



Tips and Tricks for Graduate School

Getting into a good graduate school can be a challenge. How do you make yourself stand out from the rest of the pack-and gain admission to the program of your choice? Mark Shay, President and founder of [GradSchools.com](#) knows the answers to these questions and more. Mark has spent many years building a reservoir of tactics to advise people on how to be admitted into a Graduate school program of their choice.

Many schools have very high entrance requirements, and on paper, it may look like you don't meet them. However, if your G.P.A. is a bit lower than the stated admissions minimum, or if you simply don't do well on standardized tests like the GRE or GMAT, there are ways you can increase your chances of getting into a particular grad school, says Mark Shay of GradSchools.com ([www.gradschools.com](#)), a comprehensive online source of graduate school information. Whether you're looking to go into a research-oriented field or seeking a professional degree like an M.B.A., here are some tips and tricks to consider.

If you're interested a field like medicine, psychology, economics or history, you will spend a good part of your graduate school years focused around a thesis and specific faculty member. Determine the program you're most interested in, and zero in on a key faculty member whose work particularly intrigues you. Contact the professor via letter or email, and discuss your interest in getting involved with his or her work. Try to arrange an in-person interview. "If the faculty member is impressed with your passion for the subject matter, he or she may recommend that you be accepted to the program," says Shay.

Another tactic is to find out what institutions or programs recently received research grants from government or corporate entities. If you're able to find a program that was funded by an external source, chances are that program is looking for qualified students to carry out the research for which that money is intended. "A lot of graduate programs that focus on research are looking for, in essence, free labor," notes Shay. If you express your interest in that specific program, it may help you get in.

If you're interested in obtaining a professional graduate degree, such as an MBA, make sure your application reflects your professional accomplishments-especially if you've been in the workforce for a while. This is especially relevant for MBA programs marketed to executives. "After a certain period of time, your undergraduate grades

become irrelevant," Shay observes. "Demonstrating that you've been active in your field, attending conferences, or being part of a trade association, are important."

In addition, if you've published articles in your field, that will be viewed as a huge plus to the committee reviewing your application. Colleges and universities view published work very highly; in fact, the prestige of a school is often based on how many of its professors have published articles. Make sure to include copies of your best articles with your application.

Another way to get into grad school is to apply to the university of your choice-but to a program that is less competitive than the one you really want. "If you can't get into your major, find a school that will let you declare it as a minor," Shay says. You will still be able to take a large number of courses in the program of your choice.

Also, research "satellite programs"- graduate programs that are held off-campus, in other locations. It may be easier to get into the program of your choice at a less popular site. In addition, look into programs that are based on having a certain number of students enroll and follow a set curriculum path together. Such programs require a certain number of students to form a "cohort," and are not restricted to typical semester-to-semester schedules. If the cohort requires one or two more students to be able to get started, that's an ideal time to apply.

Finally, be optimistic about your chances of getting into a good graduate school. "Somebody out there wants you," says Shay. "It might not be your campus down the street, but there are all kinds of options out there, especially with the advent of satellite locations and distance learning."