

10 Tips on Preparing for and Applying to Graduate School

1. Keep your grade point average up!

- Admission to graduate programs in speech-language pathology and audiology has become quite competitive in recent years.
- GPA is a key factor in admission to graduate school. At UF, the Graduate School asks you to report your upper division GPA. Other schools may ask for overall GPA or upper division. In either case, the average GPA among students who are offered admission to a program usually is above 3.5. (At the average upper division for students who are offered admission has been between 3.8 and 3.9 in recent years.
 - Thus, it is important that you demonstrate your aptitude for graduate work by performing well in upper division courses, particularly those that are in the CSD major.
- If your overall and/or upper division GPA during your Bachelor's is on track to fall below 3.0, you probably should contact graduate programs prior to applying and discuss your academics with them.

2. Identify several people who can serve as references for you!

- Most graduate programs require you to submit at least three letters of recommendation.
- Start lining up potential references about 4 months in advance of when your reference letters must be submitted. So, if you plan to submit your application to the University of Florida by January 10, you should start lining up references in the preceding August or September.
- Select recommenders who can write in detail about your academic aptitude. At least one, and preferably two, of your letters should come from professors/instructors you have had in college. If you completed your Bachelor's degree in another major in the recent past, it's fine to include professors from that undergraduate major in addition to letters from CSD faculty.
- At most schools, it is fine to have letters from "outside" people such as a present or former employer or, perhaps, the parent of a child with special needs for whom you provided extensive caretaking services or a clinician who you have shadowed extensively or assisted. Choose such letters carefully, however, and a general rule, have only one outside letter in your application packet. Choose outside recommenders who can comment about attributes that translate to grad school (e.g., responsibility, communication, dependability, organization, common sense, etc.)

3. Be an "active student" in your classes!

- Recommendation letters are a critical component (perhaps *the* most critical component) of your graduate school application. Therefore, it is critical that you obtain detailed, high-quality letters.
- Professors cannot write detailed letters about you, if they do not know you well. So, make yourself known in class! Go beyond good test grades by participating actively in class discussions. Demonstrate that you are a positive, collegial, and team-oriented person (attributes that are critical to success in graduate school), and that you are highly organized and capable of thinking and functioning independently (also key attributes for graduate success).
- Keep up with your readings and class notes so that you can demonstrate a thorough grasp of class information and are in a position to ask high-quality questions (also keys for graduate success).

4. Take advantage of resources from professional organizations!

- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the primary professional organization for speech-language pathologists in the United States. (They also have lots of information for aspiring audiologists.) The ASHA website features the EDFind too, which has detailed information about graduate programs in speech-language pathology and audiology, along with overviews on applying to graduate school (there's more on this in Tip #5 below!). Check out the website: <http://www.asha.org/students/>
- The American Academy of Audiology is the primary professional organization for audiologists in the United States. The AAA website features basic information about graduate programs in audiology. See their website: <http://www.audiology.org/education-research/education/doctoral-programs-audiology>
- Scholarships and financial assistance: These professional associations typically offer scholarships that support graduate study. Read up on these and apply early and often!

5. Identify several graduate programs that are both of interest and well suited to you!

- Most students apply to 4 to 7 graduate programs. To arrive at your “short list” of graduate programs, you probably should explore at least a dozen or more programs.
- Make use of ASHA’s EDFind Tool (<http://www.asha.org/edfind/>). This online database has information about most accredited programs in the US, including application procedures, important deadlines, class sizes, clinical offerings, GPA/GRE scores of students’ who are offered admission, the number of applications received versus the number of students admitted, and so forth. Such information will help you determine whether a program fits with your interests, and, perhaps, to determine who competitive the admission process is there, in relation to your grades and GRE score.
- Aim high, but be realistic. Many of the top programs in the US offer admission to only ~15% to 20% of all applicants. Consequently, it is quite possible for a student who has an excellent GPA and strong GRE scores to do no better than attain the “waitlisted” designation at a particular school. Thus, while you should consider applying to some “reach” schools, you also should identify some schools at which you feel reasonably confident about your ability to receive an offer of admission.
- Don’t put too much stock in “magazine rankings” of graduate programs. There are roughly 280 graduate programs in the US that are accredited for either speech-language pathology and/or audiology. Each of these programs must meet the same program accreditation requirements. Programs differ in variables such as student-to-faculty ratio, opportunities for graduate research, and the number and nature of clinical sites. Ask questions about these types of things as you are researching graduate programs, and I think you will find that there are many “hidden gems” around the United States.
- Try to visit several programs. Many programs offer open houses periodically and, if not, they may accept drop-in visits. Visit some of the programs that are on your “short list” and see what they are like.

