

10 TIPS FOR UNDERGRADUATES APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL:

1. Volunteer to gain the experience you are lacking. I volunteered at a 24-hour crisis line for 3 years and spent almost 500 hours on the phone providing crisis intervention to callers in crisis. This is a very strong sentence to be able to write in your Personal Statement in your application to graduate schools. It also looks nice on your CV under 'Clinical Experience'.
2. The GRE and your GPA aren't everything, they are only a small percent of the pie that make up your application. You also have your Personal Statement, Letters of Recommendation, writing samples/publications, poster presentations/conferences attended, and CV.
3. Attend conferences – but don't just attend conferences – seek out what faculty member's lab you are trying to apply to, ask them if they will get coffee with you at the conference, or at the very least attend their talk and ask questions. Go up to them after their presentation, introduce yourself, shake their hand, and if possible, invite them to attend your presentation/poster session. Then, when you have returned home afterwards, email them thanking them for their time.
4. Start doing research on the programs you want to apply to early (I did this in August the year I applied – assuming a Dec. 1st deadline for applications). When you find a list of 20-30, email each one and attach your CV and say something to the effect of "I'm interested in your research, attached is my CV for your reference, if you think we would be a good fit, please let me know." Often if they don't think you will be a good fit for the lab, they'll tell you and also maybe suggest other faculty you might fit well with. At the very least, you won't have wasted the \$50-\$150 it costs to simply apply to each school.
*In the end your list of actual schools you apply to should be between 10-15 schools.
5. Don't burn any bridges – your current professors and bosses will be writing your letters and you want to make a good impression on them, so they support you and say nice things about you.
6. Again – stop worrying about the GRE, it's only a small piece of the pie.
7. Talk to people who are doing what you want to be doing after you finish grad school. If you want to be a clinician at the VA, talk to clinicians at the VA, if you want to be an R01 researcher, talk to R01 researchers, and if you want to be a private practice therapist and not do any research, consider a master's degree.
8. Similarly, talk to other graduate students in the labs you are interested in. Do they honestly enjoy where they are, how did they get to where they are, and would they be willing to help proof read your CV/personal statement?
9. Consider how far you are willing to be from your family, friends, and significant other. For some, being as far away as possible is the only way they will be able to focus or get any work done. For others, they will find themselves in their mid to late 20's feeling homesick, and that is perfectly normal, but not so enjoyable.
10. Be nice and modest – no one wants a grumpy, entitled graduate student.