



Minorities and Philosophy Guide for Undergraduates Applying to Graduate School

How to use this guide

You are likely here because you are interested in applying to graduate school in philosophy. There is a lot of information now available on this topic. It can be overwhelming, particularly if you've only recently considered the possibility of graduate school. For those from underrepresented backgrounds, the graduate school application process can seem particularly daunting. What do you need to know before applying? Whom should you talk to about graduate school? What should you be asking about? When should all this application stuff happen? The purpose of this guide is to help you with these questions and more so that you can better navigate the application landscape. Our goal is to help you put yourself in a position to figure out what you need to know and do. All thoughts recorded here are those of the authors and anonymously interviewed graduate students, though we try to represent different points of view and opinions. Not everyone will agree with what we say here, of course. For this reason, and in general, we encourage you to ask others about the topics discussed in this guide and to do your own research. But remember, you are the one applying (if you decide to apply). Advice is great, but ultimately, applying to graduate school is something only you can do.

Sections

I. What Is Graduate school, and Should I Apply? (2)

II. What Should I Do to Get into Graduate School? (7)

III. The Application (10)

IV. After Applying (15)

What is Graduate School?

Should I think about applying?

There are two primary graduate degrees in Philosophy: a Masters degree and a PhD.

What is a Masters and how is it different from a PhD?

LENGTH: Masters are typically one to two year intensive degrees. They often involve a combination of classwork and independent research (i.e. long papers). PhDs (in North America) take upwards of 5 years. The first two years are typically dedicated to classwork. Then PhD students work on a research proposal and take exams (which vary across institutions). After receiving approval, students write PhD thesis or dissertation: a multi-year research project resulting in a text of 70-100,000 words (around 200 double-spaced pages).

FUNDING: Although there are some scholarships available for Masters programs, it is not uncommon for students to pay for tuition. By contrast, not only is tuition waived in most well-respected PhD programs, but there are often living stipends available. It is the opinion of those writing this guide that you should only apply to PhD programs with sufficient funding available for you to be able to live on unless you have independent wealth. More on the financing of PhDs later.

Diversity and Inclusivity in Philosophy: Should I be worried?

While applying to graduate school is a scary process for everyone, it can be particularly intimidating for applicants from under-represented backgrounds. Philosophy is relatively infamous for what has been called its 'diversity problem'. Philosophy graduate students from such backgrounds often report feeling less accepted and confident in their programs than other students. As a potential applicant, you might be nervous, given all this and other things you might have heard, that philosophy programs are non-inclusive and unwelcoming places. Some programs are indeed like this. In general, the world of academic philosophy is increasingly aware of such problems. The APA (American Philosophy Association,) for example, regularly features philosophers who bring problems to the attention of others and who consider and test solutions. So too are many programs, especially top programs, try to fix their climate issues, as they are called. Many programs, for example, now have diversity advisors or coordinators, work to counter bias in course design and hiring, and require mandatory climate training. The situation, however, will vary from program to program. If you are worried about the climate at a school you're considering applying to, don't hesitate to write to current graduate students (graduate students' contact information can be found on the 'people' page of a given program). This can give you more of the feel of a program than the diversity section of a program's webpage, which tends to be more of a publicity document than a source of information. Most graduate students would be happy to talk to you about such matters. Additionally, many schools have MAP (minorities and philosophy) chapters led by MAP coordinators. (This guide was written by MAP graduate students). The MAP coordinator at a given school would be particularly happy to talk with you about any climate worries you might have. The more graduate students you talk with, the better your sense of a given program. The main point is that you should not necessarily let concerns about climate turn you away from the prospect of graduate school altogether. The situation will vary from school to school.

Why do a Masters?

One top reason students get Masters degrees is to make up for scant or absent undergraduate philosophy education or for students who do not come from research-oriented institutions. Especially if your undergraduate degree was not in philosophy and you wish to go to a philosophy PhD program, you likely will have to get a masters in order to be considered as a serious application candidate. If this applies to you, it's important to do research on the placement record of that Masters program. Ask your professors about this; not all Masters programs work as a pipeline into further graduate work.

