

TIMELINE

This timeline assumes that you are a rising senior who is planning to start graduate school in the fall of the next academic year. You can adjust this timeline according to your application cycle and position in your career*

SUMMER (May-August)

Do you want to go to graduate school?

- What does your ideal career path look like?
 - It is okay if you do not know exactly what you want to do in the future!!!
 - Make a list of things you do want to do, and things you do not want to do. Look to see if the path to what you want your life to look like needs graduate school.
- Start thinking. Is graduate school the path for you?
 - Do NOT plan on going to graduate school if you are not interested in doing research, do not want to write, or if you are just planning on applying because it is easier than searching for a job.
- Start making lists about what aspects of geology excite you. This will help you later for when you start the task of looking for your potential advisor.
- Do you have an academic twitter?
 - If not, this may be a good time to start! Science twitter is full of graduate students, early career researchers, and faculty that are posting about the things they do in small, digestible tweets. This is a great way to expose yourself to different areas of research you may not have thought of.
 - Bookmark tweets that have content that excite you!
 - It's not uncommon at all for professors to tweet that they are looking for a graduate student! Keep an eye out!

GRE Prep

Does your school take GRE scores at this time? Check with COVID adjusted application requirements

Check with the programs you are interested in applying to. Many programs are starting to drop the GRE requirement in a movement called #GRExit. Geoscience programs that do not require GRE

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ZUZowZJ25DtqCgr3kK_lf1C0YOnrZeADcm4K81bq08/htmlview

Read more about it here. <https://eos.org/opinions/geogrexit-why-geosciences-programs-are-dropping-the-gre#.XtkIKca3vs.twitter>

We recommend taking the GRE in August right before school starts, that way it is one less thing to worry about in the school year. Asmara did not do this, and it was really overwhelming to take the GRE while finishing up senior year and applying to graduate schools. If you are planning to apply after a gap year(s), plan to take the GRE at any point in your life when you are not juggling too many things!

Start studying for the GRE.

- Get a GRE study book. Options include:
 - Official ETS GRE study book (\$40)
 - https://ereg.ets.org/ereg/public/testPrep/viewtestPreparation?_p=GRI
 - Hpb.com, chegg.com, poshmark, ebay, look for a used edition! If your university has an unofficial Facebook page dedicated to students buying and selling books/furniture, post in there to see if anyone is selling.
 - The GRE website itself has free help, so check that out!

- https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/?WT.ac=gre_prepare_170731
 - Power Prep offers two free GRE practice tests
https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/powerprep/
 - When you sign up to take the GRE, they provide free practice tests. Make sure to use them!
- GET A STUDY BUDDY.
 - The GRE is soul sucking, but it's much better when your buds go through it with you.
 - Keep yourself accountable and practice at least 3 times a week with someone.
- Download GRE vocabulary apps and use them regularly. Vocab is an easy way to boost your score. Start studying vocab early!
 - Asmara recommends the Magoosh vocabulary app
<https://gre.magoosh.com/flashcards/vocabulary>.
 - If you were raised bilingual like I was, you may relate. I feel like my vocabulary is not as advanced as standardized tests want my vocabulary to be. I used the Magoosh vocabulary app to learn 10 words each day and review the words I had learned in previous days. This really boosted my GRE score.
- Plan to take all of your practice tests in the same timeframe as your exam. Build your stamina!
- Schedule your GRE exam well ahead of time so you can have a clear date to structure your preparation towards.
 - Look at the pricing of the GRE exam. Yes, it is hefty and it is unfortunate. Start saving up for the exam and the costs of sending the exam scores for graduate school.
 - Luckily, there are also waivers and fee reduction programs that can help with the cost of the exam. We recommend looking into this sooner rather than later, as things like this typically take quite some time to approve, and often there are only a limited number of waivers that are first come first serve and go quickly
 - <https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/about/fees/reduction/>

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Start working on your CV. In the fall, when you start emailing potential graduate school advisors, you want to have a beautiful CV on hand to email them. Creating your CV is a tedious task that you don't want to have to do during the semester. You don't want to be caught up on your CV when you need to be focused on finding someone you want to be advised by.

