

Graduate School

Winning Strategies for Getting In
With or Without Excellent Grades

Chapter 9 Little Steps Where Most Students Stumble

Proper Timing and Following Up

Curriculum vitae and Resumes

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Chapter 9

Little Steps Where Most Students Stumble

Proper Timing and Following Up

Admissions committees get irritated by having to consider incomplete application files. In fact, many programs strictly adhere to their deadlines and will not consider an application if any of the required components are missing or late. Even when you are applying to a program that allows a little bit of leeway, perhaps a few days or even a week or two past the published deadline, you should never miss that deadline. For one thing, you usually do not know in advance which programs have absolute deadlines and which ones allow a bit of flexibility. Even when they allow you to get away with it, being late makes a bad impression, and as I have stressed repeatedly, negative impressions can be difficult to reverse.

It is *your* responsibility to make sure that all of your application materials have arrived and are in your file by the deadline. It is not the responsibility of the graduate program staff to track down missing materials. Although some programs send postcards to applicants prior to the deadline, indicating the components that have or have not yet arrived, this is more of a courtesy than an obligation. An irritating tendency of some graduate school applicants is that they do not allow themselves enough time and then expect to receive some kind of special consideration when they miss a deadline. No matter

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what the excuse for being late is, they are unlikely to get much sympathy.

Even though most students aim to just meet the deadline date, there is really no reason why you should not be early, and there are many advantages to beating the deadline by a couple of weeks. For one thing, if you apply early you can wait patiently to receive confirmation that everything is in order, without losing any sleep over it. If for some reason a standardized test score or a transcript request is not processed properly, then you will still have time to correct the situation prior to the deadline. If you plan to beat an application deadline by a few weeks, then you are less likely to be rushing to get things together at the last moment. It is usually obvious from the quality of the application materials when students were disorganized and did not have enough time to do things properly.

Graduate Program Directors and secretaries don't like it when students call or drop by on the application deadline date, or perhaps a few days afterwards, and plead or insist on submitting an application, while promising that he or she will get all documentation in within the next week or so. Although many programs offer some leeway in accepting late applications, it is generally very difficult to obtain adequate documentation in time for a fair evaluation by the admissions committee. Trying to submit an application at this point is generally a waste of everyone's time!

There are additional reasons why you should try to get your application in a few weeks early: First, it will be noticed that you are well-organized. Second, you will appear to be enthusiastic about the program. Third, some programs actually begin reviewing applications before the deadline, even though most of them have not yet arrived. Application files that are reviewed early may receive a more careful evaluation. The more closely your application is looked over and the fewer competing applications there are at the time yours is evaluated, the more likely it is to stand out from the crowd.

Note that it is *not* a good idea to send individual items as you complete them with the idea that you are at least getting some parts of your application in early. Graduate program staff find it irritating to deal with items that trickle in one at a time, and there is more chance of something being misfiled or lost when this happens. You should only send in a complete application, unless other instructions

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While it is advantageous to the applicant to submit an early application, one or two weeks early will suffice. There is no point in submitting an application months early. There can be a problem keeping track of the application and later in identifying it.

The key to getting everything in on time with a minimum of stress and anxiety is to begin early. You need to begin taking the necessary steps well in advance of the application deadlines. Many students underestimate the amount of time involved in properly filling out application forms and writing a good personal statement or essay, the typical lags between when transcripts or standardized test scores are requested and when they actually arrive at their destinations, and the ideal amount of time that referees expect to have when asked for letters of recommendation. You need to make arrangements for things like transcripts, standardized test scores, and letters of recommendation several weeks prior to the deadlines. And in each instance you need to follow up at both ends, first to make sure that the materials have been sent, and later to make sure that they have been received.

If an international student is submitting an application, extra time over and above that suggested for North American students must be provided for receipt of all documentation, particularly transcripts and letters of recommendation.

In addition to these minimum time requirements, it is important to leave extra time in case any of the offices responsible for processing your requests make errors, or encounter technical delays. A transcript or standardized test score might not be sent out in a timely fashion because the original request was misplaced. It might be sent to the wrong address. A referee for one of your letters of recommendation might think your completed letter has been mailed, when it has really fallen behind her desk. Even the postal service is not perfect and things occasionally get lost in the mail. Any of these occurrences can cause significant delays in getting the required materials to their des-

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