Alternatively, some students apply for Masters programs because they don't know if they want to commit to the far longer and more involved PhD process. This is reasonable. It is possible, however, to get a Masters degree without doing a Masters program. Some PhD programs have a process by which one can apply for a Masters based on the coursework done during the first two years of the PhD. Students who do this graduate with a Masters but no financial burden.

One of the great, but also challenging, features of Masters programs is their intensity. Often, they can be more intense than PhD programs. Class-loads can be higher. You might be writing a Masters thesis alongside class seminar papers. On top of this, the timeline is more constrained than that of a PhD. This makes them like philosophy bootcamps, something which suits some students but not others.

Some students find Masters programs very rewarding. However, it's important to be aware of the potential financial burden of continuing your studies in a Masters rather than PhD program.

There are many interdisciplinary Masters programs. If you are interested in applying for a Masters, it's worth asking professors, current graduate students, etc. if they know of programs which might particularly fit your combination of interests.

Finally, as with PhD programs, it's important to ask about professorial contact and support given to masters students at programs which interest you. It is imperative, for example, to know if masters students at a given institution will get enough attention, particularly at schools with both masters and PhD programs..

What is a PhD and how is it different from undergraduate work?

In the words of current PhD students...

STRUCTURE

"Grad school isn't a continuation of undergrad. Instead of the breadth of content and the large-scale thinking that most people fall in love with when taking undergraduate philosophy courses, grad school is designed as training for academic scholars. Being a philosopher and being a scholar are two vastly different activities. In fact, given currently scholarly trends, grad school is in many ways the antithesis of what undergraduate philosophy courses advertise. You are expected to identify your "specialization" fairly quickly and eventually produce a dissertation. This will often be required to pursue a laser focused topic which engages with only a few prominent scholars and which makes a very minor contribution to the literature. You're being trained to acquire a certain set of skills, and those may not be the same skills which a student finds initially alluring about philosophy."

FREEDOM AND DAILY LIFE

“Grad students have tons of time to do other things, way more so than in undergrad! This was probably the biggest surprise for me. Yes, you're expected to be reading and writing, but there is still plenty of time to socialize, pursue other interests, and be a person in the world.”

“The fetishization of “busy-ness” and a unidimensional personality that revolves around academia is real. There is plenty of time to pursue a full, rich life, of which one's philosophical studies are only a part.”

“I think the work/life balance is great! Being a grad student is a great privilege. You literally get paid to work on what you want, think and write. Although I spend most of my time doing philosophy, I do have a social life and other hobbies.”

For what reasons do people apply to graduate school in philosophy?

But first, a reminder: your decision here isn't final! You don't have to go to grad school fresh out of college; quite a few PhD students have careers before returning to school. Some take years off during graduate school. There isn't only one path. Knowing how to make the decision to apply to graduate school can be a little daunting, especially if you don't know (m)any other people who have done the same thing.

Consider this section a report of conversations with a surrogate community of fellow grad school applicants. Note: these reasons might not all be yours, and they need not be! (Nor should they necessarily be.)

(1) “I love philosophy!”

This is a great reason to apply to a graduate program! Doing a bit of research to find departments that match your interests (if you have a more particular sense of these) is essential. You want to find the intellectual community that supports your work. If you don't love philosophy, applying to grad school might not make much sense (but then again, you probably wouldn't be reading this if you didn't already love it!)

(2) “I want to be a professor.”

These days, you do need a PhD to become a professor. However, given today's academic job market, getting a PhD doesn't ensure that you do become a professor. There are far more qualified candidates than available academic positions. This doesn't mean you shouldn't go for it, but it is important to be realistic about how difficult it can be to land a tenure-track job. It's prudent to come up with a back-up career plan at some point during graduate school. If you are focused on becoming a professor, looking at the placement records of different programs would be very helpful research to do.

Here's a great question to ask friendly grad students and professors: What is the difference between tenure-track jobs and lecture positions, fellowships, adjunct jobs, etc.?