6. Allow plenty of time to prepare your graduate school applications!

- As you may recall from your senior year in high school, the process of applying to college can be time consuming. Therefore, after you have developed your short-list of graduate programs, make note of the application deadline date associated with each school. (For most programs, the deadline date is January 1st, January 15th or February 1st. But... some programs are earlier than January 1st, and a few programs have rolling admissions during the year. So, check the requirements for each school carefully.)
 - If possible, aim to submit your application well in advance (about 3 weeks or so) of the school’s application deadline.
 - If possible, submit academic transcripts that include your grades for the Fall semester that precedes the application deadline date. So, if the deadline is February 1, 2018, include transcripts that run up through the Fall 2017 semester.
- Post-Baccalaureate Students: It is very important to include transcripts for any post-baccalaureate courses you have taken already, especially if your GPA from our Bachelor’s degree program is not particularly strong. Your application may be considered “incomplete” without these transcripts.
- If you have yet to take some of the “major” or “prerequisite” courses, make it clear in your application (perhaps on the application itself or on your resume) which of the remaining courses you will be taking and when you will take them.

7. Prepare a strong resume and a well-crafted personal statement to show that you are “on track and doing well”!

- A strong resume and/or well-crafted personal statement can help you tie together your application.
 - You might lead off the resume with a summary of your academic accomplishments (e.g., undergraduate major and GPA, relevant work experiences, GRE schools).
- Remember: your application will be roughly 1 of several hundred that an admissions committee will be reviewing. So, make it easy for the reviewers! *Clearly show* the committee member that (a) you are performing well in your Bachelor’s degree program, and (b) you are currently on track to complete *all* prerequisite courses (as well as the required 25 hours of supervised observation) in communication sciences and disorders *prior to* when you will begin graduate studies.
- Highlight any relevant shadowing, assisting, or observation experiences that you have completed. This will help the admission committee members see that (a) you know what the profession entails, (b) you

have some sense for the different types of clinical populations you may serve, (c) you are interested/enthusiastic about both “a” and “b”.

- Inform the admissions committee that you have completed (or will soon complete) the basic science and math requirements that are needed for the Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC). If you can't complete the courses prior to beginning the program, let the admission committee know that you are aware of this standard and develop a plan for how you are going to address this. For more on clinical certification, see: <http://www.asha.org/certification/>
 - Briefly, the certification standard under discussion here reads as follows: **“The applicant has demonstrated knowledge of the biological sciences, physical sciences, statistics, and social/behavior sciences.”**
 - Applicants for the CCC typically document their attainment of this standard through grades in introductory college-level coursework. Grades of C or higher typically are regarded as meeting the standard. So, the standard can be documented as follows:
 - Examples of courses that should meet the standard include the following: (a) Biological sciences (Intro to Biological Sciences, Biology 1); (b) Statistics (Intro to Statistics, Statistics for Social Sciences 1); (c) Social sciences (Intro to Psychology, Intro to Sociology). The Physical science requirement should be met by a course in either Chemistry or Physics. Some programs may regard other physical science areas (e.g., Astronomy, Geology) as acceptable. Check with your graduate program to see if they will accept the courses you have taken as evidence of meeting the standard.

8. Allow plenty of time to prepare for and take the GRE!

- At many schools, the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is a key factor in admission. Thus, it is important that you perform as well as you can on the test.
- Familiarize yourself with the exam by reviewing the GRE website (<http://www.ets.org/gre>). Be sure you know when it is offered, how often you can take it, how much it costs per administration, how long it takes to have your scores reported to universities, etc.
- Be sure to take the exam well in advance of the application deadlines for the graduate programs to which you will apply.
- Allow yourself time to take the exam at least two or three times. So, if you are planning to submit graduate application in January 2018, you might plan to take the GRE in summer of 2017, and, if necessary, again in either early or late Fall 2017. Be sure to check the GRE website to ensure that the delivery time for your exam scores meshes with the application deadlines of your graduate schools.

9. Develop a Back-up Plan!

- Admission to graduate SLP and audiology programs is quite competitive. Many (about 90%) of our undergraduate students do continue to on to graduate school. Still, it is always wise to have contingency plans. What else can you do with your degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders?
 - Some students who have not gained admission to a graduate program on their first attempt seek employment in related jobs, e.g., *speech-language pathology assistant*, and re-apply the following year. Although this may not be your preferred path, there are many cases where people have gained admission after adding “real-world” experience to their application.
- Consider retaking the GRE. Many students who are “waitlisted” for graduate school have fine GPAs but average to below average GRE scores. If this describes your application, work at boosting your score.

10. Enjoy the Process and Be Persistent!

- Yes, it takes a lot of work to apply to graduate school, but given the rewards of the profession, it's all worth it! So, work hard, keep yourself organized, stay positive, and be persistent!