Grad School Timeline: Charting a course to success

Whether you're in college or a working professional, finding the right grad program takes planning and a good grad school timeline! Priority number one is that you stay organized. The more energy you invest now, the happier you'll be later. That's what this grad school timeline is all about: making sure you know exactly what to do, and when to do it.

To give themselves enough time, students will want to start working on grad school timelines at least a year before they're planning on going to grad school. It's even better if they give themselves two years!

Summer: Define your goals, prep for tests

Define your goals.
To find the right graduate program, you need to know what you want to do, specifically. It's OK to explore your interests in college. Grad school is about defining them.

Get prepped.
Admission exams occur throughout the year. Prep early and make sure you're ready! A practice test is a great place to start - it will help you focus your study time. Here's some info on each of the main graduate school tests:
- The GMAT
- The GRE
- The LSAT
- The MCAT

Think money.
The competition for graduate financial aid is often intense. Research fellowships, assistantships, and other sources of graduate financial aid and stay on top of all application deadlines.

Fall: Gather applications and take your exams

Create your short list.
At this point, you want to get a solid idea of where you want to go. Contact each school you're considering and request application materials. Deadlines creep up quickly!

Congratulate yourself.
Think about your achievements in the classroom and in your field. Your internship or research project could be the inspiration for a personal statement.

Talk to your professors.
Pretty soon, you'll need letters of recommendation. Meet with the people you'll ask to write them. The better they understand you, the more compelling their letters will be!

Take your admission exams.
Whether it's the GRE, the MCAT, the LSAT, or the GMAT, your admission exam is an important part of your application. Take the earliest sitting possible. You may be able to take it again if you're not happy with your scores.

Winter: Write a personal statement and apply for federal aid

Write away.
Your transcripts provide a quantitative evaluation of your strengths. Your personal statement fills in the blanks. Start writing early and edit as much as possible.
Get to work.
Most graduate applications are due between January and March. From transcripts and essays to test scores, you'll need to have everything together by then. Start early!

Fill out the FAFSA.
To qualify for federal aid you'll fill out the same form for grad school as you did for college. Get the FAFSA in ASAP after January 1. Keep in mind that all grad students are considered independent for federal aid calculations.

Send your scores.
Make sure that your prospective schools receive your transcripts, test scores, and recommendation letters. Better safe than out of luck!

Spring: Weigh your options

Compare offers.
Keep your eye on your mailbox. Around May, you should start to receive admission offers.

Look into alternatives.
If your financial aid doesn't quite cut it, look into alternative loan programs. Remember that each sets its own terms, so compare borrower's terms carefully.

Get ready to go.
You're about to start an exciting new part of your educational career. Enjoy it!

Expand the Timeline
This grad school timeline should have most of everything you'll need to get swinging on grad school applications, but you should customize it for yourself. Put different tasks on your grad school timeline for each school you might be looking at. Put down the application due dates and any other important dates that might affect your application process. Grad school timelines are there to help you with your own individual schedule, so make sure that yours is serving you, personally, in the best way possible.

Reference:
http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/grad-school-timeline.aspx