-law students?**

There is no preferred major for students interested in attending law school. The important thing to do is to be sure that you take at least two classes that require a major research paper (at least 25 pages). It is probably advisable to pursue a subject matter that you like, because that will make it easier to do well, which is the most important thing. Try to avoid “catch-all” curriculums like “pre-law,” etc., and stick to specific subject matter.

## **2. What undergraduate classes best prepare me for law school?**

The best classes are those that are going to require research, analysis, and/or serious writing. So, for example, math would be a great major, provided you take a couple of serious “paper courses.” The old standbys, of course, are philosophy, English, and history.

## **3. Is contacting a law school before applying there acceptable?**

Contacting a school before applying is a fine thing to do. You can establish a relationship with someone in the office who may later be willing “to go to bat” for you on admission and/or scholarship. However, be mindful that no office will be happy to entertain daily calls from you.

## **4. Are admissions officers actively looking for older students?**

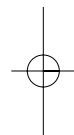
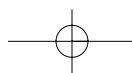
Admissions officers are happy to see older students because they add diversity to the pool of applicants and admittees. However, older students should be aware that “life experience” by itself will not get them in. Their statistics, especially their LSAT scores, which are often the only academic piece that will be recent, will still be scrutinized.

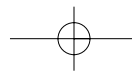
## **5. How important are the different aspects of my application?**

All aspects of your application are important and must be treated as such. It is especially important to answer all of the questions truthfully and completely. The applicant must be especially mindful of thoroughly disclosing any academic or criminal transgressions. The writing sample is, of course, crucial. Additionally, letters of recommendation must be paid very close attention.

## **6. From whom should I request letters of recommendation?**

You should get letters from those who can speak to your analytical and writing abilities from firsthand knowledge. If you can give the writer some of your “work product” for specific reference in the letter, so much the better. Letters from faculty members are best, but letters from supervisors who can speak to your academic potential are also great.



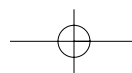


BUS

# *Thinking about Applying to Business School?*

BUS

*by Marie Mookini, Ph.D.  
Former Assistant Dean and Director of Admissions  
Stanford Graduate School of Business*



### *Are you wondering who applies to business school?*

Or more importantly, who business schools look for? Are they just looking for bankers, future corporate executives, and ambitious venture capitalists? Or are they also interested in an opera producer whose dream is to manage a theatrical company, an engineer with a passion for designing automobiles, or a high school teacher who runs sports enrichment programs for children? The fact is, each of these individuals would be a good match with an MBA program. If this comes as a surprise, you'll definitely want to learn more about what makes a successful business school applicant and what an MBA education provides.

### *The Business School Experience*

The Master of Business Administration degree is designed to prepare you to become a senior-level manager and leader, whether you aspire to be a financier or the CEO of a gourmet food company. Business schools focus broadly on teaching you about organizations—the resources (human and capital) that drive the processes that produce the outcomes (products or services). You will learn about for-profit businesses, such as retail stores and construction companies, and not-for-profit institutions, such as schools and charity organizations. What you learn in business school can be generalized to a wide range of industries and career options.

Business school curriculums differ from school to school, but fundamentally they provide you with a balance of theory and practice. That means that you will learn how organizations work, and you will have the opportunity to apply those theories through class discussions and practical work experience. Business schools employ an interdisciplinary approach, knowing that your success as a future leader and manager relies on your being able to understand how an organization operates as a total enterprise. For instance, you will come to appreciate how the different functions of accounting, human resources, and marketing are very much intertwined and interdependent.

Another hallmark of the business school experience is teamwork. You will have study groups, and you will have many team projects. The strong emphasis on teams is natural, since that is how most working professionals get things done. Even heads of businesses rely on others—for example, their suppliers or distributors. Business school is a good time to refine your teamwork skills and to learn how to work with people who may not share your communication style

or work ethic. The ability to persuade and influence peers is a critical success factor, and business school provides many opportunities to practice these skills in a supportive environment.

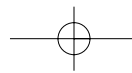
### *Your Undergraduate Major*

There is no best undergraduate major for business school. Therefore, choose a major that you find interesting and engaging. MBA students have majored in everything from economics to religious studies. Since business school curriculums will assume a solid foundation in quantitative skills, you'll want to take at least a couple of classes in economics, math, statistics, or science—i.e., courses that will sharpen your analytical reasoning skills. If your schedule precludes you from taking these courses, make the extra effort and consider taking evening or distance-learning quantitative courses from a local university or college, because it is difficult to benefit from a business school education if you are not comfortable with numbers. This does not mean that you need to be a “quant jock,” but it does mean that you cannot afford to be afraid of numbers. Also, keep in mind that you are not required to take business classes before entering an MBA program. In fact, many MBA students come from pure liberal arts backgrounds.

