

Graduate School Application Task Checklist

The following is a general checklist of tasks to accomplish in the process of applying to graduate school. The process can vary depending on the discipline and degree you are pursuing, and whether you are applying to academic or professional programs, so you may need to supplement or adjust this list with tasks specific to the program and degree you are pursuing. The list is in roughly chronological order. **For a more thorough description of these tasks and a comprehensive timeline for the application process, please see Professor Bobrow for the Timeline handout.**

1. Research programs in chosen discipline. Match the discipline/degree to your desired career goals. For instance, if you want to be a college professor, you should focus either on doctoral programs or master's programs that will position you well to go on for doctoral studies. If you want to teach elementary or secondary school, you will need to have a Masters in Education. On the other hand, if you want to be a creative writer, you should focus on MFA programs. If you plan to apply to doctoral programs, it is essential to find out which programs excel in your intended area of specialization (e.g. Victorian studies, African-American literature, Romanticism). You should research schools and programs no later than the semester before you plan to apply.

2. Talk to an advisor and full-time faculty with whom you've taken courses. All English advisors can talk with you about graduate school requirements and possibilities. They can assess your academic record, recommend specific courses of study, and discuss your potential for graduate studies. Professor Bobrow conducts application and personal essay writing workshops each semester; he has detailed material on the application process and can work with you on all aspects of your application, especially your personal statement. Your full-time professors are well acquainted with graduate study in English and/or Creative Writing and can be very helpful in helping you to choose schools and programs best suited to your interests.

3. Consult catalogs, course offerings, and applications. Most schools post their graduate catalogs, including degree requirements, and department course offerings online. It's important to look at the specific requirements for each school and program you are considering. Almost all schools now have applications online. Read each application very carefully. Due dates, recommendations, essays, financial aid forms, and other requirements can vary significantly among schools and programs.

4. Make sure that you have fulfilled necessary pre-requisites or have planned to do so. Don't assume that all programs in a particular area (MA programs in English, for example) have the same pre-requisites. This is one of the reasons that it is important to research programs the year before you plan to apply.

5. Plan to take a test-prep course for the GRE or appropriate standardized exam (if required by programs to which you are applying). The fact is that prep courses often do make a positive difference. There are effective relatively low-cost courses. It is best to take the necessary exam either during the summer before you apply or early in the fall semester. And it is essential to know the dates on which the exams are administered. For instance, the English subject exam, required for many PhD programs, is given only three times per year. If you cannot take a test-prep course, make sure to spend at least two months preparing for the exam by using review books and online material.

6. Investigate scholarships, awards, and fellowships at Hunter, at the graduate institutions you are interested in, and through external foundations, organizations, and federal and state programs.

7. Make note of application deadlines and financial aid deadlines, which often differ. Also make note of application fees, which can be as high as \$125 per school. (It is sometimes possible to have those fees waived if you can demonstrate severe financial hardship.)

8. Finalize your list of schools. This should be done at the beginning of the semester in which you plan to apply.

9. Begin to work on your personal essay (statement of purpose) and think about which piece(s) of writing you will submit as a sample. These are two absolutely crucial parts of your application. Make sure to find out whether the programs you are interested in require writing samples and pay close attention to page requirements. Don't assume that the same personal essay can be used for all the schools you apply to. Read the essay assignment very closely and craft your essay to the specifics of the prompt for each school. If you are applying to doctoral programs, you will be expected to discuss your intended area of specialization. All MFA programs require a portfolio of your creative work; all PhD programs and many master's programs require a sample of your critical, research writing. You should start working on your writing sample no later than two months before the application is due.

10. Request faculty recommendations. It is highly advisable to do this at least two months in advance of the application deadline. When requesting letters of recommendation, talk to the professor in person about your plans and bring copies of papers you have written for his or her class (with whatever comments you received), especially if some time has passed since taking the course. If possible, you should also discuss what you plan to focus on in your personal essay.

11. Contact the schools you are interested in to see if it is possible to arrange a campus visit (if geographically feasible and if offered by the

school/program). If there is a graduate student association in the department/program, contact them. Students in the program can often provide valuable information that you will not find in catalogs or department web sites.

12. Request transcripts from the registrar. It is important to note deadlines for all the schools to which you are applying and make the transcript requests well in advance.

13. Finish your personal statement. The essay is a time consuming process that will likely include several drafts, which is why it is essential not to save it for the last minute.

14. Complete applications and submit. Do not wait until the application deadline; too many things can get in the way of submitting all the necessary elements on time. Follow up on letters of recommendation, if necessary, and get confirmation from the registrar that transcripts have been sent.

15. Look forward to letters of acceptance and the happy dilemma of choosing from among your top choices.