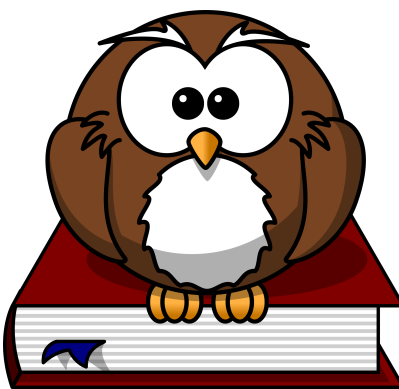


Applying to grad school*

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Overview

- Introductions
- Things you should know about grad school
- Preparing to apply
- The application process
- Timeline
- Q&A

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1 Things you should know about grad school



1.1 What is grad school?

- *Grad school* is an umbrella term for three very different things: **professional Master's** degrees, **academic Master's** degrees, and **(academic) PhD** programs.
 - **Professional Master's programs** typically:
 - * take one to two years to complete;
 - * give no funding;
 - * train you in skills required for entry into a particular profession or industry (computational linguistics, speech language pathology, language education, translation/interpretation);
 - * do not focus on research or teaching linguistics itself.
 - **Academic Master's programs** typically:
 - * take one to two years to complete;
 - * give no funding or less funding than PhD programs;
 - * allow you to gain research (and teaching) experience;
 - * culminate in a MA thesis;
 - * make your application to PhD programs much more competitive;
 - * make professional applications to some industry positions more competitive;
 - * fall into two categories:
 - American “bridging” MAs, which round out a BA training in Ling or a related field with advanced coursework and individual research;
 - Specialized Master's programs, which involve intensive training in a very particular field (e.g. formal logic).
 - **PhD programs** typically:
 - * take five to six years to complete;
 - * cover tuition and fees and provide a modest stipend for living expenses¹;
 - * allow you to gain research and teaching experience;
 - * can allow you to get a Master's degree along the way;

¹Advice passed down to us when we were undergrads: PhDs in Linguistics are long time commitments towards professional training in a field with a small number of job openings. For this reason, you shouldn't ever consider going into debt for a PhD. In fact, if a PhD program requires you to pay tuition, it is a good sign that it is not a high-quality program, and you should stay away.

- * culminate in a dissertation;
 - * differ greatly in US and non-US contexts: we'll talk about the US ones;
 - * make you eligible to apply for professorships.
- NB: Since we pursued academic training, we don't have a lot of specific information about professional Master's programs. That doesn't mean they are somehow inferior or less popular than the academic path: they are frequently a safer investment of time and money, and very popular.
 - Grad school is very different from undergrad
 - Undergrad
 - * focuses on **general education** with one or two specializations;
 - * is comprised mainly of **coursework**;
 - * is evaluated by course performance (**grades**);
 - * prepares for many **careers** or **advanced studies**.
 - Grad school
 - * is **highly specialized** and has **no** general education requirements;
 - * is comprised only **partly** of coursework;
 - * is evaluated mainly by **quality** and **productivity** of research;
 - * emphasizes the relation between you and your **advisor**;
 - * prepares you for a career in **academia**.

1.2 Why get a PhD?

- You want to contribute to your field of study, and make contributing your career.
- You have a passion for teaching about your field of study.
- You want to do in-depth research in a particular field; you have ideas and questions that you want answers to.
- “Go to grad school if you'd be happy spending five years living on a modest income and doing something you love with no guarantee of the job that you've trained for” (modified, author unknown).
- Note: if you have some doubts about whether all of these apply to you... talk to grad students and learn more about why they do what they do, what they like and do not like.
- You should *not* go to grad school if:
 - you're not sure what you want to do and you just want to take some time to decide;
 - you want a continuation of undergrad or just want to take more courses in your field;
 - you want a 9-5 job;
 - you care deeply about where you end up geographically.

2 Preparing to apply



If you're early in your BA and thinking about applying to grad school, some advice:

- Get involved with research as soon as possible! There are many research projects in our department that recruit undergraduate RAs, and on some occasions these positions can be paid.
- Take upper div courses with final papers, and invest significant energy in these projects. Rather than just a course requirement, these are opportunities to begin your own longer-term research projects.
- Follow up with the faculty in these courses, and see if they would be willing to help you polish your work.
- Look for venues to present your work: we have LURC and SURU, and there are occasionally undergraduate Linguistics conferences with open submissions elsewhere.
- After you have completed your upper divs, consider talking to faculty about participating in graduate classes at UCSC.
- Keep an eye out for linguistics events in the area, you can go! They are included in WHASC (department colloquia, national conferences, regional conferences). Also note that in the current moment, many big conferences are offering free registration and online participation (GLOW, CogSci).

When looking for programs:

- Talk to a faculty member who knows you about their recommendations.
- Talk to grad students at your institutions, like your TAs, for advice on how they navigated the process.
- Think about your interests and what subfield(s) you would like to do research in. This can change, of course, but it is good to have a starting point.
- Get an idea about what programs will suit your interests and goals:
 - Follow faculty/mentor guidance! They know the lay of the land.
 - Have you read any interesting papers recently? Look up where the authors got their PhDs, or where they teach now.
 - Look on department websites, checking out the list of faculty (and their specializations and recent publications) and also the list of recent graduates. Where are their graduates now? Have they been successful?

- NB: Don't do this by name alone. Some of America's more prestigious institutions have Linguistics PhD programs which are not as well-respected as, say, UCSC's (though note our bias), e.g. Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Dartmouth....

3 The application process



3.1 Your application materials

1. Transcripts

- Schools want to see high grades, especially in courses in your field of study.
- Some programs have a minimum GPA for applicants, which can be found on the departments' websites.
- Having upper-division courses on your transcript helps.