While in college you may wish to pursue an honors project or do a senior thesis. While the topic you choose may not seem terribly relevant to an MBA, it can demonstrate to an admissions committee that you possess intellectual vitality and initiative. Becoming conversant in another language is also a plus. In fact, some business school programs require fluency in several languages.

### *Work Experience*

Students at top business schools have an average of four years of work experience before applying to MBA programs. While work experience isn't technically a requirement for admissions, very few students pursue an MBA immediately after completing their undergraduate programs. The handful that do go straight through generally have an extensive record of extracurricular leadership, as well as superb academic credentials to compensate for their lack of full-time work experience. Moreover, these students have articulated the reasons why they wish to attend business school and are very mature and self-confident. So if you are a college senior interested in pursuing an MBA right away, and you strongly believe you have a case for going straight to business school, don't be discouraged by the overall statistics.



### *Admissions Committees at Work*

Each business school evaluates applications in a slightly different way. Some business schools have faculty members and students reviewing applications and interviewing candidates. Other admission offices use only professional staff evaluators. Some business schools require one letter of reference; others require three. Some applications require several short essays with restrictions on length; other essays have no page limit. This means that you need to carefully read what the application requirements are for each school, and tailor your efforts accordingly. For instance, a one-size-fits-all essay or a generic letter of reference will not help you in the application process and can potentially hurt you.

Reading and evaluating an application consists of two distinct but related processes. First, we focus on the individual applicant, assessing both strengths and weaknesses along the stated admission criteria. Once that assessment is completed, the individual applicant is compared to other applicants also vying for admission. What this means is that there are parts of the application process over which you have control (i.e., the quality of your individual presentation) and parts over which you have little control (i.e., the quantity and quality of the other applicants). Therefore, keep in mind that you can influence the application process by preparing strong self-presentation, but you cannot fully control the outcome.

### *Academics*

Faculty members at business schools want to teach students who share their passion for intellectual inquiry and who take studies seriously and professionally. For that reason, admissions committees place emphasis on past academic achievements, such as grade point average (GPA) and test scores (GMAT), when evaluating a candidate.

Not surprisingly, the higher your mean GPA, the better. However, other factors are considered, such as the trend in your GPA from freshman through senior year, the difficulty of your course load, and your major. If you had a particularly weak semester of grades that can be explained by extenuating circumstances, you should address the issue somewhere in your application. It is far better to provide the explanation than it is to leave it to the imagination of the admissions committee.

### *The Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)*

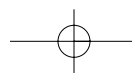
GMAT test scores are an important part of the business school application. The GMAT is a difficult exam (not to mention expensive), so you would be wise to do some preparation for it. The test consists of two multiple-choice sections, math and verbal, and an analytical writing section. It is in your best interest to do as well as you can on the test, since the higher your score, the more competitive a candidate you will be for admission. How you prepare for the GMAT is up to you, but you should definitely take at least one practice exam before the real test. Free software is available to you when you register to take the GMAT, and it will expose you to the GMAT's unique computer-adaptive format. Scores are usually good for five years, so you may wish to consider taking the exam in college while your lifestyle is still academically focused.

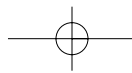
What is a good GMAT score? That depends on the schools to which you are applying and on the other strengths of your application. Most business schools do not evaluate applicants according to a formula, choosing instead to look at multiple pieces of information in your application. Just as a high score is not a guarantee of admission, a low score does not mean that you are automatically disqualified from consideration. As you begin to research business schools, you will see average or median test scores reported. Keep in mind that they were computed from a range of scores and that you should not treat the average or median as the minimum requirement for admission.

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) may also be required or recommended for students for whom English is a second language. It is important to read each business school's requirements for submitting a complete application.

### *Leadership/Management Experience*

Business schools prepare you for leadership and management positions. Therefore, admissions committees look for evidence that you have demonstrated leadership in the past or that you have the potential to become a leader when the opportunity presents itself. Extracurricular activities are important to admissions committees since they highlight your leadership experiences and reflect how you have chosen to spend your time—i.e., your judgment.





In the event that a candidate has not had the opportunity to manage a staff, admissions committees look to recommenders to describe the applicant's interpersonal skills and ability to work effectively on teams, and the degree to which he or she took advantage of opportunities to grow and to learn new skills. In essence, we are asking recommenders to tell us about the qualities you have that would enable you to become an effective leader and manager. Think back to a supervisor you've had for a summer job or internship, and make a list of the behaviors and attitudes you admired most in that person. That is what we are looking for in you.

### *Diversity is Good*

Each business school prides itself on the quality of its student body and the unique perspective each individual brings to the business school community. "Unique" does not necessarily refer to tangible accomplishments that set students apart, but rather the different lens that each student uses to view the world based on the sum of his or her life experiences. The perspective you bring to business school communities is your unique contribution; you do not need to do something sexy or exotic to gain entrance into business school.

