



Strengthening Your Application for Graduate Admission to UC Berkeley

The following is a list of suggestions that, if followed closely, will strengthen your application in the competitive field of graduate admissions to UC Berkeley.

1. Plan Ahead and Be Organized

Research the colleges and universities where you would like to apply. Find out if any of the faculty are doing research in an area that interests you. Call or write the university for application and information materials. Check the deadlines. Some schools have two deadlines; a fellowship deadline, which is earlier, and a general application deadline, which is often later. Make sure you apply **before** the deadlines. Most programs will not accept late applications.

2. Letter of Recommendation

For graduate study, letters of recommendation are of extreme importance. Letters from **faculty** are usually preferred by admission committees since they believe only faculty can truly ascertain your true intellectual and graduate student potential. You need three letters of recommendation. Try to get all three from faculty with whom you've had a class, or have done research with.

Professors invariably give your class grade in the letter, so use caution in choosing your evaluators. Approach the faculty member and ask her/him if they are able to write a **positive** letter of recommendation for you. If they say they cannot, or can only write a neutral letter, approach someone else.

Provide the evaluators with additional material such as copies of your transcript, resume, your statement of purpose, and a few notes (if necessary) about any pertinent personal history. This can strengthen the letter they write for you. Make sure to give them all the proper letter of recommendation forms, addresses, and deadlines.

3. GRE

The test required for entrance into graduate school is the general aptitude (Quantitative, Analytical, and Verbal) component of the GRE. The general GRE exam is offered throughout the year on computer. It is recommended that you take this test by November (at the latest) in order to get test scores to the admissions committee on time. (It takes 10 days for test results to be scored and sent to the department.) The test may be taken more than once. All scores will be reported to admissions committees. Try not to take the test more than two times. It is recommended that you study for the test and take timed practice exams ahead of time. You can buy GRE study guides and actual old exams in book form at any bookstore. Your GRE score will improve if you take the practice examinations in a timed format that mimics real testing conditions. You should definitely order the FREE software and practice tests from ETS to prepare for the computer administered test. Go to **www.GRE.com** to download the free resources <www.gre.com/pracmats.html>. Many students contend that taking the practice exam first on the computer makes a tremendous difference in preparing for the test. Also consider using the *Princeton Review* to help with test-taking strategies. Note that it's important to take a bit more time for the first few questions of each section of the GRE. This will help you establish a higher starting point on your final score. Don't just randomly guess answers. Make calculated guesses that will narrow your choices. You get docked a quarter point for each wrong answer. The Analytical portion of the GRE is now in essay format. You will be asked to write two essays on certain topics. Be as analytical as possible in responding to these, and try to back up what you're "arguing" with logic, analysis, and quotes from references, if you know of any.

The Quantitative section of the GRE is considered of greatest importance to admission committees in engineering. The math in this section is primarily at the 10th or 11th grade level. It is expected that as an engineer, you should do well on this section. There is no calculus on this test. Of secondary importance is the Analytical section. (Go to the GRE web site for details.) Less weight is usually given to the Verbal section (for engineers). For students in the humanities, the verbal section is very important. For students in the social sciences, all three sections are important. For Economics students, the math section is also important.

The GRE subject test is not required for the majority of those applying to Berkeley, but it is required for some departments, such as Math, English, Biology and Psychology. Make sure you check with the department you're applying to regarding whether it's required. Do NOT take the general and subject tests on the same day—it can be too much test taking in one day. It is **STRONGLY** recommended that you prepare far ahead for the GRE. Most graduate programs take the exam results very seriously. Also note, that those departments requiring the subject tests will weigh them far more heavily than the general exam.

4. Your College GPA

The college GPA is a crucial component of the admissions process. A satisfactory scholastic average, usually a minimum GPA of 3.0 is required by UC Berkeley for admission, although some exceptions can possibly occur depending on circumstances. Many admissions committees will consider upward trends in grades for admissions purposes. However, the better your GPA, the better your chances of getting admitted. Many departments, though not all, look at the GPA for courses after the second year. Careful attention should be made to any courses taken at the undergraduate level which are pertinent to the area considered for graduate study. If you are admitted to the MS program you may, in most cases, be able to continue toward the Ph.D. pending you pass the preliminary examination and have at least a 3.5 graduate GPA.

5. Research/Work Experience

If you have the time, either during the academic year or summer vacation, try to gain research experience with professors, summer research programs, or national laboratories (e.g., Lawrence Berkeley Lab). This will give you an added edge in the admission process, provide you with some insight about your own future research interests, and augment your research skills. Professors in *all disciplines* often regard students as highly motivated when they partake in research as undergraduates.

6. Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose is one of the most important parts of the application process. It is from this essay that the admissions committee will discern the seriousness of your intentions, your experience, and your motivation for graduate school. Think of the statement of purpose as a composition with three different parts. The first part is a brief summary of the program you want to study and what particular area of research you want to focus on. The second part should be a summary of your college experiences. Describe what brought about your interest in graduate study (perhaps a bit of pertinent background information), any work experience you might have had, if you put yourself through school, co-op or summer job experiences and research experiences. Here you can clarify the job responsibilities you had. You may be as specific as possible, as it is professors in your discipline who are reading this statement. The third part discusses why you want to go to graduate school, what you would like to study (research), and ideally, whom you would like to study with. Write the department or consult the web for information concerning the professor's research interests, then consult your library for recent publications. When you can mention what you would like to study, and whom you would like to study with, it often indicates to department that you've done your homework and have serious intentions about the pursuit of graduate study. At all times, be sincere and honest.

7. Financial Support

Also make sure you apply for graduate admission by the university's fellowship (early) deadline. This insures that you will be considered for various university fellowships. Make sure you apply for financial aid (you have to fill out the FAFSA financial aid form by your university's due date for consideration), and any other private, national, or corporate based fellowships for which you may qualify. Underrepresented students in engineering who do not have departmental support should apply to the GEM fellowship program <<http://www.gemfellowship.org/>>. This program provides tuition, a stipend, and a summer job in industry. The NSF fellowship is awarded to students pursuing a Doctoral degree. If you are pursuing a Ph.D. and wish to apply to this fellowship, you must apply before you complete 30 semester or 45 quarter graduate units. Go to your graduate fellowship offices to find other fellowships for which you might qualify. Students in the social sciences and humanities should check out the Javits and Ford fellowships (among many others).

8. Suggestions

If you need to submit a writing sample with your application, make sure it's not only a good paper you've written, but one you've had someone check for grammar, content, etc.

Make sure you indicate any hardships or obstacles you may have overcome in the application. We look at this as a sign of perseverance. Let us know if you've worked to support yourself through school.

Apply to more than one school to insure your acceptance to a graduate program (some programs are more competitive than others).

If time permits, try to visit the campus before you apply in order to allow some of the faculty at that institution an opportunity to get to know you, while also enabling you to get to know the university. Once you are admitted, make sure you visit the campus if possible.

Be on time, be organized, prepared, and thorough. No application to any university will be processed unless all materials are in. All application materials are usually available in August. You can apply on-line (the preferred method) in October.

Following these guidelines will help strengthen your application to UC Berkeley and any other graduate school you wish to attend.

Good Luck!