

Graduate School

MENTORING365™

This curriculum track is designed to guide you through the graduate school application process. Below are a few suggested discussion prompts and resources. Use only those resources that are relevant to you and will help you to make progress on the goals you have set with your mentor.

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Identifying graduate programs

There are many different types of graduate programs that may be of interest to you and it is worthwhile to invest the time early to identify a handful of programs that you are interested in. Begin with a very general search using [GradSchools.com](#) or other broad, general graduate school directory sites. These sites can be helpful for getting an overview of the plethora of graduate programs that are out there, but once you identify a few core schools, you should seek more detailed, department or program specific information. Your mentor can be a helpful resource in finding this information. Ask your mentor if they know of programs that excel in your desired research area. Also, find research papers that interest you and look up which labs or programs the authors are affiliated with. Depending on the program, you may also need to identify your advisor during the application process. In your search, you should also consider if you will require a research or teaching assistantship to fund your studies. Be sure to check out [AGU's Bridge Program](#) as an alternative route to geoscience graduate school application process.

Taking required entrance exams

Once you have selected the schools you wish to apply to, identify the required entrance exams at each school, such as the [GRE](#) or [TOEFL](#). Plan and schedule any required tests well in advance of the application deadline. Select a test date that will allow your scores to be sent to the institutions with time to spare prior to the application deadline. Also, be sure you to take any [subject tests](#) that may be required by your programs of interest. These days, most graduate programs [don't require entrance exams!](#) Check out this [database](#) to see if the program you are interested in requires the GRE or other exams.

Funding for graduate school

Paying for graduate school can be tricky. Many PhD programs provide research assistantships or teaching assistantships, which each carry unique responsibilities and requirements. Funding can be harder to come by for master's programs, but it is not impossible. The [College Affordability Guide offers a great overview on paying for graduate school](#). Similarly, [Collegescholarships.org](#) maintains a large directory of scholarship and grant opportunities. Funding varies greatly by country and you should be aware of the citizenship or residency

requirements of each funding source. Most institutions will provide resources with information about outside funding opportunities. Ask your mentor if they have any advice for securing funding for graduate school.

Finding an advisor

Some graduate programs require you to identify a research advisor during the application process. For this reason, it is best to make contact with potential advisors early relative to the application deadline. Forming a professional relationship with a potential advisor will increase the chances of them wanting to bring you into their research group. Professor David Evans from the University of Virginia has created a [great resource](#) on how to compose your initial email to prospective research advisors.

Letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation are critical in the application process because they let the admissions committee see who you are in the eyes of others. It is imperative to support those whom you ask to write a recommendation letter to produce a quality submission. Ensure that you allocate ample time for the recommender to submit the letter on your behalf. You should provide supplemental materials for the recommender, such as your current CV, as well as information pertinent to your application that you would like them to highlight. Some recommenders may also ask you to draft a letter that they can personalize. The Graduate Division at Cornell has compiled a helpful list of [Tips for Requesting Letters of Recommendation](#).

Statement of purpose

Nearly all graduate programs will require a statement of purpose. A statement of purpose differs from the personal statement of undergraduate applications, in that it includes less personal information and more about your ambitions as a researcher. Why are you interested in pursuing a graduate degree? What are your long and short-term career goals? These are the types of questions that you should address in your statement. Some programs may request additional information. Be sure to identify exactly what is expected for your application. The University of California, Los Angeles provides a [Statement of Purpose Guide](#) catered towards STEM graduate applicants.

A look at the other side of graduate school admissions

Before you submit your application, consider how your application will be received from the review panel. What you think is compelling may not translate for an admissions officer. Read about the graduate admissions process from the perspective of an admissions officer and gain perspective on how certain decisions are made in the Discover article, [The Other Side of Graduate Admissions](#) by Julianne Dalcanton.

Interview tips

Some graduate programs may also require an in-person interview after the first few rounds of application reviews. This is a chance for the admissions panel to get to know you in person and ensure you are a good fit for the program. To prepare for the interview, check out [this](#) list of tips compiled by the Western Illinois University.

Waiting for admissions

After submitting your application for graduate school, waiting for a decision can be nerve-racking. Check out this comedic article about the [10 stages of waiting for graduate school admissions decisions](#), as told by the Office's Dwight Shrute. Ask your mentor for tips on coping with the waiting game.

After the acceptance

Once accepted to a graduate program, there is still a lot that needs to be completed before you attend. Are your finances in order? Do you need to plan the logistics of relocating? US News has compiled a list of [7 Steps After Being Admitted to Graduate School](#). Ask your mentor to help you create a customized list of action items to help you prepare for the start of your graduate program.