

STUDY ABROAD

Demystifying the grad school application process

Aside from your degree and transcripts, another important document in your applications is your CV or resume. CVs are longer and more detailed and more commonly used in academically focused programmes, while resumes are more concise, usually one to two pages long, focused on quantifying your relevant working experience, and used in more professionally orientated programmes.

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Every year, graduate programmes around the world open up applications, and thousands of prospective students pour their hearts (and wallets) out in hopes of getting in. However, there seems to be a mystique shrouding a fairly straightforward process. While grad school applications may vary according to the country, school, and degree-specific requirements, they all have a few standard components:

DEADLINES

This is arguably the easiest yet most underestimated aspect of the application process. It's best to keep in mind the specific dates and deadlines of your intended programmes to ensure you don't miss the application deadlines. Most universities have three rounds, and by rule of thumb, the earlier you apply, the less competition for seats and aid you'll face.

ACADEMIC DOCUMENTS

Your transcripts are a very crucial part of the entire application process, as they give the admissions committee a window into your previous academic performance and help them gauge how you could perform in the programme. It's important to remember that institutes will ask for attested and official transcripts and certificates upon acceptance,

so it's best to plan ahead and keep these on hand as soon as you are done with your degree or are eligible to collect. While most UK and Australian programmes will accept documents outright, many US and Canadian institutes will require a credential evaluation to ensure that your degree is equivalent to a North American 4-year degree. Getting a credential evaluation is a lengthy process that may take up to a couple of months and has several logistical hurdles to overcome; thus, it's best to research if your institute requires an evaluation beforehand and get one done as early as you can.

Aside from your degree and transcripts, another important document in your applications is your CV or resume. CVs are longer and more detailed and more commonly used in academically focused programmes, while resumes are more concise, usually one to two pages long, focused on quantifying your relevant working experience, and used in more professionally orientated programmes. It's best to ensure that your CV or resume is tailored to the programme you are applying to through quantified, relevant achievements.

STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE OR INTENT

Your statements of purpose/intent are the heart of your grad school application. This is the only place where you can speak to the admissions committee directly

and tell your story beyond numbers. While this is the most variable part of the application, depending on your specific degree and school, as a rule of thumb, most statements of purpose are 500-1000 words long and ask you to essentially pitch why you'd be a good candidate for the programme. It's important to tie together your personal story, background, and academic and non-academic interests into a coherent piece explaining why you want to attend (in other words, a fanfiction) that makes you

stand out to the person reading it.

And while it's okay to use AI in the drafting process, please don't outright use AI-written content in your submissions unless you want to get your application straight up thrown out. However, it is a good idea to get your essays reviewed by your peers, friends, and faculty members and take their feedback to make sure you are showing up as your most authentic self.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Many academic programmes want letters of recommendation (LOR) from individuals who can attest to your academic or industrial performance and capabilities. LORs from friends and family members are usually discouraged, and these recommendations are usually requested from someone who has managed or worked with you and can speak candidly of your performance. A common recurring theme in this article is doing your research and work beforehand, and requesting LORs is no exception to this. It's best to request someone for a recommendation a couple of months in advance and help them draft it by providing them with additional information they may not know. However, it's not a good idea to draft it for them or use AI to draft it for them. You should also be mindful of when they are due and give your referees ample time to draft and submit them within the deadline.

STANDARDISED TESTS

This is often the most dreaded hurdle to cross when applying for graduate programmes. If you're applying abroad, be prepared to sit for a standardised English language test. While IELTS remains king, TOEFL, PTE, and even the Duolingo English test have gained considerable acceptance worldwide, so you have the option of choosing the one that works best for you; just make sure it's accepted by the institute you are applying to.

On the other hand, degrees that are quantitatively rigorous will often require a GRE score to get admission, while the GMAT is more commonly used for business school and management degrees. While there are pros and cons to both, they are both tests that should not be taken lightly. As they are both difficult and expensive, they can be retaken only a certain number of times in a calendar year. A word of advice would be to research if your university has GRE or GMAT scores posted in their class profiles and to aim for the middle 80 percent scores at a minimum. There's also a plethora of free and paid prep materials available on the internet, so you get to pick your poison, but as a rule of thumb, it's best to be able to factor in retakes and dedicate two to three months of full-time study before sitting for any of these exams.



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