(3) “I don’t know what else to do...”

This is a surprisingly common reason for applying for graduate school. For most people, however, this is not a particularly good one. Whether or not graduate school is a good place to figure things out is a highly personal question, but it’s worth noting that it does serve this function for some students. There are graduate students who happily decide not to pursue an academic job or even to finish their PhD. However, if you enter a PhD program without expecting to finish or to find a job as a professor, you may end up missing out on years of earnings and losing money, especially if your time in a PhD program causes you to delay establishing a career. If you really love philosophy, you might gladly accept these costs. However, unless you have this love and commitment, the risks and costs of a philosophy graduate degree might outweigh the benefits.

(4) “I want to be paid to think!”

This is easily one of the best parts of graduate school. You will have other obligations e.g. teaching, but some people love that as well. Having the space to think deeply is a real privilege, one which should not be underestimated or forgotten.

(5) “I want financial security.”

This might seem counterintuitive. But as discussed above, many top PhD programs can provide you with a stable source of income, and even medical insurance, for the duration of your time in the program. Indeed, some programs have a very generous stipend. Others, not so much.

Check out this list of fully funded programs:

<https://www.profellow.com/fellowships/fully-funded-phd-programs-in-philosophy/>

Before applying, consider looking at the stipend at programs you’re interested in, the cost of living in the school’s area, what the program’s teaching requirements are, and how many years the stipend is secured.

Speaking to current students is also important for figuring out how the stipend matches up to the local cost of living (for example, going to school in New York City is going to be more expensive than going to school in Minnesota). Ask, for example, how comfortably students live on their stipends, the source of their funding and how contingent their funding is on their teaching duties.

What can I do with a PhD?**Check out this useful guide:**

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Beyond_Academia_2016.pdf

We mentioned above that many people apply for PhD programs because they want to become professors, with job security, the time and space to think deeply about philosophy, and the opportunity to inspire young minds. Indeed, the idea of a tenured position can hold a lot of romantic appeal. However, as also noted, not everyone with a PhD is going to get a tenure-track position (nor does everyone want one). And sometimes the route from PhD to the tenure track can be a trail of precarious adjunct positions at universities. This path can require a fair bit of risk, which does not suit everyone.

But you do not have to become an academic if you've done a PhD. The culture in universities can sometimes lead students to think that academia is their only choice or that the world outside of universities is terrifying and anyone with a PhD won't fit in and will be 'bad' at any other job. This is just not true!

You can use your PhD to market yourself for jobs outside academia, though it can be challenging to explain clearly what your PhD training has given you. Working in a university for so many years will likely mean that you're used to everyone around you understanding what a PhD involves. This is not the case outside of the academy. However, you can certainly impress potential future employers with your PhD (or indeed, do well at whatever work you set your mind to) And this is not mere sophistry. If you end up in a PhD program, you are, most likely, a thoughtful, driven, competent person, with very strong writing skills and (if you complete the program) some teaching experience and public speaking under your belt.

These are fantastic skills for a lot of jobs. Besides, philosophy is a discipline of thinking, and all jobs require some thought!

If you want to learn more about non-academic jobs, check out the careers service at your college or university. You don't need to know what you want to do with your career before you apply, but it's worth touching base once you arrive to see what resources and training are available to you.

Consider, for example, these fields and positions:

- publishing
- consulting
- non-profit work
- management positions in corporations
- business
- writing
- think tanks
- independent scholarship
- political organizing
- teaching
- law (after law school, of course)
- Almost anything else....

"I'm using my time in grad school to explore other careers on the side through internships and part-time jobs. I even took a leave of absence for a year. It's a ton of work, but I'm happy to do the work since it is helping me to determine my vision for a good life." -A PhD student.

What should I do to get into Graduate School?

General and Long-Term Procedures:

Perhaps you don't know yet if you want to apply to grad school. Perhaps you do. Regardless, there are a few things you can do and habits you can form in any stage of your undergraduate career. These will help you not only prepare yourself for graduate school applications, but will allow you to better approach a variety of other post-graduate opportunities.

