Applying to Graduate School in Art History
Second Edition
Dear Reader,

This booklet is meant for anyone who is wondering whether or not they should go to graduate school in art history. Though being able to discuss everything about applying to graduate school is impossible for this small booklet, I have still attempted to address the most common things that you should consider before, during, and after applying to art history programs. Even if you already have a graduate degree, you some of the questions and issues raised in the following pages may still be useful to you. Everything discussed is based off of my own experiences and research; I wanted to disseminate honest information about this process. The information and advice presented below pertains to American schools, so some material may not be transferable to all programs.

This is the Second Edition of the guide; it has been revised and updated and includes a new feature: printable Worksheets and Checklists designed to help you map out your plans and progress on paper.

I hope that you will take something helpful away from this booklet and that it is an encouragement as you consider, begin, or continue your own journey as a graduate student.

Good luck!

Amy

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A NOTE FOR STUDENTS

I have compiled a page listing the FAQs that I have received from undergraduate and prospective and current graduate students over the years.

It may be especially useful for those of you who are undecided about (or struggling with) art history as a major or career option.

Check it out.
# Table of Contents

## Before Applying

### Preliminary Considerations
- Is graduate school right for you?
- What to expect (& what’s expected)
- A note about languages
- A note for non-art history majors
- Terminal MA or (Direct Entry) PhD?
- Cost
- Competition

### What to Look for in a Program
- How to find graduate programs
- Fit (*Part 1* Academic Fit, & *Part 2*: The Department Environment & Work/Life Balance)
- Funding

## The Application Process

### Phase One: Applying
- The Writing Sample
- The Statement of Purpose
- Letters of Recommendation
- Grades/Transcripts
- The Curriculum Vitae
- Speaking to Professors of Interest

### Phase Two: The Wait & Decisions
- Get Connected or Get Distracted
- Interviews & Welcome Days
- Accepted! Choosing your program
- Rejected, now what?

## Life as a Graduate Student

### Resources

### List of Illustrations

### Printable Worksheets

### Printable Checklists

## Creative Commons License
The first question you should ask yourself is whether or not graduate school is a viable option for you. Are you in a position to go to grad school? Does it mesh with your other, non-academic goals? Grad school requires years of your life; you must be committed to seeing your degree through to completion. The truth is that being a grad student can be extremely difficult emotionally and intellectually. I’m a firm believer that enthusiasm about our field is crucial to success in a graduate program, and being excited about your area of specialty should be a primary motivator for your decision. Not everyone in your life will recognize that you aren’t avoiding the real world by furthering your education. Having that one thing (or things) that you’re excited about will, hopefully, keep you intellectually anchored when you’re in school. Your interests will also be a main factor when it comes time for you to choose which programs to apply to and which offer to accept.

The questions below should help you begin thinking about your motivation, goals, experience, and the reality of graduate school. You can answer them (and more) using the printable Worksheet #1 at the end of this booklet. The worksheet is designed to be a self-assessment that you take your time thinking about and filling out.

**Things to Consider**

**VIABILITY**

- Does graduate school fit with your long term goals? Can you afford it? Are you a competitive candidate? (What are your grades like? Do you have internships or museum experience? Have you given any presentations?)
- Do you read at least one language related to your area of study? Do you have three professors who could strongly recommend you for graduate study? Would you be willing to move to attend your program — and after, when you get a job? If you’re in a relationship, what does your significant other think?

**DESIRE**

- What are your motivations for considering graduate school? What do you specifically want to study within art history? Can you see yourself working on that topic for at least several years? Is it the only topic you want to work on? What do you hope to do professionally once you have obtained your degree?

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.”

- Steve Jobs
When you get into a program, what should you expect, and what will be expected of you? Knowing what will be required of you before you apply should help you in deciding whether or not graduate school is the right option for you. I speak generally here because every department works differently. To find out specifics for the programs that you’re applying to, see if their websites have a section for degree requirements or email the department office to request more information about the program.

**What to Expect**

You will have a couple years of art history coursework that spans across different time periods and geographical regions. There will be voluminous reading for your courses and you will discuss your readings in class. You’ll write research papers for each seminar and you might have to present your papers in class. You’ll have to pass at least one language exam. If you’re on the PhD track, you will have to pass comprehensive exams, usually in both major and minor specializations. Finally, you will write your MA Thesis and/or Dissertation.

**What’s Expected**

Your department expects you to maintain an excellent GPA, and if you’re funded, your GPA can affect your funding as you continue in the program. You could be expected to serve as a Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant, both of which can be paid positions. Because graduate school is mostly about teaching you how to be a scholar, your department will also, as an unspoken expectation, want you to improve your CV (and give them bragging rights) by presenting at conferences, getting published, winning awards, fellowships, or grants, and doing internships.