### *Interviews*

Most business schools either recommend or require an interview of its applicants. Interviews serve several purposes. For you, the applicant, it is an opportunity to enhance an already strong application by emphasizing what matters most to you. It also is a great opportunity to ask some in-depth questions about the school or program that will reflect your strong interest in the school. Finally, it is a chance to demonstrate your communication skills. For the interviewer, the interview serves as a complement to the written application and provides a chance to see whether you will be a good fit with the school, based on both the content of the responses and the way you present yourself in the interview (i.e., appropriate level of eye contact, comfort in answering questions, thoughtfulness and conciseness of responses, etc.).

### *Essays*

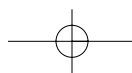
Application essays provide a great opportunity for an applicant to shine. The essays should be honest, direct, and sincere. One of the best pieces of advice comes from a colleague of mine: "Tell a story, and tell a story only you can tell." What does that mean? Your essays are stories about you. Stories are

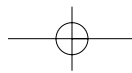
descriptive, and stories can be evocative. Everyone loves a good story. "Telling a story only you can tell" means not only describing the people, events, and accomplishments in your life, but also helping the reader to understand why those things are so meaningful to you and how they have shaped your perspective and outlook. The latter is very often what differentiates the superior candidate from the merely good one. Whereas a small handful of applicants stand out because of their unusual accomplishments and backgrounds, many candidates capture the admissions committee's attention because of the thoughtful way they approach the essay questions. Their essays become a reflection of who they are—their values, attitudes, and personal qualities. A winning essay basically gives the admissions committee insight into the lens through which you view the world. And that is the key to differentiating yourself in the competitive selection process. After all, the main objective of admissions committees is to assemble a class of MBA students with a broad range of perspectives.

### *Letters of Recommendation*

Whereas your essays are a story about you written by you, your letters of recommendation are stories about you written by others. You probably will apply to several different MBA programs, and each will have a different reference form. It may be tempting to use generic letters from your placement file, but it is always better to have a letter written specifically for an application.

Letters of recommendation are very difficult to write. As you can imagine, most letters that arrive in our office are positive, filled with glowing adjectives. What differentiates a truly compelling letter from a good one is specific anecdotes about you. Most recommendation letters tell us that applicants are smart, motivated, great team players with excellent interpersonal skills. These are baseline assumptions we have about you, so we are eager to learn the ways in which you have demonstrated those skills and qualities. For example, we can learn a lot about you from a description of how you inspired an injured teammate through her rehabilitation or how you led the fraternity through some rough times. You can help your recommenders write more helpful and persuasive letters for you by providing them with a list of anecdotes that will give substance and meaning to their answers.





### *Finding the Right MBA Program*

There are more than 700 MBA programs in the world. Whether you are a college student or a student advisor, a good place to start searching for information is at [www.gmac.com](http://www.gmac.com). The Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) administers the GMAT and is an excellent resource. Through the website you can secure a copy of “Exploring the MBA,” a free publication that is an excellent primer.

The GMAC also sponsors the “MBA Forums,” which are similar to undergraduate college fairs. MBA Forums are held in different parts of the world. At the MBA Forums, you will find business school admissions officers and alumni who will answer your individual questions about their programs. In addition, there are excellent workshops assisting students who wish to learn more about the MBA and the application process. The Princeton Review, the leader in standardized test prep, also hosts fairs and workshops around the world from which both students and their college advisors can benefit.

As you read more about business schools from individual school websites, you will get a good sense of the similarities and differences among schools. If you work with someone with an MBA or know a current MBA student, take advantage of the opportunity to get some firsthand information. Ask them about their experience. Did they enjoy it? What did they take away from the experience? Would they do it again? How has the degree enhanced their career satisfaction?

I also encourage you to add yourself to mailing lists to receive schools’ materials. Doing so may also put you on an invitation list to attend an information session in your hometown. Even if you are in the exploratory stages of researching schools and haven’t decided to apply to a particular program, don’t be shy about attending the session. You may pick up some helpful information to aid you in your search.

I do NOT recommend applying to the top five schools on a particular ranking list, because the criteria by which the schools are ranked may not be the same criteria you should use in selecting a school that is a good fit for you. Just as you spent time carefully researching your undergraduate options, you should also devote an abundant amount of time and energy researching business schools. Here is a basic list of questions to help you begin sorting out your options.

1. What do you want to do post-MBA? Check the placement reports to see what sorts of career opportunities are available to the students. Which companies recruit at the school? Are these appealing to you?

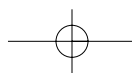
2. How do you learn best—small classes? large classes? Also, if you have not had a broad exposure to the language of business through coursework or summer internships, a school teaching exclusively by the case method will challenge you.

