

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL DECISION

Many students consider pursuing advanced studies beyond their undergraduate experience. Choosing to go into a professional or graduate program is a big decision and there are many factors to consider: preparation, application, selection of programs, finances, and more!

Good reasons to pursue graduate school:

- Your career goal requires an advanced degree, such as a lawyer, doctor, or professor.
- You want to specialize in a subject you feel is of great importance to you.
- You want to advance in your career or change career directions.

Bad reasons to pursue graduate school:

- You don't know what you want to do.
- You don't want to get a job.
- You don't think you can get a job (but you haven't tried yet).
- You want to postpone paying student loans.

What should I ask myself?

- Is an advanced degree required to enter the particular profession I want to pursue or in order to obtain a certain level within the field?
- Do I love the field enough to obtain an advanced degree?
- Do I have the financial resources to cover the cost of graduate school?
- Am I burned out academically and need to take time off?
- Do I want to go to school full-time or part-time?
- Do I have the personal qualities and skills that are needed to be successful in graduate school?
- What are the different programs that are available in my area of interest?

The best time to apply for grad school is early in the fall, a full academic year before you want to start. Take graduate school tests early so you have time to take them again if necessary.

When should I get an advanced degree?

- Most programs base admission on test scores, 2+ years of work experience, academic transcripts, references, essays, and personal interviews.
- The amount of work experience needed before applying often depends on how competitive the program is.
- Note that many accepted students far exceed the minimum years of work experience required by certain programs and institutions. Check the class profile to compare your qualifications again.

9 things to do if you don't get into grad school this year:

1. Apply earlier next year. Avoid the last 6 weeks before the deadline.
2. Apply to more schools. Six is usually considered a good number. Even 4.0 students and those who exceed a program's entrance criteria can, and do, get rejected.
3. Visit the programs you really want to get into.
4. Go to summer school in the targeted subject. It's easier to get into summer school, even at Ivy League schools.
5. Take one class at a time in the targeted subject area and get great grades! Remember, your most recent grades count the most!
6. Get a volunteer or internship experience in the targeted field. It will boost your credentials even if it's part-time, a few hours per week, or unpaid.
7. Work in a real job in the targeted field. There is no substitute for actual experience. Plus, it will give you the opportunity to add recommendations from people working in the profession.
8. Get an intermediate degree (e.g., certificate, credential, etc.).
9. Don't give up. Try again.

Resource: Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (Ten Speed Press, 2000).



THE APPLICATION PROCESS

STEP 1: Research and Select Schools

There are many factors to consider when selecting a graduate school. Reach out to the faculty contacts listed for the program to see if you would be a good fit. Some details to think about include:

- Geographic location
- Program emphasis
- Program/school size
- Professional/career opportunities
- Accreditation of the program
- State regulation (in-state vs. out-of-state students)
- Underrepresented population's concerns
- Length of the program
- Cost/financial aid
- Reputation of the program

Resources:

- Professors and professionals in the field
- Internet: www.gradschools.com and program websites
- Publications (printed program directories)
- Peterson's Guide Book at Petersons.com

STEP 2: Take Required Standardized Tests

Research to find out which standardized tests are required for admission. Some schools require the GRE, MCAT, LSAT, GMAT, or others depending on the program. Additionally, some programs may require GRE subject tests.

Resources:

- Educational Testing Services, www.ets.org
- Graduate Records Exam (GRE), www.gre.com
- Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT), www.mba.com

STEP 3: Write your Resume or Curriculum Vitae

To demonstrate your fit for a graduate program, you will need to furnish a record of your activities, including research, clinical, professional, and/or any other types of experiences. Be sure to have your document critiqued before submitting it to the program.

STEP 4: Write your Statement of Purpose/ Personal Statement

The statement of purpose is a summary of your goals and intent for applying to graduate school. The main objective of the document is to articulate your professional focus and vision. It also demonstrates your fit with the program and helps you stand apart from the other applicants in the pool. Some programs will provide you with specific questions to answer in an essay format rather than a general statement of purpose.

STEP 5: Request your Letters of Recommendation

Your letters of recommendation will provide the admissions committee with a view of you as a person, as a potential graduate student, and as a potential professional in the field. Therefore, it is important to choose the right individuals to write your letters. You should provide your recommenders with the necessary tools to write you a strong letter, such as:

- Cover letter
- Unofficial transcript
- Copy of your resume or CV
- Copy of your personal statement
- Information detailing deadlines and requirements
- Required recommendation forms
- Pre-addressed envelope with postage unless instructed otherwise

Tip: Set a deadline for your letters well ahead of the due date.

STEP 6: Complete Application Forms

Most likely you will be able to submit your application online. If you are mailing your application, send your application packet as certified mail and request a return receipt to obtain a signature confirmation of delivery. Remember to send the appropriate application fee.

STEP 7: Request Transcripts from Registrar's Office

You may have to send official transcripts from the Registrar's Office directly to the school, or you may have to include an official sealed transcript in your application packet that you send to the school.

STEP 8: Secure Financial Aid

Look into graduate assistantships as an additional source of income. If you are applying for financial aid, check the financial aid deadlines. They are often different from the application deadline!

STEP 9: Follow up

Take responsibility for ensuring your materials are received by the deadline, if not before. Call admissions to inquire about your application status. Be persistent, but allow six weeks for processing. Please note: Each program will have specific application instructions. It is imperative that you follow them explicitly.

Resources: The University of Georgia Career Guide