"Piled Higher and Deeper" by Jorge Cham | www.phdcomics.com
It is generally expected that as a graduate student, you will know at least one language other than English, preferably related to your area of specialty. Graduate programs will ask what languages you know or have taken courses in. If there is a language that you know you need to learn for your specialty, consider enrolling in a summer immersion program or reading knowledge course. While language requirements vary by department, it is safe to say that most MA programs require reading knowledge of one language, while most PhD programs require two (and sometimes three) languages. As part of your degree requirements, you will probably need to pass a language exam at some point during your graduate studies, sometimes with or without the aid of a dictionary. Further, if you claim proficiency in a certain language, you might be expected to do course readings for your seminars or conduct research in that language for your papers, even if you are the only one.
If you want to pursue art history at the graduate level but didn’t major in this or a related field during college, you might be concerned about how this will reflect on your applications and how this could affect your coursework once admitted to a program. The short answer is that it depends on each person. It is true that having an academic background in art history is recommended, but there are plenty of graduate students who came into the field from other areas of study. As you apply to grad school and are writing your Statement of Purpose, have a clear idea of what aspect of art history you would like to study and emphasize professional or volunteer experience you may have in this or other closely related areas. Also discuss why you are deciding to move from your current field to art history. You might have taken art history courses as electives or perhaps you have explored your interest independently — whatever your experience, entering an art history program without an art history degree isn’t impossible. With regard to coursework, studying art history at the graduate level may or may not be a difficult or challenging experience depending on your pre-existing knowledge of the field. You may want to seek out other art history graduate students who come from a different field of study. The Grad Café’s art history forum is a good resource for making this type of connection.
Once you have decided that you want to study art history at the graduate level and you begin to look at programs, the first choice you will be faced with is what type of program to enroll in. An MA or PhD make a difference in the career options available to you, so have an idea of what can help you achieve your career goals. It is acceptable (and even encouraged) to apply to both MA and PhD programs: generally, the more you apply to, the higher your chances of getting in! MA and PhD programs can be equally difficult to get into depending on the funding that they offer; more funding often means increased competition. If you apply to a PhD program, understand how what you want to study fits within the department. Once you have decided on a list of programs to apply to, take some time to weigh yourself against the programs’ admissions and degree requirements. What makes you the best fit for each program? What can you offer them? What can they offer you?

**Master’s Programs**

Terminal Master’s degrees are obtained through a two-year graduate program. In an MA track, you will do two main things: coursework and writing your Master’s Thesis. The topic and length of your thesis will vary by program. You could also be hired as a Teaching or Research Assistant. If you aren’t 100% certain that you want to commit to getting a PhD, a terminal MA will allow you to obtain an advanced degree while giving you an idea of what to expect in a doctoral program. There are plenty of programs that offer MAs, but not many that fund their MA students. The cost of education can be considerably higher for MA students than PhDs for this reason. I don’t recommend student loans to cover tuition as it could take years before you have suitable pay.

**Doctoral Programs**

If you will be applying to graduate school straight out of undergrad, consider a Direct Entry PhD program. In this track, you would enter the program with your Bachelor’s and earn your Master’s along the way. Doctoral programs are often described as “five year” programs but, depending on how fast you finish coursework, pass your language and comprehensive exams, and write your dissertation, you could be in the program for considerably longer. As a PhD student, you will have more funding options available to you than at the MA level. Many programs offer departmental funding to their PhD students for tuition and living expenses, in addition to assisting them with finding and applying to external funding sources.
If you’re like me, you weigh the cost of something before you spend money on it. I don’t just mean the cost of graduate school itself, but the cost of applications. For instance, I applied to a dozen programs that each offered me something unique; the total cost of my applications was $1600. That figure is comprised of application fees, taking the GRE, sending schools my GRE scores, paying for and mailing my official transcripts when requested, and mailing copies of my writing sample when requested. If you visit the programs that you’re interested in, you will also incur visiting costs unless this is covered by the department. If you think you’ll be moving out of state or abroad, then moving expenses are another expense to plan for. Depending on your funding, the most expensive part of graduate school could be tuition. To lessen the cost, see if any of the schools that you want to apply to offer full or partial tuition scholarships. You should also look into opportunities for external funding.

Graduate students don’t make much — or sometimes, any — money. You either have to be willing to live simply or think about whether or not you could successfully manage to work and be in school, something that many people have done. Note that if you receive any funding from your new program, it might come with stipulations about how many hours you will be allowed to work, if any, outside of the department.

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Before you apply to graduate school, ask yourself if you’re a competitive candidate. It goes without saying that each school wants the best students, so admission can be extremely competitive. Sometimes, there’s a battle between admitting the best students and admitting the students that the faculty want to work with. Consider your strengths and weaknesses within the following criteria and try to match your strengths and research interests with the programs that you apply to. You should apply to as wide a range of schools as your research interests will allow.