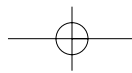
3. What do you want to learn? School curriculums are similar, but they differ in their emphases according to the research interests of the faculty and the location of the school.

4. What is the culture of the school? A school’s culture is its atmosphere for learning and the degree of energy and excitement among the students, staff, and faculty. You can best determine this by reading the school’s literature, visiting the campus to meet some of the students, and talking to alumni. Also, check out the support services available to students, such as tutors and disability accommodations. The culture of the school can help you distinguish among business schools.

5. Do you want to go to school part-time or full-time? There are advantages and disadvantages to both. The advantage of part-time programs is that you can continue to work while you complete your MBA, and sometimes your employer will sponsor you through the program. The disadvantage is that you do not have the luxury of spending a lot of time with your classmates in either study groups or extracurricular activities, and it requires a long-term commitment. On the other hand, a full-time program provides an immersion into the intellectual realm of business education but keeps you one step outside the “action.” A full-time program can also be a financial strain, since in addition to having to pay tuition, you will lose your income for the duration of the program.

6. In what part of the world do you wish to acquire your MBA education? This is important insofar as location will influence how you spend your time outside of the classroom. Choose a place that provides you with outlets for fun and the chance to continue your hobbies, whether you’re an outdoor buff or someone who needs to be within a mile of a major art museum. Also, if being in the middle of a city is what energizes you, you probably will not want to apply to schools that are a fair driving distance from major metropolitan areas.





As you read more about schools and talk to alumni with MBAs, you will be able to refine your search by asking yourself a secondary list of questions.

### *The Business School Classroom*

One of the main differences between your undergraduate education and a graduate management education is how knowledge is passed along to students. Typically, a college classroom involves an expert, i.e., the professor, pouring knowledge into the heads of college students. The flow of information tends to be unidirectional—from professor to student.

A business school classroom, on the other hand, is very different. Instead of the professor as the sole expert, students join in the teaching process by actively sharing their perspectives and ideas with one another. It is very interactive. In fact, most business school students will tell you that they learned as much from their peers (if not more) as they did from the faculty members. The professor in the business school classroom can be likened to an orchestra conductor, drawing out comments from the various students who bring a broad and interesting range of perspectives.

The graduate business school classroom differs not only in its dynamics, but also in the nature of the discussions. Undergraduate class discussions tend to be more theoretical than experiential, whether discussing a Shakespearean play or an aspect of child psychology. Business school professors also share important new theories (for example, about the growth of Internet retailing), but students will contribute their actual experiences to the class. The combination of theory, “best practice,” and the active exchange of ideas and perspectives are hallmarks of a business school classroom.

Teaching methods in business schools vary widely. There are lectures, there are group projects, and there is the “case method.” In fact, some schools teach exclusively by the case method. The business school case is a story about a company and its problems. At the end of the story, there typically are questions posed such as, “If you were the CEO, what would you do?” The case method relies on active student participation and a solid grasp of business principles with which to discuss the case. Most schools use an eclectic mix of teaching methods so as to provide professors with the flexibility to teach the course material in the way they deem most appropriate. MBA students who have had a broad introduction to business principles (either through course work or professional experience) do very well with the case method.

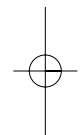
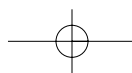
MBA programs vary in length, from 10 months to 24 months. Many programs have a core set of courses that teach the fundamentals of business and are discipline-based. They include economics, accounting, marketing, finance, strategy, human resources, organizational behavior, decision sciences, and operations. Core courses are often required courses, although some schools allow you to waive them through examination or previously completed course work. In addition to core courses, there are elective courses. The depth and range of electives is usually based on the number of faculty and tends to reflect both faculty research interests and student input. Elective course topics can range from philanthropy to venture capital. Choosing which electives to take is often a challenge, since there are always more courses than time!

### *Summary*

Applying to business school is hard work, which means you will need to set aside quality time to think about and write your essays, and to select and prepare your recommenders. You owe it to yourself to put together the strongest package possible so that once you submit your application, you can be confident that you gave it your best shot. Unfortunately, a good effort cannot guarantee you admission, since there are always more qualified candidates than there are spaces available. But an ill-prepared application can definitely keep you from achieving your dream of attending business school.

### *About the Author*

Marie Mookini, Ph.D., served as the Assistant Dean and Director of MBA Admissions at the Stanford Graduate School of Business from August 1991 to June 2001. Prior to that she spent eight years in the Stanford University Undergraduate Admission Office. She is also a former member of the Board of Directors for the Graduate Management Admission Council.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. *Beyond the academics, what is the value of the MBA experience?*

Quite simply, it's the people. That's what most MBA graduates will tell you—that their classmates defined their experience, that some of their classmates have become their closest friends. Furthermore, your time in the MBA program will provide you with a network of contacts who will be able to enrich your professional life.

