



Applying to graduate school is a big decision, and the application process takes time. Plan ahead! You should begin the process by *September* of the year before you wish to begin a program.

The following sheets offer some guidelines as you begin the process. Talk to the [Undergraduate Associate Chair](#) as well as some of your faculty for their ideas and suggestions.

Questions to ask yourself as you think about graduate school

What were your favorite courses as an undergraduate?

What made them so enjoyable (teacher, subject matter, assignments)?

Are you thinking about graduate school as...

- a professional preparation, as a means to a job
- a way to deepen your knowledge and fill in gaps in your knowledge
- a way to determine if you want a further degree (phd)

Is there an area of the study of art in which you have a greater interest?

- Contemporary art
- Architecture and landscape
- Museums and objects
- Education
- Fashion and textiles
- Contemporary design

If so, then look for a program that has faculty in this area or a specialization in this field.

Many people only think of the study of art history as leading to teaching positions or jobs in museums/galleries. There are other options: film and theatre, heritage work (historic preservation), cultural positions within government, journalism, etc

Financial issues:

- Most MA programs do not provide funding. Can you afford to support yourself through an MA degree? Will you need financial support? Most PhD programs provide funding that will cover tuition and minimal living expenses.

Geographical considerations:

Do you want to stay in Toronto? Canada? Are you looking to travel as well as study? What are your skills and abilities in other languages?

Finding out about graduate schools

Give yourself plenty of time to learn about various programs and schools.

A good place to start is the [Directory of Graduate Programs in Art History](#) compiled by the College Art Association.¹

Ask the [Undergraduate Associate Chair](#) or your faculty members for their recommendations.

Go to the website for each school that looks interesting to learn more about their program. Read about any special aspect of the program. Look at the faculty webpages and see what each faculty works on. Maybe read a little bit of their work.

Some relevant questions might include:

- Does the school offer only a masters degree or also a PhD [doctorate]?
- Is the program connected with local museums or galleries? Do they offer internships or work experience?
- Is funding available through grants, work study, teaching assistantships or other sources?
- Are exams required for the program? Do you write a thesis as part of the MA program or the program based on course work alone?
- Do you work with one faculty advisor or take courses with a number of faculty?
- Are there any resources available for travel and research?
- How many courses are required? What is the usual course load per semester and for how many years?
- Can you take relevant courses outside the program?
- How many students are admitted in each year?
- Are there language exams? How are they administered? Which languages are you expected to know?

Once you have narrowed down your search to less than ten programs, you should contact each school.

Write to the [Director of the Graduate Studies](#) with any questions you might have.

Consider writing to relevant faculty (in areas in which you are interested) to introduce yourself. Say in a few sentences that you are interested in their program, give a brief description of your background and interests. If possible, it is always helpful to arrange a visit to schools.

General information on applying to graduate schools:

David Shorter. "The Gentle Guide for Applying to Graduate Schools." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 April 2017.²

¹ <http://www.collegeart.org/publications/directories>

² <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Gentle-Guide-for-Applying/239768>

Timeline:

Applying for graduate school takes a lot of time – more time than you would think. Do not leave it until the last minute. You need time to write (and re-write) your statement, to revise your writing sample, to contact your referees, and to submit all the materials. Summer is a great time to begin all this work, before the busyness of the term is in full swing.

Most applications for schools in Canada and the US are due in late fall. Some British and European applications are not due until late winter.

Working backwards from the applications due date, here is a rough timeline of applying to graduate school:

6-8 months before:

- Begin your research of schools. Ask faculty for their recommendations. Study the guide created by College Art Association, Directory of Graduate Programs in Art History.³
- If you are applying to programs in the USA, you will likely need to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).⁴ Buy a study guide and review for 30 minutes or so a night.

4 months before:

- Narrow down your list of schools.
- Contact schools you are seriously considering. Visit, if possible.
- Begin work on your statement.
- Select an essay that you will submit as your writing sample. Edit and revise as necessary.
- Contact your referees (letter writers). Make an appointment with them to discuss your plans, and ask them if they will write on your behalf.

2 months before:

- Continue revising your statement. Ask faculty, your referees, the Undergraduate Associate Chair to read it.
- Collect your materials: writing sample, personal statement, transcripts.
- Give copies of your materials to your referees.

1 month before:

- Submit materials to schools. Do not wait until the last minute. If there is a glitch in the system or some other problem, give the school time to catch the problem so you (and they) are not scrambling at the end

More information:

“Graduate School Application Timeline.” Princeton Review.⁵

“Timeline for Applying to Graduate Schools.” Princeton University Career Services.⁶

³ <http://www.collegeart.org/publications/directories>

⁴ <https://www.ets.org/gre>

⁵ <https://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school-advice/application-timeline>

⁶ <https://careerservices.princeton.edu/undergraduate-students/graduate-school/application-timeline>

Tips for an effective personal statement/statement of intent.

Think of your statement for graduate school as an “intellectual biography.” The admissions committee wants to know your intellectual interests, relevant academic work and experiences, and plans for the future. They are looking to see if you are ready for graduate school, intellectually and professionally. They want to know if your interests and their program are a good fit.

Think of the statement as answering three inter-related questions:

- What are you interested in?
- How has your education and experience prepared you to study this topic?
- And what are your plans for the future?

Answering these questions is not easy, and often takes quite a bit of thought and soul-searching. You might begin your self-reflection by thinking back on your undergraduate career. Which course did you enjoy the most, and why? What do you want to know more about? Keep a notebook or journal. Go back over your course notes and papers. Think about any opportunities you have had including travel, field trips, independent research, internships, even family travel. Give specific examples of papers and projects that demonstrate your development of an idea and intellectual training in art history. Use the statement to discuss any anomalies in your academic career so far.

While the admissions committee will certainly want to see evidence of your commitment to the field of art history and your enthusiasm, they are not moved by passion alone. In fact, avoid words like “passion” and “love” in your statement. They are looking for enthusiasm that is supported by intellectual and academic rigor.

Although you should aim for one page single-spaced, it is much easier to write much more than that and then edit and condense. Plan for many rounds of editing; it is not an exaggeration to plan for 10 versions before you develop a strong statement that truly represents you in the best light.

For more ideas and suggestions, look at these hints from University of California Berkeley⁷ and Cornell.⁸

⁷ <https://career.berkeley.edu/Grad/GradStatement>

⁸ <https://gradschool.cornell.edu/diversity-inclusion/recruitment/prospective-students/writing-your-statement-of-purpose/>

Instructions for requesting letters of recommendation

In order to write the best letter possible, please follow the following instructions.

- Make an appointment to see your [potential] referee to discuss your plans and timeline.
- See them as early as possible in the process. Ideally, see them at least 6 weeks before the application deadlines.
- Once you settle on a list of schools/jobs, give them the following:
 - A copy of your transcript [unofficial is fine]
 - A CV/resume if relevant
 - A list of schools/jobs with their deadlines
 - Addresses [real or email] for each place OR a list of those places using online applications
 - A sample of your work. This could be the work done for my class or another class.
 - Your statement.
- Send this to them in an email, with attachments. OR print it out and give it to them in a hard copy. Do not give them the originals of anything.
- Ask them when they need to receive all this information — but plan on at least 2 weeks before the first deadline.
- Once they have a letter for you in their files, it is relatively easy for them to send out further letters. But if it's been a while since that first letter, be certain to give them any updated information.