### Things to Consider

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<tr>
<td><strong>ART HISTORY COURSEWORK</strong></td>
<td>What types of art history courses have you taken (i.e., seminars, lectures) and what eras or geographical regions did they cover? How does your academic experience fit with your research interests? Are there any courses you didn’t get to take in undergrad that you would have the opportunity to take at the programs you’re interested in?</td>
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<td><strong>GRADUES</strong></td>
<td>What is your GPA for your art history coursework? What is your cumulative GPA? If you have taken language courses, how did you do? If you wrote a Senior Thesis, was it graded?</td>
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<td><strong>RESEARCH &amp; LANGUAGES</strong></td>
<td>Do you have experience writing art historical research papers? Did you write a Senior Thesis? Do you have reading knowledge of at least one other language, preferably related to the field you want to study in grad school? Do you have any unique research experience (e.g., working in archives or with curatorial files)?</td>
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<td><strong>INTERNSHIPS &amp; WORK</strong></td>
<td>Have you done any internships? Have you worked or volunteered at any museums or galleries? Have you studied or lived abroad? If so, where and for how long?</td>
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<td><strong>STATEMENT OF PURPOSE</strong></td>
<td>Early on in the process, start thinking about what you’ll write in your SoP. Some programs give you a prompt for the SoP while others give you a word or page limit. Emphasize what it is about your experience makes you an outstanding candidate who can both bring something to the department and gain from the department.</td>
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<td><strong>GRE SCORES</strong></td>
<td>What did you get on the GRE? Does it fit within your prospective school’s average GRE scores? Programs place different weight on this score, but a higher score can’t hurt.</td>
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Graduate school requires commitment to your field of study and to your program. You will be part of your new department for a number of years, so determine if the programs you’re applying to are suitable to the type of environment you want to be in. By accepting you, your program commits to investing in you as a student intellectually, and (if you’re funded), financially. An unspoken expectation is present in that you should contribute to the department through receiving high grades, doing conference presentations, getting published, receiving fellowships, and so on. And of course, doing these things will benefit you as much as would the department.

You also make a commitment to your advisor, and they to you. If your dedication to your topic is such that you only want to work on that specific facet of scholarship, choose your advisor carefully, as they are likely to influence the scope and methodology of your research. In the event that there is an irreconcilable difference between the two of you, then it might be possible to switch advisors, but this is why it is important to apply to programs with multiple people working in the areas that you want to specialize in.

You might encounter people who will ridicule your decision to go to graduate school for art history (whatever that is). This can be discouraging no matter how many times you hear it. Apart from completely ignoring these types of comments, I have found that my best defense is knowing why I love what I do, and why I am dedicated to it.

On a personal note: If you’re in a committed relationship, now would be a good time to talk to your significant other about your options as a couple — whether you only apply to local programs or whether you’ll both be moving when you get into a program, etc. Studies show that students with boyfriends or girlfriends have a harder time finishing graduate school, while married students get through graduate school in median time of 6 years, though there are always exceptions. (Source: Robert Peters, 1997).
Finding art history graduate programs is easy. The work comes when you start looking for programs that are strong in what you want to study. You can use PhDs.org to look for art history programs in a certain geographic area, find programs fund their students, and see different programs’ time-to-degree. An excellent resource that is specific to art history is CAA’s Directory of Graduate Programs, which you can access online as a PDF or eBook — it may just save you tons of time! To quote CAA:

**Graduate Programs in Art History** covers four program types: History of Art and Architecture, Arts Administration, Curatorial and Museum Studies, and Library Science. **Graduate Programs in the Visual Arts** comprises four program types: Studio Art and Design, Art Education, Conservation and Historic Preservation, and Film Production. All program entries describe curricula, class size, faculty specializations, admission and degree requirements, library and studio facilities, opportunities for fellowships and assistantships, and more.

Aim to collect a list of 10 to 15 potential programs if your research interests will allow for it. You should research each program’s strengths by going to their websites and speaking with current students and faculty. *Look for the following*: funding opportunities, how many faculty they have working in your areas of interest, how many students they admit each year, and if their application has any special requirements. Two of the most important factors in grad school are funding and faculty: the most desirable programs (though not necessarily the most prestigious) are ones that fully fund their students and have a couple people working in your area of interest. Equally important are a program’s time-to-degree (TTD) and their job placement rate. Poor TTDs and job placement rates mean your chances of professional success are low, so look elsewhere. As you research what each department has to offer, you will find that your initial list of 10 to 15 programs will either stay the same or grow smaller. Either is fine; you should only apply to programs that are a good fit in terms of research, funding, and their ability to help you achieve your career goals.

**Worksheet #2** at the end of this booklet is designed to be a printable catchall that you can fill out for each program that you are interested in. Having in depth information about each department in front of you should help you as you compare them. You may also want to keep the worksheets in a binder along with other information that you have collected about the schools you’re applying to.
Many factors influence whether or not a particular program is a good fit for you. The most important factor in a program’s fit is how well it caters to your academic interests. How many courses are offered in your area of specialty, and how often? What does the program require from you in terms of course distribution requirements? Fit is also determined by a department’s faculty. Is there at least one faculty member who works on the same thing you do? Take a look at their CV to get an idea of what their current and past projects are and set up a time to speak with them. Is this someone you can see yourself working with? Are they active in the field (publishing, speaking, etc.)? With regard to the program itself, are there any opportunities or benefits that you want a program to offer you that others don’t (e.g., teaching experience, travel grants, photography grants)? Does the program have any red flags? Red flags include: unhappy graduate students, poor job placement, poor retention rates, poor funding and/or high tuition, and an unreasonable time-to-degree. Note: A program that might be a perfect fit in terms of your academic interests could be a terrible fit in other ways (e.g., financially or geographically). If you come across this, and you probably will, then you’ll have to decide what you can sacrifice or figure out how (or if) you can work around the troublesome issue.
**THE DEPARTMENT ENVIRONMENT**

It is imperative that you email your potential advisor to request a phone or in-person meeting. You should also try to set up a time to meet, speak with, or email with current grad students — they won’t shy away from giving you the “inside story” of life in your potential program. If you can, visit your potential departments during the school year and arrange to sit in on a seminar or two. This will give you a clear idea of what to expect in your courses. **Things to think about:** How do the faculty interact with each other, grad students, and undergrads? Are the grad students happy? Do they support each other’s work or are they cutthroat & competitive? What is your potential advisor like? Is he/she known for what you want to work in? What are the logistics of the department in terms of degree progress and funding? **Why it matters:** The reaction to each of these factors will vary by individual; some people thrive on competition, for instance. You should simply be aware of the type of environment that you would be joining.

