

# Applying for graduate school

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## 1 Introduction

Many of you are interested in pursuing graduate career in linguistics or speech pathology. The following is a summary of my advice based on my own experience, both as a student and as a teacher. Since it is based on my own experience, it is more about applying for linguistics programs than for speech therapy programs. If you're interested in speech pathology programs, I recommend that you talk to somebody else in addition to going over this document.

- (1) What you need for graduate school applications (linguistics)
  - a. Your personal statement.
  - b. Recommendation letters.
  - c. Sample work.
  - d. GRE scores.
  - e. (good) GPA.

## 2 Personal statement

- (2) Personal statement
  - a. It should maximally be 2-page long (shouldn't be too short or too long).<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Aim for a good balance between what you've done and what you want to do. Show that you've done something substantial and also have some promising future plans.
  - c. You should create a general statement which you can use for all schools.
  - d. But tailor it for each school you're applying. Mention specific professors' names that you want to work with.
  - e. Study their website and show them that you're genuinely interested in their program.
  - f. Say, as concretely as possible, why the school you're applying for is good for you. "I would like to further pursue my interests on X with Professor Y who works on Z (where X and Z are related)".

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<sup>1</sup>Good graduate programs can get up to 100 applications, so there's necessarily a psychological limit on how long the personal statement can be.

- g. Try to have a narrow focus with general interests. Don't say "I want to study the accentual system of Japanese deverbial nouns in my graduate career" or "I am interested in linguistics in general".
- h. Ideally you should be able to say something like "I have worked on accentual properties of Japanese focusing on deverbial nouns, which bears on general issues on the theories of accents. I am also interested in syntax, especially wh-movement, etc, etc".

### **3 Recommendation Letters**

#### (3) Recommendation letters

- a. You need 2 or 3 letters.
- b. Interact with your letter-writers as much as possible. Take more than one class if possible. Go to their office hours. Let them know well in advance that you're interested in going to grad school. Offer help in their research.
- c. GIVE THEM ENOUGH TIME to write your letters, at least a week, but preferably longer (they write better letters if they have more time; plus you don't want them to imply in their letters that you are a last-minute person). Have a meeting with them, and give them the hardcopies of the rest of your application packet.
- d. If possible, get letters from both P-side (phonetics, phonology) people and S-side (syntax, semantics) people.

### **4 Sample work**

#### (4) Sample work

- a. Do an independent study or honors thesis.
- b. A good term paper is usually not good enough to get you in to a good grad school.
- c. Have your advisor read your paper before you submit it.
- d. If you have more than one good sample work, that'd be excellent.
- e. Try to present that project somewhere (ideally at a referred public conference or undergraduate students).<sup>2</sup>

### **5 GRE and GPA**

#### (5) GRE and GPA

- a. These are not as important as what's been discussed above (in my opinion).
- b. But don't undermine the value of these—there can be a university-level requirement.
- c. Make sure to keep your GPA high for your major at least.
- d. Don't worry about the Verbal section if you're non-native.

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<sup>2</sup>Of course if you present at professional conferences (for graduate students and professors), that would even be better, but it is certainly not necessary.

## 6 Other advice

- (6) Other advice
  - a. Start early.
  - b. Discuss with your GPD and advisor about where to apply.
  - c. Try to present at public undergraduate conferences, if possible. Meet people there. Don't shy away from socializing with people.
  - d. Take advantage of programs that help you build your career (the McNair program; the aresty program at Rutgers).
  - e. Try to get a fellowship. Departments love to admit somebody who bring in their own money, plus it makes you look good.
  - f. Ask your graduate student friends or advisors for a successful sample application packet.
  - g. If you are non-native, have your application packet proofread by a native speaker—this handout certainly isn't.