## 2. *What about financial aid?*

Financial aid policies vary from school to school. Similar to the undergraduate level, some programs offer merit aid whereas others only offer need-based aid. Many schools are beginning to offer loan programs to non-U.S. citizens.

## 3. *Do I have to declare a major in business school?*

Some programs require majors or concentrations, and others do not. There are benefits to both. Not having to fulfill the requirements of a major allows you to gain breadth through your elective classes. In essence, it gives you maximum flexibility to tailor the program to meet your needs. On the other hand, having a concentration allows you to develop depth in an area and sends a strong signal to future employers of your primary interests and expertise.

## 4. *What are some of the most common mistakes applicants make?*

Admission officers always chuckle over essays that include the name of another business school (e.g., an essay to School X with the concluding sentence, "And this is why I am committed to attending School Y.") While this is never a reason to deny admission to an otherwise strong candidate, it does not leave a very good impression. Similarly, lazy essays are ones that never use the specific school name and instead say "your school." We know you are applying to more than one school, but this sort of intellectual laziness is frowned upon and can hurt you in the application process. Every business school wants to believe that their program is the one and only to which you are applying, so indulge them in that fantasy!

## 5. *If I apply as a college senior and don't get in, will that hurt me if I reapply in the future?*

Absolutely not. Some schools will provide feedback on your unsuccessful application, letting you know if there are aspects of your application you can strengthen. Sometimes, however, the only piece of feedback might be that there were no glaring weaknesses in your file. You may be told, "There's nothing wrong with your file, but there wasn't anything compelling either." That is not a message meant to mislead or to cover up the truth. Think about the Olympic games. There are athletes from around the world who are the best in their sport, but only one can get the gold medal, winning often by a fraction of a second. Does that mean that the non-winners are poor athletes? That if they had trained longer, they would have won the medal? No. What is sometimes difficult to accept about a highly selective admission process is that there is an element of luck. Remember, you can influence the process, but you cannot control the outcome.

## 6. *When should I start the application process?*

You should visit school websites to review and request application materials about 12 to 18 months prior to intended matriculation. Most schools offer the convenience of electronic applications, so you need not wait for the mail to arrive. (This schedule assumes that you have already done your research into your school options and that you have narrowed it down to a set of four or five schools that are a good fit for you. If you are still in the early stages, add six to nine months to the recommended schedule.)

**7. *I don't do well on standardized tests, and I notice that a lot of the top business schools sport very high average GMAT scores. Should I bother applying?***

First of all, keep in mind that those are average scores derived from a range of scores. Second, the GMAT is only one part of the evaluation process, although a very important one. If other parts of your application are very strong, do not let your score discourage you.

**8. *What is weighted most heavily in the evaluation process?***

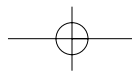
This will vary from school to school. Truthfully, every piece of your application is important. Do admissions committees give each piece an equal weight when reviewing an individual file or when comparing one applicant to another? Not necessarily. The candidate with full-time work experience will not always be chosen over the candidate who is still in college, and the candidate with the stellar grade point average will not always be chosen over a candidate with a less impressive average. Why? Because other factors are put into the equation: test scores, motivation, personal qualities, etc. It is often said that admissions is more of an art than a science. We do not admit students based on a formula; admissions is not about admitting candidates with the highest numbers.

**9. *I took the risk of going with a start-up, and unfortunately it failed. Will this hurt me in the MBA application process?***

Admissions committees are less concerned with where you worked and more interested in understanding what you've learned from the experience—i.e., your work style, attitude, management principles, and ability to work with others. An honest self-assessment of your actions and behaviors in a chaotic environment can be well received by the person reading your application.

# *Thinking about Applying to Graduate School?*

*by Dawn Terrell, Ph.D.  
San Francisco State University*



### *Thinking about Applying to Graduate School?*

If you are thinking about applying to graduate school, you will find there are many different types of graduate programs with varying requirements and admissions procedures. This chapter provides some general guidelines to consider when choosing a graduate program and navigating the admissions process.

### *Overview of Graduate School Programs*

Graduate programs provide different kinds of learning experiences, depending on their training emphasis, the degree(s) granted, and, of course, the discipline of study. Some programs are similar to business, law, or medical school programs in that they focus on preparing individuals for professional careers. Graduate programs in counseling, library sciences, public administration, and social work are a few of the many that emphasize professional training. The degrees granted in such programs are often unique to the discipline—such as the Master's of Public Health (M.P.H.), Master's of Social Work (M.S.W.), or Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.)—although they can also include the more common M.A., M.S., or Ph.D. Many graduate programs offering the latter degrees focus on preparing individuals to function as scholar-practitioners in a given discipline. These programs train students in discipline-specific methods of scholarship and offer opportunities to develop advanced expertise in the field through independent study and research.