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**WORK / LIFE BALANCE**

Either before you apply or before you begin your grad program, try to figure out from current grad students and professors what the balance between personal and academic life is like. In your coursework, how much weekly reading is usually assigned? With regard to your papers, are you required to give progress reports and/or final presentations? What are current students’ schedules like? Knowing each of these things as you begin your first semester will hopefully help you plan your schedule. You need to be sensitive to your research methods and academic strengths/weaknesses. If you are a procrastinator, prepare yourself to either pull all-nighters or make adjustments to your activity. You might find that researching and writing takes much longer than you think, and this is not a positive thing; if it happens, you’ll learn from it. That being said, not every waking moment of your life can or should be work. Don’t forget to take time to relax so that you don’t get burned out.
Funding depends on a variety of factors. You can usually find funding information on a program’s website, but if you can’t, students who list acceptances on The Grad Café often include their funding package information. Generally speaking, it is rare to find programs that fund Master’s students partially or fully. There are programs that do, however, so if you’re applying for a Master’s and would like funding, it will take careful research. PhD programs are more likely to fund their students for the full term of the program (five or six years), and packages often consist of free or reduced tuition and an annual living stipend that can range from $7k (or less) to $30k. Many departments grant you a living stipend because they expect that school is your job; in some cases, you might earn your funding through Teaching Assistantships or Research Assistantships. Further, the department or graduate school may stipulate that if you receive any or a certain amount of funding, then you cannot hold outside work, or that your external work hours are limited. Thus, when you receive a funding offer, figure out if you’re comfortable with the amount and any responsibilities or limitations that come with it. Can you live off of it? If not, are you willing to seek external funding and/or apply for loans? When weighing the cost of your education, consider your future: what career do you want to pursue? What does that career usually pay? Will that amount be enough to cover any debt you may incur? (Be wary of paying for your degree with loans.) Money, of course, isn’t everything, but you do have to live.
Every graduate program will require that you submit a writing sample. The writing sample should be your best academic research paper and preferably be written about the topic that you would like to specialize in. It should also demonstrate your proficiency in at least one foreign language. It is a good idea to ask a trusted professor if they would be willing to review the paper that you’re considering using for your writing sample, as they could have valuable advice.

Your writing sample should be formatted according to The Chicago Manual of Style, the field standard, unless you are specifically instructed otherwise. Some programs might impose a page limit for your submission. If either of these are the case, you will have to tailor your writing sample to each program’s specifications. You should also check to see if the departments or schools that you’re applying to have any additional requirements. This might include: the department would like a hard copy and the graduate school would like a hard copy, or that you’re supposed to omit all images, or that you put certain information in the document’s header and footer, etc. All requirements should be listed on the application or the department or graduate school’s website.

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<td>RESEARCH PAPER (PREFERABLY IN ART HISTORY)</td>
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<td>LENGTH REQUIREMENTS</td>
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<td>LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY</td>
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The Statement of Purpose (SoP) can be understood as a self-assessment written to an admissions committee and an academic audience. The SoP is a free-for-all for most programs, but some do provide you with specific prompts. Unless prompted otherwise, the SoP is a brief essay about your research interests and academic and professional aspirations. You should begin brainstorming for your SoP as soon as you have a list of programs to apply to. I highly recommend looking at Purdue’s OWL for writing tips. Your SoP should include:

**WHY YOU WANT TO GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL** — specifically, why you want to go to this specific program. What is it that makes this department so appealing to you as a student? How will they help you fulfill your academic and professional goals? In turn, what can you offer them — why are you a good candidate for graduate study?

**YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS.** How will the research you do in grad school impact our field? (Why does it matter?) In this section of your Statement, be both firm and flexible: that is, don’t make it sound like you’re so dedicated to studying a certain topic that you’ll never consider changing it, but at the same time don’t portray yourself as a person with such a wide variety of interests that you appear unfocused.

**YOUR CAREER GOALS** and any steps you’ve taken so far to accomplish them, such as internships you’ve done or teaching experience that you have. How will this program aid your endeavors?

If you can, mention **WHO YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH** and whether or not you’ve met, emailed, or spoken with them regarding your interests and application.

The SoP should not be your CV in paragraph form; it should help admissions committees get to know you through your writing. It also serves as a second writing sample.