In general, focus on....

1. Developing your philosophical interests (and learn about philosophy, i.e. the field).
2. Your reading and writing facility. Also, read widely, and not just for school.
3. Forming relationships with faculty members.

Do I need to be a philosophy major to get into graduate school?

Short answer, No. If you discovered your love for philosophy later in your undergraduate career and have decided you would like to pursue philosophy further, you can do this even if you have not majored in philosophy! It is not necessary to have a B.A. in philosophy to get into graduate school. It is, however, unusual to get into a PhD program in philosophy directly after receiving a B.A. in something other than philosophy. Unless you took quite a few philosophy classes (8-10 perhaps) and acquired a depth and breadth of understanding in the subject, however, it will probably be necessary to get a masters in philosophy before applying to PhD programs. This will also give you time to prepare an adequate writing sample and to develop a deeper understanding of philosophy.

Your philosophical education: It may seem obvious, but it is worth saying: majoring in philosophy is a great way to make sure that you get a well-rounded philosophical education. The courses that are required for the major cover much of what grad schools expect you to know; they provide a survey and introduction to contemporary issues in theoretical philosophy and value theory, the history of European philosophy, and logic. Elective courses, which are often required for a major, allow you to explore other questions and topics. Courses offered by other departments, especially literature, science and history courses, are also a part of a well-rounded education, philosophical and otherwise.

How should I decide if I should take special topics classes or graduate classes as an undergraduate? Both kinds of classes have something in common: grad classes and special topic undergraduate seminars are highly specialized and cover only a narrow range of questions and themes. It might be wise to be wary of specialization early on in your education.

Some graduate students wish they spent more time studying the “basics” during the first years of their philosophical education. Your first and second year are an excellent time to take intro and survey courses (often required for the major) because they give you a sense of what philosophy is and what interests you. They also help you get more out of upper-level courses down the line. If you are further on in your undergraduate career, however, you can (and should) still take survey courses which interest you! Mixed grad/undergrad courses tend to provide a foundation in a subject, which is meant to prepare grad students in coursework to do work in an area; taking a course like this can be a great way to learn about what it would be like pursue a topic that interests you. And, finally, specialized seminars are excellent contexts to use the skills you’ve developed in your other courses to write a term paper, which might serve as an excellent basis for your writing sample.

Develop skills in reading and writing:

At every stage of a philosophical career, we are all working to improve at understanding each other, and presenting ideas and arguments clearly. Many introductory courses are assessed by exams, as your career as an undergraduate goes on, which makes it even more important to make sure that you’ve taken one or more courses with a final paper during your latter years. A final paper allows you to practice analyzing arguments and texts, as well as developing and communicating your ideas. You might be interested in writing a thesis if you’re thinking about grad school, but you can apply without one. A revised version of a term paper, which involves some research, could be an excellent writing sample. Reading and writing occurs in more than just philosophy classes of course—every course can be an opportunity to practice writing and thinking analytically.

What if you didn’t take many philosophy classes as an undergraduate or do not have the opportunity to take many? The masters program requirement (for acceptance into PhD programs) will likely still hold. But what about getting into masters programs? This need not be a problem either: you can still give yourself a philosophical education good enough to get you into such a program. If you discover late in your undergraduate career that you might be interested in philosophy grad school, try to take as many survey courses, including in the history of philosophy, as you can. It would also be smart to take logic. Aside from learning philosophy, you’ll more easily be able to communicate with students and faculty in philosophy departments. It can also be possible to audit classes at a local school (if you have already graduated). A great way to further your education independently is to read anthologies, check out online bibliographies (like the Oxford Bibliographies) and read encyclopedia articles (like those on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Will I need to do Research?

Yes. Philosophy papers often respond to other philosophy papers (and books). You might be assigned recent published philosophy papers in your courses, and as you work on final papers as well as on your writing samples, you should often seek out more. Your research, however, need not be exhaustive. Selective and thoughtful research is usually better than comprehensive but hurried research.

