



MASTER'S & DOCTORAL STUDY

The Postgraduate *Application* Guide

Master's, PhD, and beyond — how postgraduate applications differ from undergraduate, and how to build one that stands out.

Apex Academic Consultancy

DR KRISHAN P. CHAUHAN & KAMINI K. CHAUHAN

apexacademicconsultancy.com

A Different *Game*

Postgraduate applications are not undergraduate applications with higher grades. They run on different logic, different timelines, and a different idea of what makes a candidate compelling.

There is no UCAS at this level. You apply directly to each institution, on their timeline, with materials tailored to their specific programme and often to specific academics. The process rewards initiative, clarity of purpose, and genuine scholarly fit far more than a polished all-rounder profile.

THE CORE DIFFERENCE

Undergraduate admissions ask "is this a capable student?" Postgraduate admissions ask "is this the right person for *this* programme, and can they succeed in it?" Specificity and fit beat generic excellence at every turn.

Undergraduate vs Postgraduate

FEATURE	UNDERGRADUATE	POSTGRADUATE
System	UCAS (centralised)	Direct to institution
Deadlines	Fixed, national	Rolling, varies widely
Statement	One, for five courses	Tailored per programme
Deciding factor	Grades & potential	Fit, purpose & research

Master's *Applications*

A taught Master's (MA, MSc) is the most common next step. Competitive programmes fill early, so timing and precision matter.

What They Look For

- **A strong undergraduate record** — usually a 2:1 or equivalent, sometimes a 2:2 with relevant experience
- **Clear purpose** — why this specific programme, why now, why you
- **Relevant preparation** — modules, projects, or work that shows you can handle the material
- **Strong references** — usually academic, ideally from someone who taught you closely

The Statement of Purpose

Unlike the undergraduate personal statement, this is a focused argument for *fit*. Name the modules that draw you. Reference the faculty whose work aligns with your interests. Make it unmistakably specific to that programme — a generic statement is transparent and fatal.

TIMING ADVANTAGE

Many Master's programmes admit on a rolling basis — applications are assessed as they arrive, and places fill as they go. Applying in the first wave is a genuine strategic advantage. **Early is not just tidy; it is competitive.**

PhD & *Doctoral Study*

A PhD is not a taught course — it is an original research project you propose, pursue, and defend. The application reflects that.

The Two Routes

Advertised projects: A supervisor has funding for a defined project; you apply to it much like a job. **Self-proposed:** You develop your own research proposal and find a supervisor willing to take it on. Each demands a different approach.

Finding & Approaching a Supervisor

1

Identify aligned academics

Read recent papers in your area. Find researchers whose work genuinely excites you — not just big names.

2

Email thoughtfully

A short, specific message referencing their actual work and your proposed direction. Attach a CV and a brief outline. Generic emails are ignored.

3

Develop the proposal together

A strong proposal is often refined in dialogue with a prospective supervisor before formal submission.

THE PROPOSAL IS EVERYTHING

Your research proposal must show a clear question, an awareness of the existing literature, and a feasible method. It need not be perfect — but it must demonstrate that you can think like a researcher, not just study like a student.

Funding & *Finances*

Postgraduate funding is more complex than undergraduate — and often the deciding factor in whether study is possible. Start researching it the moment you start researching programmes.

SOURCE	LEVEL	NOTES
Postgraduate loans	Master's / PhD	Government-backed, capped
Research council grants	PhD	Competitive; cover fees + stipend
University scholarships	Both	Often early deadlines
Studentships	PhD	Attached to funded projects
Charitable trusts	Both	Small but stackable

The Deadline Trap

Funding deadlines are frequently *earlier* than the programme application deadline — sometimes by months. Students who sort the course but miss the funding window end up with an offer they cannot afford. Map both timelines together from day one.

“The strongest postgraduate applicants treat funding as part of the application strategy from the start — not an afterthought once they have an offer in hand.”

DR KRISHAN P. CHAUHAN

Your Postgraduate *Checklist*

Whether Master's or doctoral, work through these before you apply.

- ☐ Programmes researched at module and faculty level
- ☐ Application *and* funding deadlines mapped together
- ☐ Statement of purpose tailored to each specific programme
- ☐ Relevant academics identified and (for PhD) contacted
- ☐ Research proposal drafted and refined (PhD)
- ☐ References secured from appropriate academic referees
- ☐ Undergraduate transcript and certificates ready
- ☐ Funding sources identified and applications prepared
- ☐ CV updated to an academic format
- ☐ English-language requirements met (if applicable)

FOR APPLICANTS

This is a step toward becoming a specialist. Let your genuine intellectual interest lead — it is the most persuasive thing you have, and it cannot be faked in a statement.

FOR FAMILIES

Postgraduate study is a serious commitment of time and money. Support the decision by helping weigh the funding and career questions clearly and calmly.

GUIDANCE AT EVERY LEVEL

We advise students on postgraduate applications — from programme choice to statements of purpose to research proposals. Dr Chauhan's own doctoral background means this is familiar ground. Reach us at apexacademicconsultancy.com.