



Applying to Graduate School

Advanced degrees fall into two categories: master's degrees and doctorate degrees. In addition they are generally classified as *professional degree programs*, which essentially prepare you for a specific career (i.e., medicine, law, business administration) and *research degree programs*, which allow you to specialize in an academic area (i.e., English, history, chemistry), and emphasize research and teaching. In most cases, in research degree programs, earning a master's degree prepares you to earn a doctorate, the most advanced degree. In general, master's degree programs take 1-3 years (full-time) to complete and doctoral programs may take 3-6 years to complete. Getting your graduate degree on a part-time basis may be an option, but of course, would take longer. However, it can be a good option for individuals who need to work full-time while pursuing graduate studies.

To Go or Not to Go (things to consider before applying)

- **Why are you considering graduate school?**

Application essays will almost always ask you for a personal statement describing why you want to pursue graduate study. So it is important to know what you want to study as well as how graduate school fits into your career plans. If part of your desire to go to graduate school comes from wanting to wait out a tough job market or postpone making decisions about your career goals, consider the costs, in terms of time, money and energy, of your decision.

- **Does it make sense to go to graduate school now or to wait?**

There are pros and cons to going to graduate school immediately after completion of your undergraduate degree vs. working for a few years.

Weighing the benefits of each

Immediately following undergraduate degree	Waiting a few years (or more)
Still in "student mode"	More sure of your career path/goals
Already have strong study skills	Time to build financial resources
Flexible/few commitments	Employer may pay for school
Some professions require advanced degree, even for entry-level	Improve chances of getting into a competitive school in some cases

The decision you make about when to apply to graduate school will depend on a number of factors, including the program you choose and your professional goals. For more information, see the section on **Researching Graduate Schools**.

- **Can you afford graduate school now?**

Consider the cost of getting a graduate degree. Just as there is financial aid for undergraduate programs, there are loans and fellowships for graduate work. In addition, many graduate students work as graduate assistants (or research assistants or teaching assistants), receiving a stipend in addition to reduced tuition fees in exchange for their work.

Researching Graduate Schools

- **Speak with people you know**

Talk to anyone you know who has attended graduate school, including your professors. In addition to knowing about the process of applying to graduate school and the lifestyle of a graduate student, professors who know you well may be willing to offer candid advice about your preparedness for graduate study.

- **Use graduate school guides and catalogs**

Use graduate school guides and catalogs on the web and in libraries. On the web, www.petersons.com, www.review.com, and www.gradschools.com are all free sites that include directories of graduate programs (including in some cases reviews and advice). Once you've selected schools that interest you, you can visit those schools' web sites to find out program specifics, admission deadlines and requirements and information on financial aid.

- **Visit schools if possible**

You may want to schedule a meeting with a director or chairperson of the academic department, as well as with the admissions office of the school. In many cases when you visit schools, you can visit classes and meet students currently enrolled in the graduate program. In graduate school, you will work more closely with professors and fellow students than you did during your undergraduate program. In addition, you will specialize in your academic area, so it is important that the department you choose is a good fit for you interests and goals.

The Application Process

- **Download or request application materials from schools**

Review admission requirements and deadlines.

- **Schedule and prepare for entrance exams**

The GRE (Graduate Record Exam) is the major entrance exam for graduate school. Some schools will also accept the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) in lieu of the GRE. The GRE has two types of tests—the General Test and Subject Tests. For many programs, only the General Test is required. However, you should check individual programs for their requirements. For MBA (Master in Business Administration) programs, you will likely take the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Exam), although many MBA programs will now accept either the GMAT or the GRE General Test. Medical schools require the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test), and law schools require the LSAT (Law School Admission Test). The GRE General Test and GMAT are offered throughout the year, while the LSAT, MCAT, and GRE Subject Tests are offered on only a few specific dates. Books, classes, and web sites are available to help you prepare (*see the handout on Graduate School Resources*). In addition to being a major factor in considering your application for admission, your test scores may also be used in determining your eligibility for fellowships.

- **Get your recommendations in order and request transcripts**

For recommendations, it pays to get to know your professors (and let them get to know you). Graduate schools will try to assess your ability to be successful in advanced studies, so recommendations can be very important in communicating your study habits, academic motivation and commitment, intellectual curiosity, and maturity. In addition to recommendations, you will need to provide official transcripts from any schools you have attended.

- **Prepare your essays**

Applications to graduate schools will ask you to complete one or more essay questions. Most applications will ask you for a personal statement or statement of purpose (your reason for wanting to pursue graduate work). It is critical that you allow ample time to prepare these, as they are very important in the admission process (much more so than when you applied to college as an undergraduate). The web sites mentioned in "Researching Graduate Schools," offer advice on writing your essay questions. Remember that essays are evidence of your ability to write well, so proofread them carefully and get feedback from someone you trust before you submit them.

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- **Organize your application materials**
 - If you are applying to more than one or two schools, you may want to consider using a service like Interfolio (www.interfolio.com) to manage your materials. You can submit/store documents, including essays, letters of recommendation, resumes or CVs, transcripts, etc. to this service, and then request to have them sent all together to schools. You can choose how you would like them sent (i.e., electronically, by mail, FedEx, etc.).
 - **Confirm receipt of all of your materials**
To ensure that your application is complete, contact each school before the application deadline to make sure that all of your application materials have been received.

Final Words of Advice

- This handout is intended to give you an overview of some of the factors to consider regarding applying to graduate school. Talking to professors or advisors, carefully considering you own career goals, researching your options, and allowing yourself ample time to complete the application process will help to ensure that you make a good decision about pursuing graduate work and give you the best chances for successfully applying to and completing a program.

For additional information and web resources regarding graduate school research and applications, please see the Graduate School Resources handout.