It can be hard to know what papers to read, especially when searches produce dozens that seem relevant. Lost in a swarm of papers? Talk to your professor or TA.

These kinds of questions could be great office hour questions. This would also be a time to check out Oxford Bibliographies. It organizes sources by subject matter and describes why you might read each book or paper. You can also use the database at philpapers.org, however, be wary. Not everything which shows up when you search your topic or keywords will be worth your while. Discretion, experience, and conversations with your professors should help you determine what is and what is not interesting, important and worthwhile.

Ask your professor: do you think this paper of mine would be a good writing sample?

Where can I find writing guidance?

If you are at a larger university, your TA is a great person to talk to about writing for philosophy classes, and philosophical writing more generally.

Attend office hours as often as you want, and feel free to ask any questions which might arise during the class or your paper writing process. While not all TAs will read full drafts, many will look at outlines. If there's a tricky spot in your argument, feel free to send your TA an email and they'll likely be willing to talk it through with you. If you're at a liberal arts school and don't have TA's, replace the 'TA' with 'professor' and everything said above should hold!

Build relationships with faculty members.

How do you 'build a relationship' with a faculty member? This might feel awkward and artificial, but it shouldn't. The way to get your professors to know you is just to share your genuine philosophical interests. Most professors are very happy to talk to an enthusiastic undergraduate. Don't 'try' to build a relationship; just make a point of going regularly to office hours to discuss class material, or something else philosophical which might overlap with the class. From the earliest days, after all, philosophy has occurred in conversations!

What if I've graduated already and I've been working or I want to work after graduating and prior to applying?

It is definitely possible to pursue a Masters or PhD in philosophy after working for a while. However, it can be difficult to keep up momentum after being away from school. If you think you want to take a gap year (or couple years) before committing to grad school, plan ahead! (Even if you are not sure if you want to commit to grad school, plan ahead anyways.)

Inform the philosophy professors you have developed a rapport with of your plans before you leave school (perhaps even requesting a letter from them prior to your graduation). Work on getting a mostly polished writing sample done before you leave school or in the summer after graduation. Keep in touch with at least three philosophy professors after you graduate. If you've already been working, and now want to apply, the best thing you can do is get in touch with some of your old teachers as soon as you can, and to pick out your best undergraduate paper to rewrite and use as a writing sample.

The Application

Components of your application:

Applications for masters or PhD programs in philosophy require planning and take a lot of work. By planning ahead, however, the process can become a lot less painful, and you may even be able to enjoy it. The whole application process can make you a stronger philosopher and writer.

Although there are variations among application, you will need all of these components:

- Writing Sample
- GRE Test results
- Personal Statement and/or Research Statement
- Diversity Statement (frequently)
- Letters of recommendations
 - Who can write your letters of recommendations?
 - Faculty members at your current institution
 - Faculty members at other institutions
 - Graduate students? No.

How and When Should I Apply?

There is no single path to graduate school. Some people apply straight from college. Others wait a few years before applying. Still others apply only after a whole career. Sometimes, people need to make several rounds of applications. This latter option can be expensive; applications often cost quite a bit of money. Many people do apply during or directly after their undergraduate years, so we'll lavish particular attention on this route. Applications to PhD programs are generally due between November and January of a given school year (i.e. during the fall semester or quarter).

Applications to masters programs are not typically due until after PhD programs have notified applicants of their decisions (March-June), that is, sometime during the spring semester (or at the end of the winter quarter or during the spring quarter).

During your Fourth (or final) Year:

If you plan to apply to grad school during the fall (or late winter/early spring) of your fourth year, you should begin working on your applications the summer before that school year. Take the GRE that summer (you can take it during the school year as well, but it is a lot harder to fit the time in to prepare for the test).

Ask recommenders for letters as soon as school starts (no later than October). Try to go into the school year with a draft of your statements, your writing sample, and a working list of schools which you wish to apply to. During the semester, share your application materials with professors and anyone else who might qualify as a good second pair of eyes. Refine your list of schools and continue to do research (i.e., read the work of the professors whom you are interested in working with). During the week, do menial tasks when you have less mental energy for application work. Use weekends to work on applications, if you can, and try to give drafts of your materials to professors (ones who will write recommendation letters for you and those who might just offer advice) as early as you can, along with your deadlines..

