

Publication



Shumka Centre for
Creative Entrepreneurship

Career Development +
Work Integrated Learning

How to Apply to Grad School



How to Apply to Grad School

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Are you interested in attending school beyond post-secondary? Will furthering your education invigorate your practice and enhance your passion for your work? Graduate school is an option for all who are keen on pursuing their studies. While the application process can be at times intricate, if you are familiar with the rules and guidelines beforehand, the procedure can be smooth and stress-free.

Before You Apply

Grad school application can be overwhelming if you don't understand your own goals and intentions. Before you start your research on identifying potential universities, ask yourself these important questions:

Why do you want to go to graduate school? What do you want to get out of this experience?

Have a clear sense of why you want to continue your education. Grad school can help you further your research, but also can be a necessity for those planning on teaching in the future. In other cases, grad school can deepen your practice and open up intellectual challenges for you to overcome. Grad school also provides more tools and resources not available to undergraduates.

Some people think they can make more money or get better jobs if they attend grad school. This is oftentimes true, but not always the case.

What do you want to study?

Consider your current interests and explore how attending grad school can develop this.

Remember, what you plan on studying in grad school does not necessarily have to be a direct continuation of your undergraduate degree.

If you don't have the necessary skills to apply, look for a short workshop, class or certificate program specializing in the particular field you want to study. You can then come up with a portfolio that is more specific to the program you plan to enter.

Where can you study? What are the available graduate programs?

Some universities offer interdisciplinary programs, while other schools offer specialized programs.

Who are the faculty?

Your teaching faculty and thesis supervisor will potentially influence your work and contribute to your practice and research. Your teachers and collaborators can make a big difference. When seeking out programs, don't forget to also research the faculty and their work.

Before You Apply

Where is the school located?

Are you willing to move? Would you be able to relocate to a completely different country?

What is the cost?

Be realistic about your budget and mindful of the financial aspects. Research your funding options: are you eligible to apply for scholarships or financial-aid, should you be taking out a loan?

Once you have the answers to these questions, consider speaking to an advisor or attending a portfolio day/school fair. Speaking to representatives of different schools will allow you to get a better understanding of the institution, and face-to-face communication might make it easier for you to find the information that you need.

General Tips for Applying to Grad School

First and foremost: start your research early!

Grad school applications are usually complex and schools often ask for various pieces of writing and documentation—do not leave things to the last minute.

Consider applying to several schools and always have a plan B.

There are many reasons why you should apply to multiple schools, but the most common is the possibility of rejection. For this reason alone, it's always better to have choices.

Note the deadlines!

With graduate programs usually beginning in the Fall, applications are normally due in December and January. Some have two different deadlines: one for the application and the other for the receipt of supporting materials.

Consider various costs.

This includes the application fee, transcript request fee, and courier costs.

Don't send in a "cookie-cutter" statement of intent.

Learn the application process inside and out. Based on the application components, try to understand what the school is looking for in a potential graduate student. Admission committees see an extensive amount of applications—yours will be compared to the hundreds of other applicants hoping to get the same spot. Show that you have done the research and have spent a considerable amount of time working on your application. For example, naming a specific faculty member and stating why you would want to collaborate with them would make your application stand out.

Take initiative and research funding opportunities.

Bursaries and funds are often awarded based on various characteristics, so you need to do the research to find them in advance. Don't forget, grants and scholarships also have deadlines.

When Preparing Your Application

1. Get your transcripts.

Order official copies of your transcript from the Registrar's Office. In order for these to be considered official, transcripts must be submitted in an unopened envelope that is stamped and sealed by the Registrar of the issuing institution. If you're halfway through the semester, sending an interim transcript is acceptable.

2. Find referees.

Know what the institution is looking to see in the reference letters. Some schools have specific guidelines, make sure to follow them. Once you know this, contact your referees as early as possible!

A good referee is someone who can speak positively to your post-secondary performance, capacity for research, as well as your potential for academic study and creative practice at the graduate level. Your referee should be someone that knows you from a professional or an academic setting, such as a previous professor or a supervisor or manager from a job relating to whatever you're planning to study.