In planning for graduate school, it is important to develop a realistic picture of what it entails. Despite the differences in the types of programs, one commonality of graduate education is that it allows individuals to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to take on leadership positions in their chosen fields. Graduate education is therefore more intensive than undergraduate education, often focusing on similar topics but in greater depth. Graduate programs also require much more independent scholarship, usually culminating in a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation. In fact, in many graduate programs only the first one or two years follow a structured pattern of course work, with the remaining time spent in independent study and scholarship.

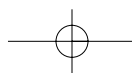
The length of a graduate program can thus vary tremendously, since the complexity of the thesis or dissertation project will often determine the amount of time necessary to complete a degree. Master's programs are usually one to three years, while a doctoral program can take between four and eight years,

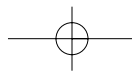
with most requiring completion within seven to ten years. The time it takes to complete a program will also depend on whether you attend full-time or part-time and whether you can receive credit for advanced undergraduate or graduate work already completed. It is always a good idea to research the average time to completion for the degree programs you are interested in and to determine provisions for obtaining advanced status.

To determine the graduate program that is best for you, it is important to assess your current and long-term goals. A master's degree can lead to a rewarding professional position, especially if it is considered the terminal (i.e., highest) degree in the field or if it can be used as preparation for doctoral study. In many disciplines, the doctoral degree is the terminal degree, and one's advancement will be limited without a doctorate. For example, while there are many master's-level programs in psychology (some even lead to licensure as a psychotherapist), only individuals with a doctorate in psychology—Ph.D. or Psy.D.—can be licensed as psychologists. Programs leading to the Ph.D. are usually the most academically rigorous. The Ph.D. is often a prerequisite for a career in academia, teaching, and conducting research, although the Ed.D. is also considered acceptable in the field of education and in fields without a terminal Ph.D.

### *Preparation for Graduate School*

While it is sometimes possible to be admitted to a graduate program without an undergraduate degree in a given discipline, undergraduate course work in the same or related disciplines is usually an important part of the preparation for graduate school. If you are switching fields from your undergraduate major, you may have to complete some prerequisite course work in your new field. Whether you have completed a major or just prerequisites in a discipline, admissions committees will place special emphasis on your GPA in the specialized course work as well as review your overall GPA. For many competitive graduate programs, advanced or independent study within the field is highly desirable, as are cocurricular activities, such as presenting at conferences, publishing, or gaining practical experience through internships or positions in the field. These activities demonstrate to graduate admissions committees that you have what it takes to survive the rigors of graduate education. These activities also provide opportunities to interact more closely with professors and professionals in your field of interest, which comes in handy when choosing a graduate program and asking for letters of recommendation.





### *Choosing a Graduate Program*

Given the hard work required in graduate school, it's wise to carefully consider which programs provide the best fit for your interests and goals. You might ask professors or professionals in the field for suggestions, or research the programs with which key individuals in your field are associated. For doctoral programs, a critical factor to consider is whether there is a faculty mentor you want to work with who will be able to provide the guidance and support necessary for you to complete your degree. The reputations of the program and of your faculty mentor are of vital importance for subsequent career opportunities. Admission to a graduate program can be far more competitive than admission to law or medical school because many graduate programs accept only a handful of students. Therefore, it is important to develop contingency plans in case you are not admitted to your first choice (i.e., obtain a master's degree before a Ph.D. in order to boost your research experience and overall GPA or apply to equally strong programs in less desirable locations).

### *The Application Process*

Contact your top-choice graduate programs to determine their application requirements and deadlines, ideally six months to a year before you plan to apply. This will allow plenty of time to complete all prerequisites and to do the best job possible on the application itself. Most programs require some combination of the following for admission: scores from the Graduate Record Examination General Test (GRE, see below) and/or a GRE Subject Test; transcripts; letters of recommendation; a personal statement; short essay responses; a résumé; and an interview. Some programs have only one admissions cycle per year, while others have rolling admissions (i.e., admissions decisions are made as applications arrive).

### *The Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)*

Because undergraduate programs differ so greatly from one another, many graduate admissions officers rely on standardized GRE scores to provide information about how an applicant compares to others who are applying to the program or who have been successful in the past. Programs vary in how much they weigh GRE scores in admissions decisions. Some have a range of scores they expect of prospective students, while others simply use the scores as one of several indicators of potential success. Some programs don't require the GRE at all.

