Twitter Thread by Fadel Adib



Fadel Adib
@fadeladib

I've been serving on grad admissions committees at MIT for 5 years - in EECS and Media Lab

If you want to get into a PhD at a place like MIT, here's a thread with some advice based on my observations

1/13

1. Grades do matter, especially in courses that are important for your chosen field

2. Research matters, even more than grades

3. Publications matter, but letters of recommendation matter even more

4. Your statement of purpose should be the cherry on top of the cake

2/13

When I say grades matter, it doesn't mean that you need 100/100 or A+ in every course. It does mean that you are expected to have strong competence (close to straight A/A+/A-) in technical courses relevant to your field of interest

3/13

While grades show competence, a PhD is about research. So, the more your application demonstrates research potential, the higher your chances for acceptance. It's not about the number of papers (if any), but about the quality of research you pursue

4/13

This is why the best evaluation of research potential often comes from letters of recommendation (LoRs)

Letters shed light on technical competence, creativity, work ethic, & personal interaction. All of which are important for a

successful PhD

5/13

How to choose your letter writers?

The best LoRs I've seen usually come from a faculty/research who publishes in highly selective venues

If you are in CS, you can use https://t.co/VB8Wh9MKKR to see what are considered the most selective CS venues (ignore rankings for now)

6/13

What about other LoRs? I would argue you need at least 1 from a research supervisor. Letters from industry internships seldom help (unless it's publishable research). You're better off getting a letter from a professor who taught you a relevant *technical* course you Aced

7/13

A great statement of purpose (1) shows clarity and depth of thought and (2) demonstrates alignment between your background and the PhD research you want to pursue. This is why it should be the cherry on top of the cake

8/13

SoP should highlight:
1- Area of interest (& possibly profs you want to work with)
2- Briefly: your academics (grades,honors,projects)
3- Your prior and ongoing research projects. For each proj, talk about motivation, your role & contribution, & outcome/status

9/13

What if you're not exactly sure of what your area of interest? Or if your prior research is not aligned with it?

If I'm being honest, this is where the final cutoff usually happens at very selective schools. There are three ways around it

10/13

1- If the application deadline is 3 months away, thoroughly read papers recently published in an area of interest
2- If you have more time, try your best to do research in that area
3- Do a Masters first

These can help you clarify your own purpose for pursuing research

11/13

What about GRE and TOEFL? I never personally looked at them. Anything they would tell about communication or technical skills should come out in the LoRs and SoP

12/13

Final thought: Admission decisions are hard because there are many amazingly qualified applicants. The process also varies quite a bit across schools. If you're an aspiring PhD, I hope this thread can help you help us admit you!

13/13

And if you're wondering, our admits come from various types of backgrounds. I can give my own research group as an example

https://t.co/pMQurb1AsH

> How many languages do we speak in #SignalKinetics @medialab? Quite a few, it seems. Watch and say "hello" in whatever language speaks to you! \U0001f30d\U0001f38c\U0001f5e3\ufe0f#linguistweets #bilingual #globalcitizens pic.twitter.com/LcougoL973
>
> — MIT Signal Kinetics Group (@MIT_SK_Lab) December 4, 2020

And here's a video if you're interested in hearing the story of one of my superstar students @OsvyRodriguez

https://t.co/l6rI5QTCoT