

## **Business Masterclass: Applying to Graduate Schools**

By  
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If you want to teach music at the college level, you're going to need a graduate degree. I have seen studies that have indicated 80 percent or more of college teaching positions require at least a master's with nearly 50 percent requiring a doctorate.

In preparing to apply to graduate schools, you'll need to do some research to find out which schools best meet your needs. Hopefully your private teacher will help you. You want to try to find the right combination of faculty in your area of study. Most any school becomes viable if there's a teacher there who you really want to study with.

Develop a list of schools—I would suggest at least ten. Put some local schools on your list. Also include some “dream” schools.

Write a letter of interest to the music school and the graduate college of each university on your list. Try to send it by September 1 of the year before you plan to enroll.

After you've made contact with the schools and learned more about them you will probably want to shorten the list you actually apply to. I recommend you ultimately apply to no more than about eight universities. Any more than this and you're going to be throwing a lot of money away, because the application fees alone will cost you anywhere from \$20 to \$50 per institution. I do however recommend that you apply to at least five. Even if you're certain about where you're going to go, apply to at least two or three additional schools. It's always good to have a back up plan in case circumstances change.

Following are some suggestions to help you with the application process:

You should request and complete financial aid forms at the same time that you apply to each school.

Make sure that all of your materials are sent early, and call to confirm that they've been received before the deadline. Talk to secretaries at both the school of music and the graduate college and ask, “Is my file complete?” Sometimes they won't even look at your file if it isn't complete.

Have a good audition tape. When submitting a tape, 30-45 minutes of playing is more than enough. Make sure your tape is able to show that you have solid fundamentals (good tone quality, intonation, rhythmic accuracy, etc.). This is what most schools are looking for.

It's also a good idea to include a resumé. I recommend putting in the time to make sure you have an impressive one. People will often judge you quickly by the appearance and content of a resumé. They're interested in knowing your chances of being successful after you've finished your degree. A resumé shows that you're ready to apply for jobs and suggests that you'll eventually be able to land one.

At some point before you apply, you should take the GRE (Graduate Record Exam). It is required by every graduate school. You can increase your scores on it by doing some preparation.

When you're ready to decide which school to attend, here are some things to consider:

Look for a teacher who's going to help you. Even if they are not at the biggest school, if they're truly committed to doing everything they can for their students, they'll go out of their way to help you, including help with your job placement once your studies have been completed. You want to make sure that your major advisor is a person of character and integrity. This is incredibly important.

Very few people simply breeze through graduate school with no problems. Usually there's a test or an oral exam or something that's a "bump in the road." You want a professor who's going to stick up for you and will help you make it through your graduate study. You want one who will support you and make calls for you even after you're no longer a student. This can be more important than attending a "big name" school.

Don't be upset or discouraged if a particular school doesn't accept you. The decisions a college makes on acceptance and scholarships often reflect their own needs more than a given student's ability.

When the results of all of your applications come back, think about what you want to do, where you want to live, and what your financial concerns are. These all factor into what decision will be best for you. There are lots of good schools and teachers out there. The most important thing is to find the situation that's right for you.

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