

The Major Do's and Don'ts of Applying to Graduate School



Adapted from the original article By Clare Tattersall

Original posting: <http://talentegg.ca/incubator/2012/10/22/8-dos-donts-applying-grad-school/>

DO

Visit the school you are applying to and connect with faculty and prospective supervisors.

Having that face time with a member of the selection committee or a [prospective supervisor](#) can go a long way in helping you to get into a program. Many programs will not admit a student unless they already have a faculty member who is willing to supervise his or her research.

If you take the time to learn who is out there, and connect with him or her about your area of research interest and he or she seems interested in your ideas and approach then you are halfway, at least, to getting in.

DO

Take time before you start the application process to reflect on what you would like to research while in grad school.

The most successful applicants are those who have a clear research interest – one that is innovative or takes a new approach to an old question. You need to know how you want to conduct your research, what resources you intend to use, what the burning question is that you want to address and why it is important. I know it is difficult at this point in time to know the answers to all of this, but the closer you can get, the better.

Take time to chat with your current professors and to get their insights on your research. This is also the sort of thing that you can connect with prospective supervisors on. They can direct you to other resources that may be of use to you.

Look into funding early! Tri-Council funding competitions are due in the fall the year before they are awarded. Funded students are always more appealing to potential supervisors!

DO

Write a [statement of purpose](#) that is personal and well thought out...

...not cliché or filled with broad sweeping statements and random flattery of the program to which you are applying. Know what your purpose is? Explain who you are, what you want and why you want it from where you are applying.

Follow the department's directions to a tee. Rewrite, give drafts to your family, friends, etc. Make it punchy, personal and free of typos.

DO

Apply early.

Programs get flooded with late applicants who are making sudden life changes or who have just received a [rejection letter](#) from law school, med school, dentistry school, etc.

DO

Give the people writing your [letters of recommendation](#) at least four weeks' notice.

You want them to be thinking of you positively when they write that letter so the more leisurely and the more prepared they are the better the letter will be. If they are rushed at the last minute, they may feel frustrated or stressed, and that will have a negative impact on your recommendation. Too often, admissions committee chairs said, students received unflattering letters because they failed to ask whether the potential recommendation author would write a "strongly favourable" letter.

To help in getting a good letter, be sure to take the time to get to know your professors: go to drop in hours, have good attendance in class, and be an all-around engaged and diligent learner.

DON'T

Apply to a whole bunch of programs hoping that one has got to work out.

You need to learn the key details of a program, including faculty research interests and specific courses offered, before you apply. It is better to take the time and identify the programs that are best suited to you, tailor your application to that program and make connections with people there.

Take the time to do your research and know who the school's faculty members are and what they are known for, and play to those strengths in your application.

DON'T

Hand in an application that is unclear, disorganized, or contains spelling or grammatical mistakes.

This will give the impression that you are not clear about your purpose or do not take the application seriously.

DON'T

Overdo the flattery.

A number of admissions committee chairs have cited distaste for applications that include insincere flattery, such as praising the program in an obsequious manner. Other chairs added inappropriate name-dropping or blaming others for a poor academic record as potential kisses of death.



Clare Tattersall is the Manager of [Career Development and Community Based Learning](#) at Huron University College at Western University in London, Ont. She oversees the international exchange and internship programs, offers career counseling and development appointments and workshops, and has developed and implemented a co-curricular certificate in Leadership and Professional Development. Clare holds a Master's degree in English Language and Literature and has over 10 years of experience in the communications sector and post-secondary administration.