Good things about this approach: You have increased contact with a network of people (professors and students) whom you can ask for help and increased contact with letter writers. The discipline and context of school keeps you 'in' the academic and philosophical world more easily and can encourage work of more depth and rigor. Competition with peers can also help you to do better work.

Less than good things about this approach: Increased competition and decreased time and space in which to work on applications can produce a stressful context which does not always help one do the best work. Because you apply when your final year has barely begun, you have less of your own philosophical material to choose from to use in your application. In most cases, you must use third year work. There is a lot more one learns during one's fourth year.

After Graduation:

If you plan to apply to Grad school in the fall or spring after you graduate, use your final year to collect application materials. Continue to work on your writing sample (i.e. probably your senior thesis or a chosen seminar paper). Keep in touch with your old philosophy professors and tell them about your plans (if possible) before you graduate so they can write recommendation letters for you while you still are fresh in their memory. Continue reading and thinking about philosophy. (Something you'll want to do anyway of course!) Investigate the schools you are considering applying to, specifically focusing on the kind of work done by philosophers at said schools. You want to be familiar with this work, both in order to write your statement of purpose or personal statement and to make sure whatever school you pick is a good fit. You can also wait to take the GRE until after you have graduated, though again, the sooner you take it after you finish with school, the easier it will be to retain the intellectual discipline of school. In other words, you must do everything fourth year applicants must do, but you have a lot more time to get them done.

Good things: You'll have more time to work on application materials, to find the right school, and to decide that graduate school in philosophy really is the route for you.

Less than good things: You have reduced contact with those writing your recommendations and with the rigors of thought and study imposed upon one by school. These cons can be counteracted, however, by smart planning, good discipline, and continued correspondence with recommenders and other professors and students who would be willing to read your materials

Where should I apply?

Can you apply to the same place as your undergrad institution?

Yes, but this is fairly atypical. If you are considering this (for whatever reasons, personal, or otherwise) talk to a professor or the director of graduate studies. Of course, this would only be possible if your undergraduate degree is at a research institution!

MAP Guide to Applying to Graduate School for Undergraduates

School Selection Considerations

(1) Consider application costs and stipend availability. Applications can be expensive (depending on the number of fee waivers you can get). If you need to keep application costs down, try to distribute your applications so that you have a selection of schools which are more and less competitive. Do not apply to schools you have no desire to go to and (unless you are independently wealthy) do not bother with PhD programs which do not give stipends to their grad students (although some schools have competitive stipend programs, which might still make that school a good choice)

(2) Look at placement rates for graduates of that school. If grad students at a given program do not get jobs after they complete their PhD or they are not getting into PhD programs after completing their masters, then maybe reconsider applying to that program.

3) Read up on philosophers you might like to work with and kind of work done in their departments.

Do not, however, spend all your time reading one person's work at a given school. When reading someone's work, try to get a feel for their guiding interests, their central questions, and their sense of what philosophy is. Ask yourself what it would be like to discuss the issues discussed in that philosopher's work with them for years. If the prospect sounds unappealing to you, maybe don't aim to work with that philosopher. Indeed, if you don't like the work of a good proportion of the philosophers at a given school, there is a good chance you would not be happy at that school. One thing you should NOT do is apply to programs which have 'star' philosophy professors only in order to work with the star. Not every famous philosopher is a good mentor (in fact, such philosophers often have less time for students). Furthermore, do not try to replicate the work of philosophers ('stars' or not) whom you might wish to work with. Flattery and mimicry is often counter-productive and awkward.

(4) Talk to current and former graduate students (if possible) about a possible school to get a sense of what kind of place it is (and if you'd be happy there). Current graduate students are a great resource for you in this respect; many students also know other grad students whom they would be happy to put you in contact with.