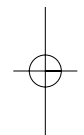
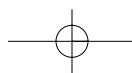
The GRE General Test has three sections: Verbal Ability, Quantitative Ability, and an Analytical Writing Assessment. The Verbal and Quantitative sections are in a computer-adaptive test (CAT) format, which means that the test algorithm uses your performance on the questions you've been asked to determine subsequent questions. While questions are drawn from the same pool, each test taker has a unique combination of questions that forms his or her entire GRE. The test adapts to your skill level, with correct answers leading to more challenging questions and incorrect answers leading to less challenging questions. The computer starts with an average score in each section, and raises or lowers your score according to your performance. The GRE is scored on a scale of 200 to 800 per section. Average GRE scores are about 470 for the Verbal section, and 570 for Quantitative.

The Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) consists of two writing tasks: a 30-minute "Analyze an Argument" task and a 45-minute "Present your Perspective on an Issue" task. Each essay is graded on a scale of 0 to 6 by two different graders. These scores are averaged to generate the overall AWA score. Introduced for the October, 2002 GRE administrations, the AWA replaces a multiple-choice Analytical Ability section.

In addition to the General Test, some schools may require you to submit scores for one or more GRE Subject Tests. GRE Subject Tests are intended to measure your knowledge of specific subject matter. There are eight GRE Subject Tests covering disciplines from biology to literature. The GRE Subject Tests are administered in the paper-and-pencil format in November, December, and April.

### *The Personal Statement*

The personal statement is perhaps the single most important element in your application. Ideally, it provides readers with a clear sense of who you are and what you wish to accomplish in graduate school and beyond. Be careful to avoid simply providing a narrative of your résumé. Rather, use the statement to set yourself apart from other applicants and to demonstrate why you would be a good fit with the school's program. The statement can also be used to explain any extenuating circumstances of which the admissions committee should be



aware—positive or negative—such as a bad semester for personal reasons, a gift for languages, or experience overcoming obstacles. It's a good idea to have a trusted mentor read your statement before submitting a final draft.

### *Letters of Recommendation*

Strong letters of recommendation should provide insight into the kind of person you are and highlight qualities you have that will enable you to be successful in graduate school. It is therefore important to ask individuals who have some basis for assessing your potential to write letters of recommendation. Consider professors you have taken advanced courses with and/or professionals in the field who have had the opportunity to observe your work. Provide these individuals with as much information about your goals and interests as possible, including a draft of your personal statement. Give them ample time to complete their letters, and supply stamped, addressed envelopes.

### *Get It Right, and Get It In On Time*

It is critical that you carefully proofread all parts of your application before submitting it and that you submit it on time. You want to demonstrate superior communication and organizational skills when you are applying for an advanced degree. You don't want to find out that your application to a program in World Literature has been routed to the department of English Literature because you've checked the wrong box, or that it came in after the deadline for World Literature applications. Graduate school admission is a difficult enough process without sabotaging your chances by submitting an application late or with errors.

### *About the Author*

Dawn Terrell has earned three graduate degrees, including a Ph.D. from Yale University, and has taught in the Psychology Department at San Francisco State University since 1990. Like many of her academic colleagues, one of her greatest pleasures is helping students get into the graduate program of their choice. She also coordinates a master's program in clinical psychology and has read hundreds of graduate applications over the years.

# *Frequently Asked Questions*

## *1. When should I take the GRE?*

Find out the admission deadlines for the graduate schools to which you are applying, then work backward so that you take the GRE at least six months before your earliest deadline. This gives you some extra time for unexpected delays in case you need to take the test again. You can take the test only once per calendar month. Keep in mind that it can take as long as four weeks for your official scores to arrive at your designated schools. Some testing months are more popular than others, so it is very important to register early. The GRE can be taken on almost any day except Sundays and major holidays.

## *2. Do I have to get a master's degree before pursuing a Ph.D.?*

Not necessarily. Graduate degrees are not like promotions—you don't need to go through one to reach the next level in most disciplines. In fact, some doctoral programs prefer to accept students straight from undergraduate programs to avoid a potential clash in training philosophy with other master's programs. Many doctoral programs grant master's degrees to students while they earn the doctorate. In some instances, however, having a master's degree can enhance your chances of admission to a doctoral program, especially if your undergraduate degree was in another field, you did not have the experience of any independent scholarship, or your undergraduate GPA was

not high enough to show your potential for success in a doctoral program. Another advantage of obtaining a master's degree first is that doing so usually enhances opportunities to support yourself while in a doctoral program.

**3. I've heard that grad students go to school for free and also get paid. Is this true?**

It depends on the discipline and the program. In many research-oriented doctoral programs, students are fully supported through a combination of fellowships, grant funds, and assistantships; they often receive tuition and stipends in the range of \$10,000 to \$15,000. It's hardly going to school "for free" though, as students must work as research or teaching assistants while in school as part of their support package. Doctoral programs in the humanities and arts are less likely to be able to offer full support, although assistantships may be available. Pre-professional master's and doctoral programs are similar to business, law, and medical school programs in that they rarely provide tuition support or stipends.

