Creating A Timeline For The Application Process
You will need to do a significant amount of work before you apply to graduate school. You will need time to identify potential programs, contact the schools, and potentially visit the programs. All of this takes planning. Your time and effort will pay off when you are selected to a program that is a good fit for you and your career goals. Your planning should start in your junior year (or earlier) and will go through your senior year.

An approximate timeline to help you is below:

Junior Year (Or Earlier):
Identify your academic and career goals.
- Finding the right program depends on knowing what it is you want to study and the requirements of the types of jobs you plan to pursue. You do not need to be absolutely sure of your future before you begin exploring; start with what interests you most and go from there. Exploring graduate programs will help you see the differences that exist between programs and will help you refine your interests. Your career center can help you too.
- Generate a list of schools that interest you and visit their websites. Read about course offerings, the professors’ research interests, and, if you can, visit the campuses.

Prepare academically.
- Keep your grades high while completing a rigorous undergraduate curriculum. Be aware of the prerequisites for the programs that interest you and identify the exam you need to complete to be admitted. Many schools require the Graduate Records Examination (GRE).
- Admission exams can be completed throughout the year. It is important to prepare for them. Practice tests are often a useful gage to determine if you are ready for the exam.

Build professional relationships.
- Visit faculty members during their office hours. Be sure to attend the lab meetings if you are conducting undergraduate research. Try to attend a professional conference and meet others doing research that interests you. These relationships will be important when you request letters of recommendation.

Start thinking about finances
- Figure out how much graduate school will cost including: tuition, fees, books, and living expenses. Research fellowships and assistantships in your field and stay on top of all application deadlines.

Summer Before Senior Year:
Organize your application process.
- Decide which schools are your top choices. You should apply to a range of schools including some you want to attend, but may not be the strongest candidate academically,
some you have a very good chance of being accepted, and a couple that you regard as back-up programs – they have the program you want, but are not as prestigious as you would like.

- Carefully research your choice of department, degree program, and potential advisor.
- Communicate with your potential advisor or advisors well in advance of the application deadline. Often, a letter of introduction, indicating your research interest and an overview of your background, is a good way to start.
- Arrange to make a visit to the department so that you can meet that person, other potential faculty advisors, and graduate students. Ask the graduate students about their impression of the department and your potential advisor, and try to get more than one opinion. Remember that you will be interacting on a daily basis with your faculty advisor for at least four or five years, and after your degree, will rely on that person for advice and letters of recommendation. Base your selection upon as much information as possible.
- Find out when applications will be available and when they will be due.
- Study for entrance exams. The summer can be a good time to finish your exam preparation.
- Find out how to request transcripts and how long it takes to obtain them.
- Talk to your professional mentors about letters of recommendation. Who you ask to write letter(s) of recommendation will depend on the type of program you want to enter. For example, a professor might have a specialty in an area one of your prospective graduate schools has a strong reputation. No matter whom you choose, give them plenty of time and send them some information about your academic and professional preparation when you request a letter. You could send them your transcripts, a draft of your personal statement, and / or your resume. Send a thank-you note once your professor submits his or her letter!

**Fall Semester, Senior Year:**

**Apply.**

- Some of your applications might be due in the late fall. Create a calendar with the application deadlines for the schools to which you are applying, the number of letters of recommendation needed for each school, the number of transcripts you will need, and any other application materials required. Your career services office can help you write a resume that is tailored to the school(s) to which you are applying. Take time writing your personal statement, it will not come together well at the last minute and you will want to have serval people read through it and give you feedback.
- Take your standardized exam; for example, the GRE or GMAT. Generally, it is best to complete your exam by the end of October.

**Write Your Essay**

- Draft your personal statement. If you are having trouble with structure or what to write, ask your career center, academic advisor, or the Writing Center for assistance. If you feel comfortable doing so, ask for help from one of the professors writing a letter of recommendation for you.

**Identify how you will pay for school.**

- Search for scholarships and financial aid. Also, check loan or fellowship options with your prospective graduate schools. Many graduate programs offer funding through research or teaching assistantships. Ask your targeted programs about these opportunities.
- Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1. To qualify for federal aid you will fill out the same form for graduate school as you did for your undergraduate degree. Keep in mind that all graduate students are considered independent for federal aid calculations.
Winter Break and Spring Semester, Senior Year:
Send the applications.
- Submit your applications (check deadlines, many applications are due before Spring Semester begins!). It is common for students to finalize their applications during winter break. Before you mail the applications, make copies of all materials in case you have to resend them. Send your applications via certified mail to verify delivery. Many schools send a receipt letter or postcard after they receive your application. If you do not get one from a school to which you applied, follow-up with that school.

Prepare for your admissions interview.
- Practice before your interview, if possible. Your career center may have resources to help you prepare.
- Develop answers to the sample questions in the handout titled, “Questions For Graduate School Interview”

Keep your eye on your mailbox.
- In March and April, you should start receiving admission offers.
- Inform the school in writing (or via the school’s preferred method) that you have decided to attend. Also, take time to inform the schools you are not attending that you are declining the offer.
- Send thank-you notes to those who assisted in the application process such as professors and advisors. They will want to hear your quest to enter graduate school was a success!

Resources
- Grad Café - http://thegradcafe.com/
- Grad schools.com - http://www.gradschools.com/
- ScienceCareers - http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/