It’s a good idea to speak with your professors about what they think your academic strengths and weaknesses are, and thus what you should emphasize in your Statement. If you wait to write your SoP until you contact the professors you’re interested in working with, they might offer to give you advice on what should be included to make you stand out to their department or offer to read a draft. Every professor has their own opinion about what the SoP should contain. Ultimately, go with your instincts (and any prompts).
Most programs require three strong letters of recommendation from professors you have worked with. Your letter-writers should be in art history or a related field. (Some programs have specific guidelines as to who they want letters from.) Early on, confirm that your letter-writers can and will write you excellent letters. The last thing you want is a half-hearted or even poor recommendation from a professor who either wasn't pleased with your work or who doesn't know you very well. Give your letter-writers ample time to complete this task; approach them as soon as you have a list of programs. Once your professors agree to write for you, provide them with the following: your transcript & curriculum vitae, a sample of the work you’ve done in their class and did well on, a list of schools you’re applying to and the respective deadlines for applications, and a list of your potential graduate advisors. Recommendation letters are almost always submitted online by the letter-writer unless otherwise requested by the program or graduate school. Waiving your right to your letters of recommendation is standard courtesy and practice; be sure to do so if prompted by graduate schools as you are filling out the online application. Most schools’ application systems have an online tracking system that allows you to see when each letter was submitted. Once you see that a professor has submitted your letter, send them a thank you note either via email or snail mail.

### Things to give your letter-writers

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<td>From the Professor’s Class</td>
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<td>List of programs that you’re applying to</td>
<td>List of potential graduate advisors</td>
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<td>Method of submission</td>
<td>List of submission deadlines</td>
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A thank you note!
Most schools won’t want your official transcripts until you’ve been admitted to the program. Instead, you’ll be asked to scan and upload unofficial transcripts. Some schools, however, will want copies of your official transcripts and will not consider your application until they get these. You might be required to send sealed transcripts to the graduate school itself and to the art history program, or one or the other, so verify each school’s requirements with enough time to get the transcripts there before the application deadline. As part of the application process, some schools may ask you for a list of the art history classes you’ve taken and what your grades were. If you’re an art history major, you should take as many courses or independent studies as you can in the area you want to focus on in grad school.

If you don’t already have a CV, take a look at some of your current professors’ CVs to get an idea of the information they included and the different ways it can be formatted. Generally speaking, your CV should contain your contact information, education and degrees earned, and any fellowships, grants, scholarships, and similar honors & awards that you have received. Your CV should also include any related professional experience, such as internships, conference presentations, lectures or talks, or publications. If you have worked or volunteered at a museum, this should also be noted. You should also list your research experience (e.g., senior thesis), what languages you can read, write, and speak, and what professional organizations you belong to (e.g., CAA). Think of your CV as an ongoing project that you work to build up each year. I refer you to Purdue’s OWL for examples and writing tips.
Keep a list of all the programs you like and the professors you want to work with, who in grad-applicant speak, are called “Professor of Interest” or POIs. Email each POI and ask if you can set up a time to speak to them about their research and the art history program. Although professors are always exceptionally busy, they tend to be especially busy at the start of the Fall term when most people are starting their grad school applications, so email them early. Here are some guidelines for communicating with your POI:

When you email them, the subject line should have something like “Prospective Graduate Student” in it and that the body of the email contains the following information (preferably in the first paragraph): your name, your degree and the school you graduated from, that you’re applying to their school for your MA or PhD this year, and what your research experience & languages are. The rest of the email should demonstrate familiarity with their work and how their work fits into your own research interests. Say that you’d love to speak with them about the art history program and end by thanking them for their time and alerting them to your attached your C.V. Include your phone number and email address in your signature, and if at all possible, send this email from your .edu account. Hopefully they will reply soon. If they don’t reply within two weeks, send them a follow up email and include the original email. If they never reply, you probably didn’t want to work with them anyway. If they do reply, great!

Once you’re on the phone with your POI or meeting with them in person, remember to be yourself. Ask them about their research, the department environment, and, most important, if they’re accepting students. Answer any questions they have about you. They may ask you about your research & travel experience and languages. Don’t assume they read or remember your C.V. The phone call is your chance to show them that you’re really excited about working with them, but it’s also a chance for you to figure out if you think you’ll get along with your POI in grad school or if they’ll support your interests and goals.

Regular contact with your POI after this conversation is important. Immediately send them a thank you note for their time. If you’re comfortable with it, feel free to send them articles or other things that you think they might be interested in once in a while. Once you submit your application, send them a quick note letting them know you submitted it.

Be warned that a good relationship with your POI and/or regular contact with them doesn’t guarantee you admission into the program—nor does it necessarily affect your chances of admission. If you get rejected from a program and felt that you hit it off with your POI, try not to take it too personally. Many factors go into an acceptance or rejection. Send your POI an email letting them know you received the school’s decision. Keep the door open for future networking.
Once you have submitted your applications, you enter the most grueling part of the application process: waiting. Some programs send early notifications in February, but March is the standard month for notifications. If the anxiety of not knowing gnaws at you incessantly, find a distraction — a new hobby, volunteer work, a book club — anything that will help you keep you from obsessing over what you cannot control. (If the unknown doesn’t faze you, congratulations!)

If talking to other people is therapeutic, then you should also consider getting connected to other prospective graduate students who are going through the same thing. One place to connect with prospective, current, and past graduate students online is The Grad Café. The Grad Café has a forum with a plethora of topics (including a section for art history) and, more dangerously, a Results search tool that allows you to view user-submitted acceptance, rejection, and waitlist statistics for individual universities.

