**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNklqIvYa5E>**

**STEP 0: Decide to apply for grad school**

This might seem a no-brainer but many people actually suffer because they have not made up their mind about this. You need to be a 100% sure that you actually want to go into a grad school because it requires a lot of work and commitment. This would be a big change in your life, so evaluate all your options and then decide if getting in a grad school is what you want to do at this point in your life.

If you need help convincing yourself to pursue higher education, read my article on: [Why higher studies? | Grad School Advice - MS/PhD | Gradvisors](https://www.thegradvisors.com/study-more/)

**STEP 1: Prepare your profile**

*Convince the grad school committee that you have acumen for research.*

Stated in brevity, this sentence is very open ended and actually holds a lot of substance. In a nutshell, you have to convince the people evaluating your application that you’re actually interested in taking up a graduate degree course at their university and that you are indeed a very worthy candidate for it. How you actually achieve this is a combination of having a strong GPA in your undergrad, intensive project work, publications in journals/conferences, strong Letters of Recommendation and a compelling Statement of Purpose and good GRE/GMAT scores.

Your selection depends on all the above mentioned factors and probably some more. Although it’s hard to determine the exact weight that each of them carry in the decision making process, I can share my thoughts about it.

* Your GPA and project/course and research work is probably the most important part of the whole package. If you’re still in college, focus on maintaining a high GPA through your final semester. If you haven’t already talk to a professor and get started on a project outside of your regular coursework. This will have a 2-fold impact: you’ll get a project on your resume and build your relations with the professor for a good LOR. If you’ve already graduated, you can focus on getting impactful projects at your company and scout people for writing an LOR for you. You should try to get something published, even if it is in an unpopular journal/conference. This would show the selection committee that you at least tried for it and will still be better than nothing.
* Don’t worry if you have missed the GPA boat. While it surely is important, it’s not the end of the world if you don’t have exceptional GPA in your undergrad. Writing a good SOP, combined with high GRE scores and strong LORs can get you back in the game. You can use the SOP to summarize all your achievements, overshadow your limitations and prove why you are the most suitable student for that MS program. The SOP can make or break your application after you’ve cleared all the eligibility criteria. Finally the LORs attest all other parts of application by giving a stamp of approval for your skills.
* Scores from standardized tests (GRE/GMAT and TOEFL/IELTS) are more of an eligibility criteria. While good scores do not really improve your chances but bad scores will surely hurt them. Super high scores might earn you some brownie points in the case of GRE. TOEFL is purely an eligibility criteria and nothing else.

The articles in [Preparation Archives | Grad School Advice - MS/PhD | Gradvisors](https://www.thegradvisors.com/category/preparation/) can give you some tips and pointers to ace different parts of your preparation.

One analogy that I amuse myself with is to relate the selection process of a grad school to the process of choosing a restaurant for dinner:

Restaurants (Students) need to pass a certain food quality check by the FDA (GRE/TOEFL) in order to be on your list of choices. They might have highly qualified chefs which excel in the culinary art (good resume and rich academic background) but it is their ads (SOP) that make an impact on your mind. However, it is not until you read some great reviews (Letters of recommendation) that you actually make your decision.

**STEP 2: Choose the universities to apply**

Assuming you are all prepared, it is now time to choose the universities that you should apply to. Choosing the universities is a non-trivial task and you should do it with sincerity. The old adage goes “divide your university in three groups: safe, medium and dream to maximise your chances of getting in the best possible university for you”. You should also consider factors like funding, program offerings and the location when choosing a university. Consult this article if you need more help: [How to shortlist universities for graduate studies? | Grad School Advice - MS/PhD | Gradvisors](https://www.thegradvisors.com/shortlist-universities/)

Timely choosing the university can help you minimise your application costs as you can choose to send your GRE/TOEFL scores to some of the schools of your choice for free.

**STEP 3: Apply and wait for the results**

The final step is to actually prepare the application package for each university and submit them in a timely manner.

* Make sure your test scores reach the school on time.
* Timely check with your recommenders to see if they’ll be able to submit your LOR before the deadline.
* Try to customise your SOP for every school that you apply. A personalised SOP has a better impact on the reader.
* Have the transcripts from your current school ready before hand.
* Make sure you fill in all the required parts of the application. Some universities have extra requirements.
* If you’ve to physically mail in your application, choose a reputed courier service for reliability.

With all the preparation and some luck by your side, you can surely get into the best graduate school possible ;)

As you would have already guessed, I have a blog where I write about this stuff in order to help students like me realise their grad school dreams: [Grad School Advice - MS/PhD | Gradvisors | One stop for all your higher education queries!](https://www.thegradvisors.com/)

You can also follow my Facebook page to stay updated with helpful posts on grad life: [Gradvisors](http://www.facebook.com/gradvisors" \o "www.facebook.com" \t "_blank)