We all know that it is good to stay in contact with faculty and remain an active member of your undergraduate community after graduation for many reasons. If you've graduated some time ago, when asking faculty for a letter, consider reminding them of your research project (maybe even include a photo). This might make it easier for them to remember you and your work.

If you're not certain that someone will write something positive about you, don't ask them—it's not worth the risk. Schools put a lot of emphasis on the letters of reference, so make sure you are leaving a good impression.

Remember that the letters are sent directly from the referees to the institution and not through you. When applying to Emily Carr, you will get notified via SlideRoom once the referees send in their letters.

When Preparing Your Application

3. Write a statement of intent/ purpose.

Look for guidelines and write your statement specific to each application. You are usually given a particular prompt or question to answer. Spend an ample amount of time on your statement of intent—make drafts, outlines, edits, etc.

At Emily Carr, the Career Development + Work Integrated Learning Office or The Writing Centre can help you. Career Development office also serves Emily Carr alumni!

Your statement of intent should describe your art or design practice in detail and demonstrate critical thinking and perhaps even explain the specific pieces in your portfolio. It should also contextualize your work, discuss how your work relates to the world today. Consider addressing relevant historical or contemporary cultural and academic issues. This shows that you are up to date on current topics.

Make sure your statement of intent is written specifically for the program you're applying to, and avoid sending the same statement of intent to every school. Explain why a specific program interests you. Consider naming specific faculty members you'd like to collaborate with and why.

Last but not least, consider including any specific life experiences that you think are relevant.

4. Prepare your resume.

Your resume should include professional experiences as well as any related activities, research, publications, awards, exhibitions, and more. You can incorporate anything you have worked hard to achieve, anything from a second language or special skill, volunteer work, to a unique hobby. This is your time to show off!

Remember, there's a difference between CV and resume. Submit only what you're asked.

When Preparing Your Application

5. Prepare your portfolio.

Practice-based programs will ask for samples of your work through a portfolio.

Follow the portfolio and online submission guidelines. Most schools will require 15-20 still images, audio, or video examples of your work. Choose pieces that best represent you as an artist or designer. Ideally recent examples of your work, that demonstrate a high level of skill and your research interest. In some cases, you are allowed to submit sketches, to show the evolution of a piece or your creative process. Don't be shy about asking questions to advisors regarding your portfolio.

As always, remember to submit your portfolio and all supporting documents by the specified deadlines!

6. Apply!

Submit your online application by the deadline and pay the application fee.

After You Apply

1. Interview Stage

If you've been asked for an interview, this is usually a good sign! Only shortlisted applicants are contacted at this stage. Some institutions require an interview before a final decision is made. The interview may be in person, but most institutions conduct their interviews using applications like Skype or Zoom.

2. Offer(s)

If you get an offer, don't accept automatically unless you know all the details. For example: do you know when the program starts? What is being offered financially?

3. Funding

Some institutions will provide entrance scholarships or even paid positions to incoming graduate students. Schools do this in order to attract the best students. Be prepared to ask about this kind of opportunity.

4. Prepare for your new life as a graduate student!

This may include securing a place to live, obtaining a study permit, making travel arrangements and more.

Good luck!

Appendix

This document is based on the Skill Up Session taught by **Lee Gilad**, Graduate Recruitment Coordinator at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Fall 2019. Skill Up Series are co-hosted and co-produced by Career Development + Work Integrated Learning Office and the Shumka Centre for Creative Entrepreneurship at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. These resources are produced with the generous support of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training.

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The Career Development + Work Integrated Learning Office connects students and alumni with local, national and international employers in the creative industries and beyond. We offer career advising, clinics and strategy sessions, drop-in and individual advising, access to work integrated learning opportunities such as co-ops and internships, co-curricular programming, and industry networking events, as well as the Arts-work career portal.

The Shumka Centre for Creative Entrepreneurship launched in 2018 to create programs and partnerships that help artists and designers realize their ideas in the world. The Centre is a place where creative practitioners can find the community, knowledge, and resources they need to launch, fund, and organize projects across the spectrum of contemporary art and design activities- products, projects, curatorial initiatives, platforms, companies, organizations, and more. We believe that tactical support specifically designed for the needs of artists and designers is the first step in achieving a systemic change to empower creative people. The Centre is operated by Living Labs.



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