Graduate School Guide
A Resource for Navigating Further Education

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Is Graduate School for me?

Whether or not graduate school is for you depends on a number of factors, but you must take caution and care in making this critical step in your career development.

Yes! Graduate School is for me!

☑ An advanced degree is absolutely necessary for my career whether this is a master’s, more advanced degree, licensure or certification.

☑ I cannot advance in my career without graduate school in order to develop my skills, increase my pay and move into higher positions and am aware of post-graduate school prospects.

☑ I would like more training in my field to achieve personal goals.

☑ I know that graduate school is completely in line with my career goals based on my knowledge of what I want to be doing and have lots of motivation and a great academic background to continue schooling.

☑ I can afford graduate school or will be able to finance it comfortably

☑ I am okay with another 2-7 years of school as it will fit in my current lifestyle considering the time it will take, research and possible required internships.

Maybe Graduate School isn’t for me?

☒ I’m thinking about Graduate School only because I’m not sure what to do after I graduate.

☒ I want to avoid student loans, so I’ll just defer them by taking more classes.

☒ I can’t find a job and the economy is awful, so I need to do something.

☒ I’m a great student and am good at school, so I’ll just keep going.

☒ If I go to Graduate School, I can skip entry level jobs and start in a management position.

☒ All my friends are going to grad school, so I’ll just follow because it seems like the right thing to do.

☒ I want to put letters after my name, so I sound more intelligent.
Timeline

So you’ve decided that Graduate School is a step in the right direction for your career development and to meet your career goals. Now, what is the next step?

Junior Year

☐ Research careers and specialty areas to find out what you want to study
☐ Research different schools and programs
☐ Visit Career Services for input on Graduate School and process as well as to update your resume
☐ Study, prepare and register for admissions tests
☐ Investigate financial aid opportunities
☐ Visit schools to get a feel for the faculty and atmosphere
☐ Look at applications to start gathering materials requested
☐ Start thinking about admission essay ideas and view samples
☐ Give those you would like a letter of recommendation from a heads up that you will need one

Senior Year

Fall

☐ Organize application materials for schools you have selected
☐ Take admission test(s)
☐ Obtain letters of recommendation from employers, professors, etc.
☐ Finish application essays to be reviewed by Career Services and/or professors
☐ Keep in touch with faculty from the schools you are applying

Spring

☐ Send thank yous to those who wrote you a letter of recommendation
☐ Prepare and send materials before application deadlines
☐ Follow-up to make sure your application materials were received
☐ Set up a mock interview appointment with Career Services if you know an interview will be part of the application process
☐ Keep track of acceptances and rejections and notify schools of your decision
☐ Apply for financial aid, loans or other financial assistance
☐ Celebrate your decision!
Finding a School

- **Websites:**
  - Peterson’s: http://www.petersons.com/
  - GradSchools: http://www.gradschools.com/
  - Gradview: http://www.gradview.com/index.jsp
  - PhDs: http://graduate-school.phds.org/
  - GraduateSchools: http://graduateschools.com/

*Searching should not stop with the web. You should be sure to visit each school, get to know the faculty and students and do further research.*

- **Evaluating Programs**
  - **Location/Environment:** Choosing your location is important based on where you live and how far you are willing to commute to class as well as location benefits in relation to career opportunities in the area. The environment should also be considered based on your preferences whether you prefer an urban setting or suburban setting with varying climates to the ability to study abroad or online classes. Class size should also be considered.

  - **Accreditation/Curriculum:** Accreditation plays an important role in your future, whether it’s for the value on your degree in your field or for future certification and licensure. Be sure to research what accreditation you are looking for based on your field of study. Typically accredited schools have a more vigorous curriculum that is highly approved and sometimes required for your career path. Curriculum is also an important factor in knowing what the purpose of the program is, if there is experiential learning opportunities as well as specializations and if the curriculum is in line with your career goals.

  - **Faculty:** These will not only be your professors, but also your mentors and professional connections. The relationship you build with graduate school faculty will be much closer than in your undergraduate time. It’s important to see if you will be entering a school that has quality faculty who are committed to the field and helping you succeed through your studies, research and experience.

  - **Resources/Facilities:** Resources are important to ensure you have a positive experience from library databases, career services to on campus housing, parking and computer labs. Make sure you know what you are looking for that will maximize your experience.

  - **Cost:** With the average graduate school bill being $30,000, it’s good to know ahead of time what the school will cost as well as associated fees you will incur. It’s important to look at your finances in determining what you can afford as well as if the school offers financial aid, grants, fellowships, assistantships, etc.
Application Process

Testing: (www.ets.org)

- **GRE (Graduate Record Exam):**
  - 2.5 hours
  - Quantitative: 45 minutes, 28 multiple choice
  - Verbal: 30 minutes, 30 multiple choice
  - Analytical Writing: 2 essays (1-30min and 1-45min)

- **GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test):**
  - 4 hours
  - Quantitative: 75 minutes, 37 multiple choice
  - Verbal: 75 minutes, 41 multiple choice
  - Analytical Writing: 2 essays (30mins each)

- **MCAT (Medical College Admission Test):**
  - 5 hours
  - Physical Sciences: 70 minutes, 52 multiple choice
  - Verbal Reasoning: 60 minutes, 40 multiple choice
  - Writing Sample: 60 minutes, 2 essays
  - Biological Sciences: 70 minutes, 52 multiple choice

- **LSAT (Law School Admission Test):**
  - 4 hours
  - Logical Reasoning: 2 sections, 35 minutes, 24-26 questions
  - Reading Comprehension: 35 minutes, 27-28 questions
  - Analytical Reasoning: 35 minutes, 23-25 questions
  - Essay: 35 minutes

**Transcripts:** Admission committees always require official transcripts. Be sure to keep up good grades if you plan on applying to graduate school because most likely, your GPA will be a strong factor in determining your acceptance as well as the content of your courses.