2. Writing sample

- This is the most important part of your application. It shows that you're capable of doing independent research.
- Ideally, your writing sample should be a research paper. This should not simply summarize facts. Instead, it should propose a novel analysis of data or contribute in some way to an open research question.
- It can be a final paper for a course, an honor's thesis, etc. Consult with faculty.

3. Strong letters of recommendation

- Most departments in linguistics will ask for three (sometimes even four) letters of recommendation.
- Make sure to ask professors in the field who know you and your work.
- If possible, ask professors who know the department(s) you're applying to, and who are known by people of those departments.
- Give professors plenty of time to write the letter.

4. The GRE

- Linguistics as a field doesn't care as much about your GRE scores as other fields, but it's still important to prepare and do your best.
- Some linguistics departments don't even require you to report your GRE scores.
- There are some free prep tests available online: POWERPREP practice tests, math reviews and more at ets.org

5. Personal statement

- Sometimes referred to as *Statement of purpose* or *Statement of intent*
- Personal statements are different for everyone.
- A good place to start is personal statements of successful applications. You can ask current graduate students or professors.
- Your personal statement should definitely include:
 - what your interests in the field are;
 - what experience (both educational and professional) you have that will make you a successful graduate student;
 - evidence that you're capable of completing a research project;
 - why you want to pursue graduate studies;
 - why you're applying to the specific program you're submitting the statement to; this portion should be changed for every school you apply to.

6. The application fee

1. These can be high and they vary from school to school (\$65-125).
2. Some schools have fee waivers available to certain students. Make sure to check.

3.2 The timeline

You might decide to go right to grad school from undergrad, or you might take a year (or several) in between.

3.3 Going right to grad school

Before applying: about 1 year before you want to apply, throughout your penultimate year of undergrad.

1. Follow suggestions from above about taking advanced courses, getting involved in research, etc.
2. Develop relationships with faculty members and communicate your interest in graduate school.
3. Start working on a research paper, something that can be used as a writing sample. Again, this could be a final paper for a class.
4. If the programs you are interested in require GRE, study and take the exam.

5. Start thinking about potential programs, but you don't need to have a finalized list.

Preparing the application: Late summer and fall of application year.

1. Finalize the list of schools you're applying to, following advice from mentors.
2. Work on your application materials; personal statements should be tailored to each program. Get feedback from mentors on these materials (and remember to give them plenty of time).
3. Ask faculty for letters of recommendation, at least a month in advance of when they need to submit them, and then send a reminder a week or two before the deadline – they are busy! It can be helpful to give them a cheat sheet about your time with them (took x class, worked on y project in a lab, wrote z paper together, etc.) so they have the specifics readily available.
4. Keep an eye on submission deadlines – different schools will have different dates.
5. Submit!

After applications are submitted.

1. Wait to hear back.
2. Some programs will contact you for an interview, usually January-February.
3. Receive decisions, February-March.
4. Open houses: some programs invite admitted students to visit the department in person, costs covered. This is a really great opportunity to get a feel for each department and talk to faculty and graduate students. There are a lot of resources out there compiling lists of questions to ask and what to look out for. If you aren't able to attend in person, the department will likely be willing to set up remote calls with faculty and students, which you should take advantage of. Some programs will invite applicants before acceptance, and the interview will be conducted during the visit.
5. You must decide by **April 15** by informing the department you choose that you intend to enroll, and then notifying the schools you won't be attending.
6. Thank yous! Remember to thank your faculty mentors/letter writers and give them updates. They're rooting for you! If you have to reject a program, it's usually done through an online portal or by notifying one of the department staff members, but it's a good idea to send additional emails to faculty you met with to thank them for their time and let them know of your plans. It's a small field, and you will likely be seeing them around, and could potentially work with them in the future.

3.4 Taking time off

Taking time off can be a great way to be sure you want to go to graduate school, to have more time to refine your application materials (if you are working on an honors thesis, you can now use it as your writing sample), to save some money, and just to take a break from being in school. Phase 1 of the timeline above can now extend into the last year of undergrad.

Some things to consider during the last year of your undergrad:

- Talk with faculty about your plans. Let your faculty mentor(s) know both that you want to apply to graduate school eventually and that you plan to take some time off.
- Consider whether you want a job in a related field: there are a (small) number of research positions available in linguistics targeted to recent BAs, such as lab manager positions and research assistantships. Check places like linguistlist, and ask your mentors if they have subfield-specific recommendations. These positions usually start being posted in **early spring**.
- Depending on the jobs you apply for, you will need a resume or CV. Consult mentors or the career center for advice and for edits to your materials.

Some things to consider during your break:

- If you are in a linguistics-related job, talk to your boss or mentor at work about your grad school plans. Try to cultivate a relationship there that could lead to good research experience and a good letter of recommendation. This won't be feasible in all jobs.
- Regardless, maintain your relationship to your undergraduate mentors and try to stay involved in research. This could look like expanding a paper you wrote for one of your professors in undergrad or joining a project with a faculty member remotely.
- Research experience in a non-linguistics field also demonstrates the kind of skills you need in grad school.
- Depending on the job, you might not have the time or ability to continue research. The most important thing is to keep open lines of communication with mentors who can help you through the process.

Once you're ready to apply, follow the timeline specified above, beginning by having your application materials solidified fall of the year you aim to apply.

4 Resources

- Linguistlist: <https://linguistlist.org/>
- Linguistics Society of America: <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/>
- Directory of Linguistics Departments: <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/programs>

5 Q&A