- Make a list
 - Use these headers to start: Field experience, lab experience, work experience, presentations (ie conferences, invited lectures), professional memberships, leadership positions
 - Fill out this list with everything you can remember doing since you started your undergrad. Do **not** include high school experience here.
- Find a template that you like for your CV and input the items on your list into the template. First focus on content, then the formatting. Career Services has CV templates and examples that you can look at for help on handshake
- Does your university have a Career Services center? Schedule a meeting with the science representative in Career Services for an extra set of eyes on your CV. If not, contact your academic mentors, academic advisors, or even your favorite TA to proofread your CV.
 - Be sure to ask someone who is familiar with your involvement in your academics. They may remember something to add to your CV that you forgot!

LATE SUMMER/EARLY FALL (August- September)

Create a support system. This is the advice we wish someone would have given us because finding this out on our own was difficult.

- Set up an appointment with your university’s counselling services if you do not already have a therapist or counselor. You may need help processing your emotions. This is big life stuff! Cry about it, be sad, be excited, be confused, be stressed, be happy. Please, don’t think you need to go through it alone. You don’t need to be having a break down to talk to a counsellor. Even if you feel silly, just go.
- Talk with other people who are also applying. It is so nice to vent and express your frustrations with your geo pals about this process. When this process ends, the celebration with your pals will be wonderful, especially since you went through this process together.
- Lean on your mentors. They will encourage you and help you think through things.

What type of graduate program do you want to pursue?

- Think about the career path you thought about in the early summer. What does that look like? Also think about the resources you have, because that will help you determine which program is right for you.
- Do you want to do a traditional Masters or a professional Masters program?

Program type	Description	Career path	Cost to you
Traditional (thesis based) Masters	This program includes your own research project that is written as a thesis. Oftentimes, the thesis will be formatted to publish in a peer-reviewed journal.	-Academia -Industry -Policy - Government	Do not accept an offer if they do not cover tuition, health insurance, and provide a stipend. This stipend should cover most, if not all of your living expenses.
Professional Masters	This program varies by institution in length and course content. The program is geared to a specific profession such as: energy industry, climate policy, mining, etc. Often, they have the same class-load as a traditional masters student, but they do not complete a thesis. Instead, students complete a different deliverable. Depending on the program, the student may complete a	-Industry -Policy - Government	Professional Masters Programs are expensive. Some Professional Masters Programs are geared towards those who are further in their career, and their company pays for their masters at this program. If this is the path you want to take, make sure to look into the cost of the specific programs and see if it is affordable for you.

	valuable internship in the profession, or a different type of project like a capstone.		
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- Do you want to go straight to a PhD? Talk to your academic mentors to see if that is a wise choice, as your undergrad experience may not be enough to start a PhD right away, and that is OK! As students who did go straight into a PhD, we can say it was a HUGE learning curve that may not be for everyone.

Find an advisor for graduate school.

The most important part of your graduate school experience is the advisor you have and the project(s) you work on. Yes, the institution is important, but finding the perfect fit with your advisor and project(s) is far more important for your advancement in your career and for your own wellbeing.

Academia is weird. There is no centralized place on university websites or department websites where they list the graduate student positions available. You have to reach out to potential advisors to ask them if they are looking for students. But how do you even find a potential advisor?

- Remember the list of aspects in geology that you made at the beginning of the summer? Read it again and refine it to fit your interests now. Remember those things as you begin the search.
- Reach out to your undergraduate mentors and let them know what field(s), topic(s), or scientific question(s) interest you. Ask them for suggestions on where to go/who to work with. Maybe they have colleagues that are looking for grad students. The geo world is small, so take advantage of that.
 - Do not rule out your mentors who do not specialize in the field you are pursuing. They are likely to have friends in many fields that they can help connect you with!
- Look at the Geological Society of America and American Geophysical Union catalogues of past conferences for talks/posters/abstracts that interest you. Make note of the authors and schools that are doing work in your area of interest. Look at the papers those people have published and search through their colleagues as well.
- Go on google scholar and do a simple search of your topic. If you see a paper that interests you, look into the author and co-authors' institutions to see if they have graduate student programs.
- Have you always wanted to move to a certain state? Look up geology and/or environmental sciences programs in that state and see if there are any advisors who would be exciting to work with! This may be your chance to get a 2-6 year snapshot of life in a different environment.
- Remember science twitter? Be sure to check it out to see if anyone posted positions online!

WRITE DOWN who you're interested in and what they are doing. There will be tons of people in the beginning! Write down each name, the university, the project, and maybe include a link to a paper or their website. Make an excel sheet to keep track of it all.

You will find that as you get deeper into your search, you will begin to get more and more excited about certain advisors, topics, and/or fields. Listen to your interest and follow those leads!

