

FAQs on Applying to the Chemistry Graduate Program at Caltech

What are the steps of applying to the chemistry program?

- Research labs/professors
- Take requisite tests (GRE, GRE subject test (not required for Caltech), TOEFL)
- Ask for letters of recommendation
- Write application, edit application, write again!
- Upload transcripts, letters of recommendation, CV
- Reach out to professors whose research interests you (optional, recommended)
- Send it in!

****Note that to apply for the graduate program in chemistry at Caltech, you will submit your application through the main graduate admissions office****
(<http://www.gradoffice.caltech.edu/admissions/applyonline>)

What tests do I need to take? When should I take them?

The GRE and GRE subject tests are no longer required for chemistry. Applicants for which English is a second language are required to submit the TOEFL (widely accepted in the US) or the IELTS (some US schools might not accept it), and this should be completed in time for your scores to be sent in with your application.

What will it cost?

Application fee is \$100, but this may be waived with an explanation of why this fee would be a financial burden. Valid explanations include low family income, involvement in programs directly serving low income students, granted fee waivers for the GRE test, etc. Fee waivers might not be available for international students at other schools.

Who should I ask to write letters of recommendation?

Professionals in your field who know you, and who will write a favorable recommendation for you. Your letters of recommendation are a chance for other sides of you to be represented, so talk to your letter writers about your interests, past experiences, and research if you feel they may not already know about it. Professors who you've done research with are highly regarded, but you can also ask postdocs you've worked with, professors you helped teach a class for, or even scientists in industry.

To facilitate your recommender's writing process, be sure to share your essays, transcripts, and CVs with them! It'll help you create a cohesive application package.

What should the tone of my essay be?

It should be true to you! These are formal applications, but stilted language can hide your real voice from coming through. Be wary when having others edit your essays that your personality is not hidden under the edits.

Should I reach out to professors before my application is in? After?

This is a matter of preference, but if you have questions about a lab, don't hesitate to contact the professor running it, or one of their graduate students. Don't forget that you also have the power of choice over where you will work, and you want to make sure that there are several labs that you are interested in at a school before applying.

How much do publications matter?

Not much! Undergraduate research is valuable for informing your interest in chemistry and later research paths, but is not the only thing of importance for graduate school applications. It is more important to demonstrate your contributions to your research project, level of independence, skills, etc.

How much does my GPA matter?

Again, many will tell you, not much! Doing well in courses relevant to your research shows your commitment to the field, and this may carry some weight. If you feel that your transcript doesn't reflect your dedication, you always have the chance to address your academic journey candidly in your essays. If you took high level graduate classes in your undergrad, that will be looked upon favorably, even if you didn't get the highest grade!

Who can I contact if I have questions?

The authors of this document! The Caltech Graduate Studies Committee is a group of graduate students in chemistry aiming to make the graduate student experience as pleasant as possible. We are here to extend that to the application process as well! Feel free to contact Sadie Dutton (sdutton@caltech.edu) or Kim Pham (khpham@caltech.edu) with further questions, or attend our webinar to ask questions live.

When can I expect to hear back after submitting my application?

This depends. If you submit in late November or early December, you may hear back as early as January, or it could be as late as March. Unfortunately, a strict timeline cannot be expected, as the admissions committee will be working to admit a diverse group of applicants in a process that will look different year to year.

Further resources:

Graduate application checklist: <http://www.gradoffice.caltech.edu/admissions/checklist>

Graduate admissions office FAQs: <http://www.gradoffice.caltech.edu/admissions/FAQ>

Chemistry graduate program overview: <https://cce.caltech.edu/graduate/graduate-chemistry>