(5) Over-applying: more applications of mediocre quality will likely yield worse results than fewer applications of higher quality.

Funding the Application Process:

Applications can be very expensive. However, some schools offer fee waivers, especially for minority students and those students who have participated in a philosophy diversity program (see below). Check the webpage of the program you are considering applying to thoroughly; sometimes you can find fee waivers. There are also funds for students who are applying to PhD programs designed to cover their application fees. See for example: <https://theihs.org/funding-career-resources/hayekfund/>

Summer Diversity Programs:

These days, there are many excellent programs for undergraduate students from under-represented groups who are interested in doing philosophy in graduate school. Such programs can be a great way to get a better sense of what graduate school is like, can allow you to connect with other philosophy students, grad students and professors who can support you during your application journey (should you choose to embark upon it), and can give you a chance to do some philosophy over the summer. Such programs are great places to ask more about climate issues. Often programs offer stipends and will cover travel costs. Such programs are also a great way to get a sense of programs which might interest you. Programs vary in their focus, length, applicant pool and structure. Alums of such programs are often happy to talk about the program. Professors often know such students and would be happy to refer you to such students.

The contacts and friends I made while I attended several summer programs were essential for my success in the application process. Highly recommended!"
– A PhD student

Check out this link for a list of programs:

<https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversityinstitutes>

General Resources:

The career advancement office at many schools has a lot of internet resources to help orient yourself in the graduate application process.

It is also possible to make an appointment with one of the office's counselors. Although such counselors will likely know little about philosophy graduate applications in particular, it can still be helpful to have a professional outside the discipline to talk with and to help you compile the best application you can.

Many current graduate students will gladly talk with you about the application process and what it is like to work with specific professors. Generous graduate students might even read application materials.

Resources for Picking Graduate Schools:

General PhD Application Advice :

<https://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2019/06/applying-to-phd-programs-in-philosophy.html>

APA Guide to Graduate Programs in Philosophy:

<https://www.apaonline.org/general/custom.asp?page=gradguide>

On Choosing a Graduate School:

<http://rkcheck.frege.org/philosophy/choosing.php>

N.B. You might have heard of the Philosophical Gourmet which ranks philosophy programs according to reputation. There are also various rankings of graduate schools, including U.S. News and World Report rankings. Personal opinions on the value, utility and accuracy of rankings naturally vary. Perhaps ask several professors their opinions about rankings when considering the role rankings will play in your school selection process.

How should I ask faculty for help?

Of course, we all know we should ask our professors to read our writing before we send it off into the world of applications. But who should we ask? What should we ask for? When should we ask? We focus on two main components of your application: your writing sample and your personal statement (or statement of purpose, intent, etc.)

“What I wish I knew when applying...”

“Just because someone tells you to change something, it does NOT mean you should!” –a PhD Student

Who: A professor you TRUST and RESPECT.

This does not necessarily mean the person with the flashiest title, the most popularity, or the fuzziest soul. Also, it is great if that professor has been on application committees before!

About your....

Writing sample: Find one or two professors you trust and show your writing sample to them. (If you have done a summer philosophy program, you can also send your writing sample to professors you have developed a relationship with through the program.) Often such professors welcome hearing from and helping their former summer program students.

However, it is possible to have too many people looking at your sample. You want constructive individuals giving you advice you can work with, not a committee! If you get conflicting advice, don't be discouraged! It's your sample, and ultimately you should do what you believe will make it the best piece of philosophical writing you can produce. Your writing sample is not an exercise in pleasing professors, either your current (or past) ones or the ones who will be reading your application (whoever they might be).

Personal Statement: It's hard to do a personal statement! It would be great to show these to philosophy professors, but what is more important is that you discuss it with someone who you trust—regardless of their department. Some grad students received the most helpful advice on their writing sample from professors in totally different disciplines. What matters here is the quality of your professor's writing: do you admire their style? Do you feel you can talk to them?

When Should I Begin My Application?

