

Being A Competitive Candidate

Programs differ in how competitive they are for admission and what they prioritize in candidates. Not all universities have a centralized graduate school office, but for those that do, there may be separate requirements for both the graduate school and the specific department you're applying to. While meeting the minimum requirements is necessary, it doesn't guarantee admission. A better indicator of acceptance is how your qualifications compare to the average of current students in the program. Keep these key points in mind:

Tips for Advantage:

GPA: A GPA of 3.0 is often the minimum requirement, but the average GPA of graduate students is usually much higher. Some programs place more importance on grades in specific courses; for instance, in medical school, performance in science prerequisites is crucial.

TIPS: Aim for strong grades, particularly in your final years of college and in courses related to your field. Many graduate programs prioritize recent academic performance when considering applicants.

Test Scores: Test type and score requirements differ by institution and program. While there are usually minimum scores considered, the average scores of admitted students are often much higher. Some programs place more weight on certain sections of the test. Make sure to check the specific requirements.

TIPS: Dedicate time to studying and getting familiar with the test format. If you find standardized tests challenging, consider enrolling in a test-preparation course to help with required exams. Keep your budget in mind, as these courses can be costly!

Relevant Experience: Experience from internships, fieldwork, practicums, volunteering, independent studies, research, and similar activities can demonstrate your commitment and suitability for the program, while also helping you gain a deeper understanding of the field and build a strong professional network.

TIPS: Stay informed about the latest trends and skills in your chosen profession, such as artistic techniques, computer skills, communication abilities, or analytical skills. Focus on developing strong writing and research skills during your undergraduate years or while employed. Look for opportunities to collaborate with faculty on research projects.

References: References and strong networking with faculty and staff can sometimes give your application a significant boost. Seek out opportunities to connect with individuals at your current institution, the schools you're interested in, and within your field.

TIPS: Arrange informational interviews with professionals in your field or alumni from the graduate program you're considering. Visit your top-choice schools and schedule an informational interview with the program chair or a relevant professor.

Professional Application: While GPA and test scores are important objective factors, strong application materials give the admissions team a deeper understanding of your place and potential for success in the program. Reviewers are looking for clear writing, organization, attention to detail, and relevant skills and experience.

TIPS: Take advantage of resources to craft standout resumes, personal statements, and essays, and have your statement reviewed by a qualified editor, such as staff from the Career Development Center. Build and maintain a portfolio that includes letters of reference, writing samples, and relevant projects.