Hang in there!
At some point after you have submitted your application, some programs may contact you for an interview. The interview could be with the admissions committee or with specific professors in the department. As part of the vetting process, some departments even offer short listed students paid campus visits. These are often innocently named something like “welcome days (or weekends),” but essentially they are a day or weekend-long interview. The department wants you to see what their program, faculty, and current graduate students are like in the flesh, and they hope that these events will leave you with fond memories of the program so that you will be more likely to accept if offered admission. They also want to get to know you and your interests better. As exciting interviews are, they are not guarantees that you have been accepted. Wait list notifications or rejections can follow for any number of mysterious reasons that might not have anything to do with you or your qualifications.

Do your research before the interview and be ready to ask questions and to talk about yourself and your potential program. Remember to be yourself and try to have fun! Good luck!
Congratulations on your acceptance to graduate school! If you have been accepted to one program or to your dream program, your decision should be simple. Making a decision becomes more complicated if you have received multiple offers. Regardless of how many offers you have, it is important you re-consider each of the factors described in the “Fit” section of this guide. Think about:

* **Financials:** If you have more than one acceptance, which offers more funding? Would you be funded for at each program? If so, for how long? Are any of your admissions offers conditional (e.g., contingent upon meeting a certain GPA in your final quarter or completing a certain class)? What will the cost of moving be, if anything?

* **Research & Professional Development:** Which program has better research facilities and resources? Which has a higher job placement rate? What is each program’s time-to-degree? Does one program have certain professional development opportunities that others don’t?

* **Faculty & Coursework:** If you have more than one offer, which POI would you rather work with? Can you truly see yourself working with your new advisor for the next several years? Are the course offerings of one program more appealing to you than another?

* **Location & Environment:** Have you visited the campuses that you have been accepted to and met with current graduate students and/or the faculty? At a minimum, have you spoken to anyone on the phone? Do you prefer one location over the other? What is the cost of living in each location?

The above is a sampling of things you should take into consideration as you decide whether or not to accept a particular offer. You may want to get the opinion of your letter-writers, friends, and family.
Prepare for disappointment. I wish someone had told me this the first time I applied to graduate school. Admission to graduate art history programs seems to be getting increasingly competitive as time passes and it is not uncommon to have to apply to graduate school multiple times before you get in. When I was rejected across the board in my first round of applications, I was shocked because I kept hearing “You’re brilliant! Of course you’ll get in!” Such responses are natural indicators of support and encouragement, but the truth is sometimes they aren’t true, at least for that moment in your life. If you get rejected, take heart in knowing that others are in the same boat. After all, you may have dodged a bullet! Rejection does have a silver lining: you can work and save money, spend more time independently researching your academic interests, and continue to look into different programs. You might find a program that better suits your interests or needs the second time around.

Acceptances are given out for many reasons, and so are rejections. Some of the factors that go into either decision are out of your control. Your rejection may have had less to do with your qualifications and more to do with the program or university’s needs or financial situation. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that you will ever know the specifics of the admission committee’s decision. If pursuing art history at the graduate level and working in this field is truly what you want to do, then re-apply! If you don’t, there is a 100% chance that you will not get in. Persistence and dedication are key parts of success.

There are ways that you can improve your application if you want to re-apply. Only you know what your strengths and weaknesses are, so in the months before your new applications are due, try to gain more experience in your strengths and build up your weaknesses. Did you get a low GRE score? Take it again. Is there another language you know you need but don’t have? Take a course in it. Do you have a fantastic paper that you can publish? Can you volunteer at your local museum or apply for an internship? Are you able to study or work in the geographic area whose art you want to specialize in? In short, update your CV as much as you can. A final tip: Cast your net as wide as your interests and wallet will allow. If you only applied to five programs, apply to ten for your next round of applications.
In graduate school, you will find that time is almost unlimited and your choices are much more flexible than in your undergraduate years. Be prepared to ask yourself important questions like, “Should I binge watch *Game of Thrones*, or should I go to the library and check out those books I need for my bibliography?” Remember that time usually isn't money in grad school — time is the caliber of your work. That being said, everyone works differently. Some people work better under pressure while others like to work on a single project for months at a time. Be aware of your working style and be prepared to discipline yourself to schedule your days in such a way that you can get work done and still find time to relax.

Grad school can be stressful, especially around the time that papers and presentations are due. Don't forget to make time for your friends and family.

You might get some assistance when it comes to administrative matters and degree requirements, but for the most part, keeping on track of deadlines and degree requirements is entirely up to you. Take a look at your department’s requirements early on and talk to your Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) if you have any concerns or questions. Current grad students are also a good source of advice, since they are ahead of you in the program and will know more about how the department runs in practice versus in theory.

You have to be the one to advance your career. Watch for call for papers (CFPs) and fellowship, internship, and funding opportunities. Ideally, you will have the (moral or literal) support of your advisor. Your advisor isn't a mind reader and won't know your ambitions unless you tell him/her, so communication and a good relationship is of vital importance. When it comes to presenting and publishing, if you're not sure which (if either) you should put more emphasis on, ask your advisor and DGS. Think about what kind of career you want and base your efforts on what those types of jobs are looking for.
In my first year of graduate school, I learned some valuable lessons that I wish I had come into my program knowing. I’ve listed these “Lessons” in bullet form below; if you would like to read the full post, it is available online here.