Express interest. We know. This is scary. How do you even begin to start the relationship with your potential advisor? Trust us, once you send the first email, it gets easier. Here are our tips on how to contact potential advisors!

- Start composing emails to prospective professors. (Note from Asmara: “During this process, I realized which professors I felt most excited about, and narrowed down my search (crossed out people on the excel sheet).” You can use a template, but make sure to make each email personal and specific!
 - Before you compose your email, scour the university website, department website, and search to see if your potential advisor has a website. Look for information about the work they do and if they have publicized open graduate student positions.
- Ask to set up a phone call/zoom call. Malisse highly recommends some kind of video call because it is so much easier to gauge a person when you can see them.
- Ask questions that are important to you! Ask about things you read about their projects/school, what projects they have in mind for you, what their work life balance is like, how they like to mentor. **TAKE NOTES DURING THE CALL!!** You won’t remember later. Trust us. You think you will, but you won’t. Take the notes.
 - Ask your mentors, friends that are in graduate school, etc. about what questions you should ask your potential advisor.
- If you are going to a conference, mention that in your email. They may be going to that conference as well, so ask if they would be willing to grab coffee with you!
- Listen to your heart/gut. If someone gives you a weird vibe, trust that and move on. **Do not ignore red flags.** You know what’s best for you.
- If someone doesn’t email you back, wait a week and email them again. . If they don’t respond after your second email, it’s their loss. People are busy and emails can slip through the cracks, but do you really want an advisor who consistently takes forever to get back to you? No, no you do not.

EARLY-MID FALL (September- November)

Prepare to apply

- By now you have a list of advisors and schools that you would like to apply to. Check out the application websites and add all the requirements and supplemental materials that each application needs to your excel sheet. **Take note of the due dates! DO NOT write down the wrong date, Asmara did that for one application and nearly missed her chance.**
- Organize your excel sheet by the due dates and work on applications accordingly.

Personal Statement- WARNING: TIME CONSUMING! NO PROCRASTINATING HERE!

- Use what you have learned from your phone calls with advisors to write your personal statement.

- Avoid cliques and too many buzzwords. Think of how many of these they read a day. Gross. Don't waste their time, or they will throw it in the "no" pile after their eyes have finished glazing over. You want to sound authentic, so if you *have* to use a buzzword like the ones listed below, only use it ONCE. Think about how you can show the reader that you have the quality of these buzzwords without using these words. This was some of the best advice Asmara's undergrad advisor gave her.
 - Passion/passionate
 - Dream
 - Team player
 - Hard worker
- Give them your character arc. The recipe is something like this: "Here's what I'm into, here's what I have done to further my skills in that area, here's what I have learned from those experiences/ and my future goals, and here's how/why you can help me further my goals while I help you reach yours."
- Make it specific to each school and program. Most of the personal statement will be the same but the last one or two paragraphs should be about the school/ advisor/ program/ project
- Edit, edit, and more editing. You will almost always have another edit, but, as Malisse's undergraduate advisor always said, "there is no final draft. Only a deadline." Find your voice and trust that you have done a good job. Don't get too obsessive, and never let some edit out your true voice. Ask your mentors to proofread your drafts. They have seen many applications and will help strengthen yours.

MID-LATE FALL (November-December)

Letters of recommendation

- Ask your professors if they would be willing to write a FAVORABLE letter of recommendation. Ask people who can speak to your academic abilities as well as your character
- Give them lots of time. We're talking 6 weeks' notice. They will likely procrastinate, but at least it was on their mind for a while.
- Give them a simplified version of your excel sheet with the school, the advisor, the potential project, and the deadline. Also, give them your CV and at least a template of your personal statement. Send them your final draft of your personal statement when it is done. You want their recommendation letter to augment your personal statement, not repeat your statement.
- Send them reminders about the due dates. One of Malisse's letter writers didn't turn in any of the recommendation letters until the night they were due! Stressful! Politely, shoot your recommenders an email one week before the deadline to make sure they know the deadline. Email them again if the application portal shows that they have not submitted the recommendation letter the day of. Call them if you need to, Asmara has needed to do that a few times.

Actually apply

- Create a work schedule based on the due dates of the application
- Try very hard to finish a week earlier than the due date in case you have issues!
 - Sometimes application portals glitch the day of, since many people are populating the portal.
- Remember that it takes a while for transcripts to be processed and reach the universities so send those early.
- **Try to finish before winter break so you're not stressing on vacation.**