**4. How much teaching will I have to do while pursuing my degree?**

This will vary depending on the program and degree. For doctoral students, some teaching is usually expected (and helps if the ultimate goal is an academic career), although the mix between teaching and research will depend on the discipline and the level of research funding available. Some doctoral students without much funding seek out teaching opportunities at local two-year colleges to support their studies. Master's-level students are rarely required to teach. If teaching opportunities are available, they are often reserved for outstanding students.

**5. I'm interested in going to graduate school to become a psychotherapist, but I can't figure out the difference among programs in counseling, psychology, and social work.**

In many states, a degree in any of these fields will be sufficient to meet the educational requirements to be licensed as a psychotherapist (with additional hours of supervised clinical practice required). However, while a master's degree is the terminal degree for social work, the doctorate is the terminal degree in either counseling or clinical psychology. Although some counseling programs lead to an Ed.D. degree, the Ph.D. is still the most common degree. A

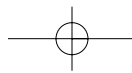
few programs across the country offer a Psy.D. degree for students interested primarily in practice rather than in becoming scholar-practitioners.

**6. I already have a graduate degree, but now I want to pursue another field. Will this hurt me in the admissions process?**

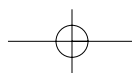
Not necessarily. It could even help if it demonstrates breadth and strong academic potential. This is one instance where you will want to clearly explain the change of fields in your personal statement. You will also want to describe how your earlier studies have contributed to your preparation for study in your new field.

**7. I wasn't really focused for the first two years of college, and my GPA is not very high. What should I do?**

Remember that it's the GPA in your field of interest that will count the most. If that's still not as high as it should be, you may want to consider doing some advanced course work before applying to graduate school, or maybe even earning a master's degree in the field (see question 2 on page 55). If there are extenuating circumstances that account for your poor GPA, by all means explain these in your personal statement. Have the individuals who are writing your letters of recommendation highlight the fact that your GPA is not a true reflection of your capabilities.



*The  
Princeton  
Review*



### *Managing the Application Process Using Technology*

When you start the application process for grad school (medical, law, business, or graduate school) you'll be faced with a new dimension in time management. Fitting in school searches and visits, writing essays, proofreading applications, researching financial aid requirements, and dealing with all of the other aspects of applying to graduate school can be nothing short of a nightmare. No need to fear, The Princeton Review can help you with a lot more than just preparing for your entrance exam.

The Princeton Review website ([www.PrincetonReview.com](http://www.PrincetonReview.com)) hosts search and application management tools to help make the whole process a bit less stressful and less time consuming. Because our system is completely web-based, you have access to all of your forms and information no matter where you are. Here's an overview of some of the free tools that are available.

#### *School Search*

Search for schools and learn the most up-to-date stats and information about hundreds of graduate schools in the United States and abroad, including average standardized test scores for every school's graduates, percentage of people who applied vs. percentage who were actually accepted, anticipated cost of living expenses, and much more.

#### *Expert Advice*

Get expert advice on writing a winning application, information on managing the transition from the workplace to school, and tips on succeeding once you're in graduate school.

#### *Online Application Technology*

The Princeton Review has an online application engine that allows many grad applicants to show their best face and submit their applications in the way that schools prefer to receive them: online. Why waste your time waiting for the application to be mailed to you, and then waste more time finding a typewriter and filling out the same information on every application?

- **An Easy System:**  
Once you fill out one application, the basic contact information you have provided automatically appears on each application you open thereafter. In addition, you'll be able to find and manage all of your applications in one place.

- **A System that Is Fast and Safe:**  
Once you submit your application, the school receives it immediately. In addition, The Princeton Review uses Embark technology, which is the same system many schools use to receive applications through their own websites.
- **A System that Is Free:**  
You still have to pay the application fee; however, there is no additional fee incurred for applying online.

#### *Manage the Process*

The Princeton Review website stores all the relevant data about where you are considering applying, what parts of the application you have already submitted, and from which schools you have heard back. It allows you to manage the entire process from a central, online interface so that you can access this information anytime, from anywhere.

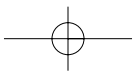
#### *Financial Aid Forms and Advice*

Our Financial Center houses all the relevant calculators and information you need to win the maximum amount of financial aid. We have a scholarship and grant search, FAFSA Worksheet, Aid Comparison Calculator, and other tools to automate the financial aid process.

We know a thing or two about what it's like to apply to graduate school. These online tools are not only free, but are also the most efficient way to help you manage the process and ease the associated stress.

Good luck. And don't forget to let us know where you got in!

To find more free articles and tools like this one, go to [www.PrincetonReview.com](http://www.PrincetonReview.com), your complete admissions and application resource.



# Notes

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