**Resumes:** Having a professional, updated resume is highly important for your professional career and graduate school acceptance. Be sure to build a resume that showcases your abilities and dedication to your field. Meet with Career Services to make sure your resume sells itself!

**Recommendations:** Most applications require letters of recommendation from professionals who know you well. It is usually sufficient to have a recommendation from a professor, an employer and someone who has supervised you whether that is through an internship or research experience.

**Essays:** Most programs require an essay that is based on a specific question or a personal statement that reflects your desires for graduate school and how you will be a good fit for the particular school you are applying. Please see our section on Personal Statements for more information on how to begin writing an admission essay/personal statement.

**Interviews:** Most graduate schools are highly selective in that they not only choose students based on their GPA and testing scores, but also interview students either by phone, individually, in a group and some also require a writing sample during the interview. Please see our interview section for more details.
Writing your Admission Essay/Personal Statement

Resources:

- Peterson’s: http://www.petersons.com/gradchannel/file.asp?id=1009&sponsor=1&path=gr.gs.yourpersonal
- Accepted: http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx
- About.com: http://gradschool.about.com/od/essaywriting/All_About_the_Graduate_Admissions_Essay.htm
- Purdue Online Writing Lab: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/

Tips:

- Don’t try to sound impressive! Admission representatives are looking for real people with real goals. Avoid restating your resume or recounting all your activities and honors.
- Be yourself and make it personal to why you want to go to graduate school, but avoid being too personal on sensitive topics, dropping names, apologizing for your past or embellishing.
- Do answer all of the essay question(s) you are asked.
- Try to not start every sentence with “I.” Be creative and weave a story throughout your essay with a common theme or perspective.
- Be sure that your essay has a beginning middle and end.
- Don’t underestimate the importance of the essay and be sure to proof read many times.
- Write different drafts of your essay and see which draft flows better, has a better approach to your story and feels more “you.”
- Have an opening paragraph that will capture the reader by wanting to read more.
- Make sure to follow all directions, whether it is answering questions to how many words your essay should be, this is partially a test to see if you can follow directions.
- Take breaks when writing various drafts and have professionals read them for feedback.
- When you meet with faculty members from your prospective schools, get a feel for the program goals and relay how you match those goals through your desires to join in your essay.
INTERVIEW SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Getting ready for a graduate school interview? Congratulations! Getting an interview is a significant step towards winning acceptance to the graduate program of your dreams. What questions can you expect?

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- If you're not accepted into graduate school, what are your plans?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What do you know about our program?
- Why did you choose to apply to our program?
- What other schools are you considering?
- In what ways have your previous experience prepared you for graduate study in our program?
- Any questions?
- What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?
- In college, what courses did you enjoy the most? The least? Why?
- Describe any research project you've worked on. What was the purpose of the project and what was your role in the project?
- How would your professors describe you?
- How will you be able to make a contribution to this field?
- What are your hobbies?
- Explain a situation in which you had a conflict and how you resolved it. What would you do differently? Why?
- Describe your greatest accomplishment.
- Tell me about your experience in this field. What was challenging? What was your contribution?
- What are your career goals? How will this program help you achieve your goals?
- How do you intend to finance your education?
- What skills do you bring to the program? How will you help your mentor in his or her research?
- Are you motivated? Explain and provide examples.
- Why should we take you and not someone else?
- What do you plan to specialize in?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What can be determined about an applicant at an interview?
Financing your Studies

So you may have heard that educational debt is the best debt to have, but either way it is still debt and you will eventually have to pay it back just like a new car or the T.V. you’ve financed before.

Here are some financing options available to you as a graduate student:

Reimbursement Programs: Your current employer may offer educational assistance or reimbursement options that could cover a portion to 100% of your graduate school expenses.

Financial Aid: By filling out the FAFSA, you may be eligible for federal student loan options.

Assistantships: Graduate Assistants/Teacher Assistants generally work between 10-20 hours per week in exchange for getting a tuition reduction and possible stipend.

Residence Life: Resident Directors, similar to Graduate Assistants generally get tuition paid, a possible stipend and may get living expenses and housing paid in exchange for managing an on-campus residence hall.

Fellowships and Grants: These are usually awarded based on academic achievement and do not have to be repaid. They normally include tuition and a stipend for living and typically go to stellar students. Search early!

Loans: 75% of all graduate financial aid is in the form of loans. Contact your institution’s financial aid office to learn more about their loan programs or you may research rates on private loans.

Scholarships: Although much harder to find, there are graduate school specific scholarships out there. Conduct a search and don’t forget to look into professional organizations in your field that may have scholarships available specifically for you!