### Lessons from Graduate School

- **Start early, finish early.**
- **Take time to relax.**
- **Have people you can confide in.**
- **Nurture your relationships.**
- **Strive for excellence, not perfection.**
- **Be thankful.**
- **Don’t compare yourself to others (unless you’re going to do something about it.)**
- **Remember why you’re here.**

Your graduate school experience is what you make of it. Don’t be afraid to dream big, and do the best you can to make those dreams happen!

College Art Association, *Directories of Graduate Programs in the Arts.* Search online or buy it at CAA.

PhDs.org: compare & contrast art history programs, search by funding, TTD, location, & more.

Writing Resources: Writing a Statement of Purpose Writing a CV

Funding Resources: Fellowships & Opportunities online at Resources in Art History. This is a good place to start to get an idea of what exists.

The Grad Cafe: General Forum Art History Forum Admissions Results

Grad School Fun: PhD Comics What Should We Call Art History? Unemployable Like Me Academic Tim Gunn What Should We Call Grad School?

More from Caravaggista.com: Research & Career Resources

Q&A: Should You Take a Year Off Before Grad School? Facebook Community

This is a small list of my favorite resources. Thanks to the web, there is plenty of information that is immediately available to you for nearly any question or concern you may have. Have fun with the process & good luck!
Artworks

FROM THE GOOGLE ART PROJECT | IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Daniel Ridgway Knight, The Shepherdess of Rolleboise (1896), Brooklyn Museum

Rembrandt, The Artist in His Studio (c. 1628), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

John Singer Sargent, A Capriote (1878), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Johannes Vermeer, A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window (c. 1659), Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Guercino, Cleopatra and Octavian (1640), Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Parmigianino (Francesco Mazzola), Two Studies for a Holy Family (1526), The Getty

Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura) (1638-1639), Royal Collection Trust, UK

Frederico Zuccaro, The Lucca Madonna (1547), Städel Museum

P.S. Krøyer, Roses. Marie Krøyer seated in the deckchair in the garden by Mrs Bendsen’s house (1893), Skagens Museum

Édouard Manet, The Balcony (1868-1869), Musée d’Orsay

Vilhelm Hammershøi, A Room in the Artist’s Home in Strandgade, Copenhagen, with the Artist’s Wife (1901), Statens Museum for Kunst

Jan van Eyck, The Madonna in the Church (c. 1438), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Giulio Romano, Portrait of Margherita Paleologo (1510-66) (1531), Royal Collection Trust, UK

Peter Paul Rubens, Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (1620), The National Gallery in Prague

Peter Paul Rubens, Lion (c. 1612-1613), National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Paul Cézanne, Bathers (Les Grandes Baigneuses) (1894-1905), The National Gallery, London

Claude Monet, Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare (1877), The Art Institute of Chicago

Giovanni Battista Gaulli, St. Agnes is Received into Heaven (after 1689), Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Giuseppe Passeri, Cardinal Albani is offered the Tiara (1700), Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Anonymous, The Unicorn in Captivity (from the Unicorn Tapestries) (1495-1505), The Cloisters

Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak, Single Leaf from Akbarnama (late 10th century AH/AD, 16th century), The Walters

Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Spring (1894), The Getty

Hubert Robert, A Hermit Praying in the Ruins of a Roman Temple (c. 1760), The Getty

Louis Comfort Tiffany, Peacock Mosaic from entrance hall of the Henry O. Havemeyer house, New York (1890-91), University of Michigan Museum of Art

Jan van Eyck, The Lucca Madonna (1437), Städel Museum

Guercino, Pope Gregory XV (c. 1622 - 1623), The Getty

Nivardus of Milan (attr.), Sacramentary (first quarter of 11th century), The Getty

Workshop of Rembrandt, A Young Scholar and his Tutor (c. 1629 - 1630), The Getty

Bouguicot Master and workshop, The Struggle between Fortune and Poverty (c. 1413 - 1415), The Getty

Henry Ossawa Tanner, The Annunciation (1898), Philadelphia Museum of Art

Henry Ossawa Tanner, The Good Shepherd (1902-3), Zimmerli Art Museum

Jacques-Louis David, The Oath of the Horatii (1786), The Toledo Museum of Art

Vincent van Gogh, Dr. Paul Gachet (1890), Musée d’Orsay

Eugène Delacroix, The Death of Sardanapalus (1844), Philadelphia Museum of Art

Constantin Hansen, A Group of Danish Artists in Rome (1837), National Gallery of Denmark

Théodore Géricault, Three Lovers (1817-1820), The Getty

Jean-François Millet, The Birds-Nesters (1874), Philadelphia Museum of Art

John Constable, Stonehenge (1835), Victoria & Albert Museum

Édouard Manet, In the Conservatory (1878-9), Alte Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museum zu Berlin

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, La Promenade (1870), The Getty

Gertrude Käsebier, The Bride (1902), George Eastman House

Archibald James Campbell, Cootamundra Wattle (1921), Museum Victoria
Worksheet #1:

**QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE APPLYING**

1. What are your motivations for considering graduate school?
2. What do you specifically want to study within art history? Can you see yourself working on that topic for at least a couple years? Is it the only topic you want to work on?
3. What do you hope to do professionally once you have obtained your degree?
4. Do you have time for graduate school? Does it fit with the long term goals you have for your life?
5. Can you afford graduate school? If not, what funding sources will you seek out?
6. Are you a competitive candidate? What kind of experience do you have? What are your grades like?
7. Do you read at least one language other than English related to your area of study? Are there any languages you will need to learn?
8. Do you have three professors who could strongly recommend you for graduate study?
9. Would you be willing to move to attend your program — and after, when you get a job?
10. If you’re in a relationship, what does your significant other think?
Worksheet #3:

GRADUATE PROGRAM FACTSHEET

1. **The Department**
   - Department / Institution:
   - Location:
   - Number of Faculty:
   - POI's Name & Email:

2. **Research & Resources**
   - Arts Library or Special Collections?:
   - JSTOR Access?:
   - Artstor Access?:
   - Nearby Research Resources:

   Nearby Museums:

3. **Funding**
   - Is department funding available? If so, for what period of time? Does the funding cover tuition and a living stipend?
   - Are there any eligibility requirements or restrictions?:

   Are travel & conference grants available? If so, are there any eligibility requirements?:

   Does the University have any funding opportunities?:

4. **Professional Development**
   - Average Time-to-Degree:
   - Department's Job Placement Rate:
   - Retention Rate:
   - Are there opportunities to teach? If so, would you be a TA or could you teach your own course?

   Are there opportunities to participate in a lecture series, work on exhibitions, do a summer fellowship, or the like?

5. **The Social Environment**
   - Have you visited this program? If so, what were your impressions? If not, are you planning to?

   Have you spoken with your POI? How did it go? Are they accepting students? Are they going on leave anytime soon?

   Have you spoken with current graduate students? What do they have to say about the program — and each other?

6. **The Coursework**
   - Number of courses offered each semester:
   - Number of courses in your area of study:
   - What are the program's distribution requirements?:

   What external funding options are available to you?:

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Checklist #1

**THINGS TO GIVE YOUR LETTER-WRITERS**

**Writer # 1**
- Transcripts
- CV
- A work sample from the professor’s class
- A list of the programs you’re applying to
- A list of your POIs
- Submission method(s)
- A list of submission deadlines
- A thank you note

**Writer # 2**
- Transcripts
- CV
- A work sample from the professor’s class
- A list of the programs you’re applying to
- A list of your POIs
- Submission method(s)
- A list of submission deadlines
- A thank you note

**Writer # 3**
- Transcripts
- CV
- A work sample from the professor’s class
- A list of the programs you’re applying to
- A list of your POIs
- Submission method(s)
- A list of submission deadlines
- A thank you note

Checklist #2

**THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

- Who are you? What is your academic background? Why do you want to study art history at the graduate level?

- What do you want to focus on in graduate school?

- How is this program suited to your research interests and academic goals? What resources, facilities, or partnerships does this university have that would enrich your research and work?

- Which faculty member(s) do you want to work with? Why? Have you spoken or met?

- What are your career goals? How will this program (or a graduate degree) help you achieve them?

* Don’t forget to address any prompts given to you by the Art History Department or Graduate School.*
Checklist #3

THE GRADUATE APPLICATION

☐ Accounts on each university’s online application website

☐ Statements of Purpose that are customized to each program you are applying to (answer any prompts given)

☐ Your Curriculum Vitae in .doc or PDF format

☐ Three letters of recommendation for each application
  ☐ Each recommender’s name, position, address, phone number, and email address

☐ Unofficial Transcripts in PDF Format
  ☐ Official Transcripts — Send only if required or when requested

☐ GRE Scores — Unofficial (reported online) and Official (sent directly to the university from ETS)

☐ A writing sample on an art historical topic. Possible Requirements:
  ☐ Page Limits
  ☐ Formatting Requirements
  ☐ Image Specifications
  ☐ File Size Limits
  ☐ Electronic Submission
  ☐ Standard Post Submission
  ☐ Copy sent to the Graduate School
  ☐ Copy sent to the Department of Art History

☐ Both your Major and Cumulative GPAs

☐ Some applications may have text fields asking for:
  ☐ A list of all the art history courses you have taken, including the course name and the grade you received
  ☐ A list of any awards, honors, scholarships, or fellowships you have received
  ☐ A list of any lectures or publications you have
  ☐ A list of any relevant volunteer work or extracurricular activities
  ☐ Your work experience

* Supplemental documents in addition to all of the above may be required by specific art history departments! Check each department’s website carefully. If you aren’t sure if there are any extra requirements, call or email the DGS.

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Thank you for reading

Applying to Graduate School in Art History
Second Edition
Written & Designed by Amy M. Martin

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Art History Guides from Caravaggista.com

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What to Expect From Your First Art History Course

The Author

Amy Martin is an Italian Renaissance & Baroque art historian. Her website, Caravaggista.com, stems from her passion for higher education and the advancement of digital art history. She hopes that this booklet helps aspiring art historians begin their own academic adventures.