

## Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles

### *Crafting Introductory Messages for Potential Grad Advisors*

#### Preparation Phase

1. Plan to contact potential PIs ~1 yr before academic year you wish to start (August–October)
2. Identify areas of research interest (be as specific as you can)
3. Identify PIs to potentially contact (4–6)
  - a. Focus on recently published researchers in your field(s) of interest
  - b. Ask faculty, postdocs, and grad students for recommendations based on your interests
  - c. Follow listservs, blogs, etc.: Ecolog, Evoldir, SSAR Google doc, Science X (formerly Twitter), Texas A&M
4. Check admission requirements for institutions of selected PIs to ensure you meet criteria
5. Learn about labs (most PIs have prospective student info on their websites; read carefully as they often have prompts for info PIs want when first contacting them)
  - a. Familiarize yourself with recent publications (past 3–5 yr)
  - b. Identify current lab projects that interest you
  - c. Identify recent grants to PIs and conferences lab typically attends
  - d. Determine status of prior grads (transitioning to PhD programs, postdocs, jobs?)
  - e. Determine PI/lab reputation (contact trusted collaborators or colleagues in same field)
6. Create a spreadsheet with PI info (campus, program, etc.), dates of initial/follow-up messages, Zoom/phone interviews, on-campus recruitment events, application, program, or scholarship deadlines, etc.

#### Contact Phase (continued on next page)

1. Email top PIs individually
  - a. Tailor your message to each PI by expressing interest in each lab's unique areas of research (generic messages are usually ignored)
  - b. Introduce yourself including prior degree(s), where earned, and prior research mentors
  - c. Declare your intentions (I'm interested in joining your lab; are you accepting students?)
  - d. Describe your broader and specific research interests
  - e. Describe why you are interested in joining their lab (alignment of research interests, PI/lab/program/campus reputation, geography, climate, personal, etc.)
  - f. Describe your career goals and how/why joining their lab will help you achieve them
  - g. Briefly describe prior research experiences, what you learned, and any products (professional presentations, publications)
  - h. Include your CV and unofficial transcript if undergrad (or include GPA when listing your degrees)



**Contact Phase** (continued from previous page)

- i. Drop names of shared colleagues, current/former students of PI, or others in the field you have worked with or know you well
  - j. Subject line should be clear (fall 2024 prospective grad student)
  - k. Include message in body of email, not as separate attachment
  - l. Write clearly, concisely, scientifically, and professionally; message should be ~0.5 page
  - m. If considering >1 PI in same program or department, let each know at outset (most talk to each other, so best to share in advance than have them find out on their own)
2. Positive responses typically lead to follow-up questions or a request for an interview (Zoom or phone); if no response, follow up with a friendly email reminder after 2 wk

**Additional Resources**

- <https://www.esa.org/career-development/apply-and-get-into-graduate-school/>
- <https://americanornithology.org/how-to-send-a-graduate-school-inquiry-email/>
- [https://german.bio.uci.edu/images/PDF/Application\\_Guide.pdf](https://german.bio.uci.edu/images/PDF/Application_Guide.pdf)

