



CRA-WP

Computing Research Association
Widening Participation

How Do I Successfully Apply to Graduate School?

Deciding Where to Apply	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What areas of computing interest me? (Architecture, AI, Bioinformatics, HCI, Systems, Theory, CS Education, etc.)2. What type of degree am I considering? MS? PhD? Why?3. What type of academic environment works well for me?4. Do I have any geographic preferences? Any restrictions?5. What are my academic credentials? (GPA, research experience, test scores, communication skills)6. Who is on the faculty at the school I am applying to? Who would I like to be my advisor?
Preparing Application Materials (Pay attention to deadlines)	<p>EVERY program is different, but most want:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• application (basic contact info)• transcripts• letters of recommendation (2-3)• statement of purpose (goals/research/intent)• resume• test scores (GRE; TOEFL or IELTS)• fee
Engaging Reference Letter Writers	<p>If planning to take time off from school before applying, keep in touch with faculty.</p> <p>Ask "Would you be able to provide a strong recommendation?"</p> <p>Give them materials (transcript, resume, statement of purpose, chart of schools, deadlines, how to submit letter) at least 2 -3 weeks before first deadline.</p>
Taking GREs	<p>Take spring junior/fall senior years; retake if needed. If non-native English speaker take proficiency exam (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS).</p>
Finalizing Applications	<p>Follow up with letter writers, report test scores, and request official transcripts.</p>
Financing Your Graduate Study	<p>Apply for teaching assistantships, research assistantships, fellowships (NSF Graduate Fellowship), and other grants. Deadlines may be as early as mid-Fall for next academic year.</p>
Evaluating Offers	<p>Spend time researching programs. Visit the schools, meet faculty in your interest area(s), meet current grad students/alumni and ask about their experiences.</p>
Making the Final Decision	<p>You will likely do well at any of your top choices. Make a decision, inform schools, write thank you notes to letter writers, and CELEBRATE!</p>

(OVER)



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Master's degree	Ph.D. degree
1-3 years	3-7 years (most often 4-6)
Courses + Project or Thesis Some programs: Courses only	Courses + Research + Dissertation
More attractive for industry/lab	Minimum for industry/lab research
Minimum for academic instructor	Minimum for tenure-track academic position
Some opportunities to specialize	Become expert in a particular research area
Often limited graduate study funding	Easier to obtain RA/TA support

Additional Resources

Applying to Ph.D. Programs in Computer Science:

<https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~harchol/gradschooltalk.pdf>



M.S. or Ph.D.? And how to apply:

<https://cs.stanford.edu/degrees/phd/PhD/GraduateSchoolAdvice.pdf>