Writing Sample: Try to begin working with a faculty member on a writing sample your junior year (if you are applying in the fall of your senior year; if you are applying later, then this would be unnecessarily early). But no matter how late in the day it gets, still ask someone to read your sample; later is better than never!

Personal Statement: Work on these as early as you can! If you are applying in the fall of your senior year, for example, it would be wise to show some kind of draft to a trusted professor in October of that year. Don't be afraid of sharing something bad

What should I try to accomplish in my application and how should I ask for feedback?

Writing Sample:

When you share your writing sample with a trusted professor or grad student (or two), try to ask specific questions. Do you feel like some parts of your argument are vague or poorly phrased? Do you worry about making assumptions you think are not justified? Do you need more secondary or primary source material? Could they suggest any papers or books for you to look at? Does your argument follow? The more specific your questions, the easier it will be to convert advice into revision.

Personal Statement:

Your personal statement should tell a kind of story, but it needs to be an appropriate one for the audience whom you are addressing. Consider: Is my statement interesting? If not, how can I make it more interesting? Am I telling a story successfully here? Am I clearly trying to flatter particular philosophers? Do I pander too much? Am I too dismissive of or ignorant of the work of the faculty members whom I mention in the statement? Do I get my audience right?

“What I wish I knew when applying....”

(1) Do not take criticism personally!

(2) Do not necessarily accept all pieces of criticism. Not all feedback will be compatible, for one thing. Always make your own decisions about how to revise your work.

After Applying

If you get in to your top program, you are all set! If you get into several programs and need to decide between them, you will often have the chance to visit the programs to get a feel for the culture and life of the institution.

On such visits, ask as many questions as you can. Ask yourself: Did I enjoy talking to the faculty? Was I happy with the intellectual rigor and community of the program or school? Do graduate students seem enthusiastic about the program? Would I want to live in the school's location? What is the average cost of living for grad students and how does that compare to the stipend offered by the university? While visiting, try to talk to as many graduate students and professors as you can so you can make the most informed decision possible.

What should you do not get in to any programs or any that you wish to attend?

Naturally, rejection hurts. You might decide to reconsider the graduate school route. But you need not do this. There is a lot of luck involved in this process. Some people decide to try their luck again, but this time, armed with everything they learned in the first round of applications. That is, you now have two options:

1. Forget this grad school thing (or maybe forget about it for a couple of years).
2. Reapply immediately. (And thus think of round one as a practice round!)

Should I reapply?

It is perfectly fine to decide that the philosophy graduate school route is not for you. But you need not give up. In fact, it can be a wonderful opportunity to learn from your application experience and to spend more time figuring out the kind of philosophy you wish to pursue. Whether you decide to do a masters program or you decide to take a gap year, keep in touch with philosophy professors you trust and do not stop reading and learning in your gap year. Work on your sample. Use it as a chance to really make sure you want to commit the next two–seven years of your life to studying philosophy. Most of all, if you love philosophy and you really want to pursue a degree, don't give up!

The good things: A chance to learn from the application process and to deepen your philosophical understanding in general. A chance to make sure graduate school really is the best choice for you.

The less than good things: More time out of the context of discipline and competition provided by college. Rejection is not fun. You might have to find a way to support yourself in the interim.

Going to graduate school in philosophy is a commitment that should not be taken lightly. Programs last for years. If you decide to go into academia, the job market is uncertain. Applying to graduate school is scary enough, especially for applicants from under-represented backgrounds, to ward off all but the stout of heart. However, if you decide you want to make the commitment to do philosophy in the academy, you CAN successfully get into graduate school. More than anything else, good planning, discipline and strategic organization of your application will help you get in. It is also very important to remember that in applying to graduate school, you are not committed to GO to graduate school. If you are strongly considering going to graduate school in philosophy but you are not sure if that life is for you, you can still apply! Ultimately, use the application process as a chance to really think about philosophy. You do this in your writing sample and statements, but also through the conversations you have about and amidst the application process. It is a great chance to investigate your own commitment to and conception of philosophy. It is a chance, that is, to investigate your philosophy of philosophy! **Good luck!**