

The decision to attend graduate school is not one to be taken lightly. It is a huge time and financial commitment, so ask yourself what your motivations are for attending graduate school. Being honest with yourself is the best way to establish if grad school IS right for you.

The **RIGHT** reasons to attend graduate school

- You have a clear sense of the career you want to pursue and an advanced degree is the ticket to entry into that field.
- You have a love for scholarly pursuit. Keep in mind that you will be immersed for several years studying and doing research in a particular academic discipline.
- You are a career changer whose new interests have little connection to your undergraduate major. A graduate degree could add to your marketability in the job market.
- Attend grad school if you are working toward a goal, NOT postponing making a career decision or to avoid looking for a job.

The **WRONG** reasons to attend graduate school

- You haven't decided what kind of career you want to pursue and would rather go back to school to "find yourself" or to postpone the "real world".
- You're getting pressure from your parents, friends, or professors. Your interests and motivations are what is important.
- You think grad school is a last resort because you won't be able to get a job. Don't buy into this myth! There is always something that can be done with ANY major.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What do I want to accomplish in my lifetime?
- What are my long-term and short-term professional goals?
- Is graduate school necessary for me to achieve these goals?
- Am I simply postponing my career planning and decision making?
- Will the amount of time and money spent on a program ultimately translate into greater career mobility and financial possibilities?
- Am I willing to meet the extensive research, coursework, and major paper demands of another academic program?
- Would continuing education alternatives, such as University Extension, vocational school, community college, or professional seminars and workshops assist in achieving my goals?

Prior To Application

Prior to applying to graduate programs, you must choose an area of study to pursue. Often it is helpful to discuss different areas of specialization with your faculty, research options online, and consider what you want to do with your advanced degree. Other issues to think about include what the job market is like in your chosen field, types of jobs available, and if the jobs "fit" with your career interests and goals.

- In order to obtain the best education that fits your goal, choose which schools you apply to carefully.
- Take the time to evaluate several schools that appear to offer programs that will meet your needs.

- Discuss the merits of different schools with faculty, conduct research online, and talk to professionals/alumni already in that field.
- Ask what the leading programs are in your chosen field.
- Consider personal geographic preferences and restrictions.
- Check websites, including www.petersons.com; call or write for information on schools that fit your requirements.
- Determine what tests are required and when they are offered.
- Inquire about the cost and opportunities for financial assistance, assistantships, stipends, etc.
- If at all possible, make a campus visit. Meet with faculty and a few students to see if the atmosphere is conducive to furthering your academic goals.
- Look at areas of faculty research and program emphasis.

School/Program Selection - How Many?

Several factors, such as faculty, the program's reputation, university reputation, accreditation, your own qualifications, size, diversity, etc. may help you narrow down the number of applications to submit. Choose one very competitive program and one school where you are very likely to get in. Application fees are costly and application forms take time, so make sure that all schools you apply to meet your academic goals and economic circumstances.

Prepare Application Materials

The Application Package

A typical application package will consist of several components. Completion of each part requires diligence and dedication and should not be taken lightly.

- Application website - including a personal statement
- Non-refundable fee (*sometimes this can be negotiated based on economic need*)
- Financial Aid application (*required if you will need a loan or want to apply for scholarships, fellowships, assistantships, etc.*)
- Transcripts for **all** schools attended
- Letters of recommendation (*typically from faculty who are familiar with your work*)
- Standardized test scores (*verify if they are necessary -- some fields do not require*)
- Personal interview *varies by type of program and school/department*

The Application Website

The application website is the most unambiguous component of the application package.

- Make sure to follow the instructions carefully and pay special attention to detail.
- Fill out each portion/area clearly, accurately, and free of typographical and grammatical errors.

