

EECS 498 W26 System Design of a Search Engine

A plan to apply to graduate school

Due Sunday, January 18, 2026, 11:59 pm

You are to create a Gantt chart showing a plan to apply to graduate school for a fall semester admission sometime following your graduation here. If you haven't already been thinking about graduate school, I hope this will encourage you. If you've already done this or if you prefer, you may choose a different personally meaningful objective that requires careful planning. Regardless of the objective you choose, the exercise isn't about deciding whether to do it, it's about figuring out what it would take to do it and laying it out on a Gantt chart.

Your Gantt chart doesn't need to be very detailed. I'm looking to see that that you know how to draw a useful Gantt chart and that you've put some thought into the assignment.

Hand-drawn is okay as long as it's readable but software can make it easier. Umich students do not have free access to the de facto industry standard, Microsoft Project. GanttProject is not wonderful but it is free and can be downloaded from either of these sites:

<https://www.ganttproject.biz/>

<https://sourceforge.net/projects/ganttproject/>

Upload your plan as a PDF to Canvas.

General constraints

1. Application deadlines for fall admission are usually the first week in December of the previous year. Let's assume December 7.
2. Your plan may include a break between graduation and graduate school while you work and may start at any future date.
3. Unless you already know what you would choose, your plan should indicate when you expect to decide whether you are going for a master's or a PhD. (One difference worth noting is that you pay for a master's; they pay you for a PhD.)
4. You will need to identify a set of graduate schools that might be appropriate. There are 130 R1 universities in this country that could grant you a PhD and they're not all in the top 10. Someone will take you. Your plan should allow time to identify your best options.
5. You will need to write various essays. Let's narrow it to a statement of purpose and a personal statement. A statement of purpose is a forward-looking explanation of what the university should expect will happen if they admit you, what you expect to study,

your objectives, and how it fits into your plans for career and life. A personal statement is a short essay intended to explain who you are and what motivates you. If you expect to request feedback from other people, show that in your schedule.

6. You will need to create or update your resume or CV.
7. You will need three LORs (letters of recommendation) for each application. For a master's, they could include supervisors on internships. For a PhD, faculty references are more helpful. If no one knows you, your schedule might include one semester of showing up randomly at someone's office hours just to schmooze them enough so they will know who you are.
8. Anyone you ask for an LOR will want 2 months to write it.
9. Before asking for an LOR, you will need to assemble a set of materials to help your reference write a good letter. It should include a list of schools where you're applying, copies of your transcript and your essays (so they can stay on message) and anything that might serve as a short reminder of who you are, e.g., the class you took from them, where you used to sit, why they might remember your work, some discussions you had they might remember, perhaps a photograph. It's okay (and helpful) to suggest strengths you hope your reference can speak to, e.g., your creativity, ability for abstract thought, contributions to a group.
10. If a reference is faculty, FERPA privacy rules require that you explicitly state, "You have my permission to discuss my academic performance."
11. If someone declines to be a reference, simply move on.
12. Once someone's written an LOR for the first admissions committee, they can quickly change the inside address to submit to it to other committees. But any given reference is only good for about 4 to 6 letters max before they're used up.
13. You will need to take the GRE. Typically, the last GRE test date that might get reported in time for a December deadline is the first week in November. Let's assume November 1. If you expect to do practice tests ahead of time, show that in your plan.
14. If you're applying for a PhD, especially at a top school, it's helpful but not required if there's evidence of your potential for research. For example, one of your LORs might be from someone who supervised some research you did for them, or (jackpot!) you might have a publication, perhaps a student paper presented at a conference. If you think your plan should include research, you'll need to include time to identify the project, carry it out and produce results.
15. You will need to submit each application individually, filling in forms and customizing your essays and other materials to their requirements.