GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

Apply as early as possible for the following reasons:
- If you’re in college, you really don’t want to be working on applications during finals or end-of-term work, if possible
- You will want to be ready for something to go wrong
- The sooner you get your application in, the sooner you can have the school track what information has arrived. Don’t assume that if you submit everything right before the deadline it’s all going to make it!
- You will have more time to work on your personal statements
- Professors need time to write letters and yours won’t be the only one; make your request the first one they get
- Sometimes schools start reviewing applications early, in which case earlier applications are usually at an advantage.

June-August
- Research graduate schools and potential advisors.
- Look up departments’ websites and read the profiles of the faculty members at each school. Are their research interests compelling to you?
- Check out the program requirements and the typical time to earn the PhD.
- You may wish to start working on your personal statements. You do not need to see the individual schools' questions in order to start on these. Thinking about this now means you’ll have a lot less to do later.
- You may wish to get started on your curriculum vitae. Write a rough draft to bring to a professor or career services once you get to school in the fall.
- If you haven’t taken the GRE, try to take it over the summer when you are likely to be less busy than during the fall semester. Taking the GRE early is good because you don't want to spend too much time preparing for it while you are writing applications, and it will afford you time to comfortably take it a second time, should you wish to do so.

August-October
- Start checking graduate school websites in late August for application availability.
- Organize! The application process is extremely complex and can get confusing quickly. Some schools require you to send materials to the graduate school; some to the department; some to both. Most schools have at least part of the application online, but many have a paper component as well. Transcripts and GREs may be sent any number of places. Some schools have different requirements.
- As soon as the applications come out, start downloading forms for recommendation letters, financial aid, and application checklists.
- Enter application requirements and deadlines for each school into a spreadsheet.
September
- Finalize your c.v.

- Write a first draft of your statement of purpose or at least a statement of research interests for your letter writers to use. The more information you give to a professor about yourself, the better.

- If you haven’t already taken the GRE, take it this month. Note that you are able to send up to four score reports FREE when you take the GRE, saving you up to $60. Before you go into the test, decide on what schools you want to send the scores to. Then, look up their instructions on where to send them. It may be the department OR the graduate school. If you choose the wrong one, you will have to pay for the scores to be sent to the other place later on.

September-October
- Ask your professors for letters of recommendation. It is preferable you do this by late October, to give them at least one month to write the letter.

October
- Get in touch with potential advisors at schools on your list, and see if they are taking on graduate students. This step is optional, but highly recommended for the following reasons:
  1. You may discover that some of the people you were most interested in working with are not in fact taking students. Indeed, this might be enough for you to cut a school off of your list. Better do this now than find this same information out in March via a rejection letter, after you've put in all of the effort and money.
  2. You will get your name into the ether and will have a greater chance therefore of being a recognizable name when the applications are being considered. Professors are pretty objective in the application process, but name recognition always helps, especially if you also get the chance to discuss research ideas with them.
  3. If you can have a conversation with a professor either over the phone or in person as part of a visit, your statement of purpose will be much easier to write, because you'll know what research to focus on.

- Get application packets out to your recommenders this month. Include a checklist for them with every deadline and method of filling out the form (online, paper to be returned to you, paper to be sent directly.)

- Order and send your transcripts.

- Send your GRE scores (typically takes two weeks)

October-November
- Work on your statement of purpose.

November
- Start and ideally finish submitting applications.

December-January
- Wait....wait....wait....

- You should start to hear back from schools as early as January.

Adapted from http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mooreks/apptimeline.html