

Applying to Graduate School: Contacting Programs

Why should I email professors before applying to graduate school?

Emailing professors from a program where you want to study can help establish a “relationship” with someone inside the department where you want to apply. This is especially important if you apply to a Ph.D. program as this could increase the chances of being accepted. In many Ph.D. programs, a professor must agree to serve as your advisor in order for you to be accepted. If applying for a Master’s degree, emailing professors is not likely to increase your chances of being accepted but it definitely will not hurt (see next question).

Should I contact a professor if I am applying to a Master’s degree?

In addition to establishing a “relationship” with someone in the program, you could ask if the professor has projects that you can join. In some cases, professors need graduate students to help them as Research or Teaching Assistants.

How do I decide whom to contact?

- If you already know the specific programs/schools where you want to study, look up the department website and search for faculty that do research in the topics that you are interested. To be sure that their work is a good fit for you, skim through one or two papers/books written by the professor.

Why write the Program Coordinator before writing a professor?

Before you write a professor that you are interested in, it is a good idea to first contact the Program Coordinator/Director (or Department Chair if it is a small program) in order to have some idea of the expectations in the specific department that you are interested in. For example, you could ask:

- If the Program Coordinator recommends contacting faculty before applying.
- If the department offers Research or Teaching Assistant positions for Master’s students.
- About the possibility of visiting the department before applying.
- If they can recommend current students you can contact to ask other questions about the program.

What do I say in the email to the professor?

The most important part is that the email has to be clear and short. See this example:

Dear Dr. X,

I hope this email finds you well. I am X, a senior in the International Studies program at Seattle University. I am applying to the X program and I am very interested in your work. Do you currently have

projects that I could join? (or, I'm visiting your department next month, is there any way you will be able to meet with me?)

I have read your research on XX and it greatly coincides with my interests. I have studied similar topics in (my capstone project/courses/internship/etc. and very briefly explain).

I've attached my resume for your review. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Other tips:

- The subject should clearly say what you are interested in (i.e., Prospective student interested in your work).
- No long emails. Should be around 5 to 7 sentences or less.
- Only attach PDFs files (otherwise it could end up into SPAM folder)
- Refer to the professor as “Dr. LAST NAME”.
- Do NOT ask directly if you will get funding, a position or get accepted to the program.