The Personal Statement

Most graduate school applications contain an essay portion or "statement of purpose." Your essay should specifically address questions posed in the application, and express your enthusiasm for the field of study, your motivation, creativity, maturity and personal uniqueness. The essay is a key measure of your communication skills, so it pays to be meticulous about spelling, grammar, and writing style. Most applications will state the length of the essay or provide space. Keep your essay within these boundaries;

a longer essay will tire the admissions committee and will work against you. Admissions committees will evaluate the quality of the essay, not the length. For easier readability, use at least an 11 point type or larger and choose a traditional easy-to-read typeface.

Visit the Purdue Online Writing Lab to learn more about personal statements (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>). Within the site you will see information including Questions to ask yourself before you write and general advice, examples, Advice from Admissions Representatives, and Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls.

Don't forget to search for "personal statements" online to locate tips, advice from specific programs, fields of study, samples, etc.

Application Fees

In most cases, fees range from \$25 - \$150. By the time you apply to several schools, the fees add up to a lot of money! However, many schools have an application fee waiver for students with financial need. Call the admissions office for more information.

Financial Aid Application

An application for financial aid will generally come either as part of your application packet or in a separate mailing from a campus financial aid office. You may need to apply separately for fellowships and loans. Since financial support varies widely from institution to institution, the best advice is to read all financial aid materials carefully and to file documents on time.

Transcripts

Have your Registrar's Office send an official transcript of your undergraduate work directly to the admissions office of the schools to which you are applying. When reviewing your transcript, the admissions committee may consider:

- Cumulative GPA
- GPA in your major/concentration
- Final 2 year GPA
- GPA in courses relevant to your intended field
- GPA from year-to-year, or semester to semester

The standard GPA needed for acceptance to most graduate schools is 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Many other schools will accept students with less than 3.0, so don't rule out graduate school if your GPA is below that mark. A below-average GPA can often be offset by good letters of recommendation, high test scores, and a well-written personal statement.

Personal Interviews

More and more graduate schools include personal interviews as part of the overall application process. The interview gives both you and the admissions committee a firsthand opportunity to determine if there is a good match.

Letters of Recommendation

Most schools ask for three to five letters of recommendation. Admissions committees prefer references from faculty who can evaluate your academic performance and graduate school potential. Approach faculty members early in the fall of your senior year and give them time to write before their other academic pressures mount. Schedule meetings with your recommendation writers to discuss your reasons for going to graduate school and why you are applying to specific programs. Provide an abstract of courses taken and grades received, projects completed, and a concise description of graduate school and career plans. Letters of Recommendation should outline specific accomplishments that you have achieved and should tie into why you are an exceptional candidate.

Standardized Test Scores

The school’s catalog will specify which test you need and often indicate what is considered to be a competitive score. The most common tests are the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission test), the MCAT (Medical College Admission test), and the LSAT (Law School Admission test). Some schools may require other tests, or specialized tests for various professional degree programs. Test registration deadlines are well in advance of the actual test dates, and most are given only a few times annually. Due to increased competition for admission and financial assistance, it will work to your advantage to take the appropriate standardized test early in your application process. Policies regarding taking the test more than once, and whether scores are averaged or if the highest score alone is considered vary from institution to institution so make sure and ask the admissions office.

Timeline Review

December Grads: Some graduate programs may admit in January. So be prepared to adjust your timeline accordingly.

<p>Spring of your Junior Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research grad programs. • Visit school/program application websites. • Develop a personal timeline for the application process. • Begin preparations for standardized exams; register for a test date 	<p>Fall of your Senior Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify deadline, including those for financial aid. • Complete your personal statement. • Order transcripts from all post-secondary institutions. • Complete application forms. (do a draft on a photocopy first) • Give the necessary information to your references. • Inquire about Assistantships and Fellowships.
<p>Summer between your Junior and Senior Years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with faculty members to discuss your personal statement. • Ask for letters of recommendation. • Complete standardized exams. 	<p>Winter of your Senior Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit applications. (<i>may be done earlier based upon your personal timeline</i>) • Contact institutions to ensure your applications were received.

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