

Knowledge/Growth Support

Tips on Applying to Graduate School

A Guide from www.kgsupport.com

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TIPS ON APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Introduction

Graduate school provides a more specialized level of training and enhanced, expert instruction in a particular field. The most critical decision in applying to graduate school is not in selecting the institution but rather in identifying the most favorable area of study. Unfortunately, the decision-making process does not end there. Other considerations such as timing, location of study, financial aid, and the student population should all be given appropriate attention.

In this publication, we offer tips to jumpstart your search for a Master's or Doctoral degree. We explore the common reasons for applying, the selection process, test taking, and the necessary preparations leading to attendance. These guidelines will provide you with insights into approaching the application process with confidence and will serve as a reference as you go through the application steps.

Good luck!

I. Top Reasons for Applying to Graduate School

Career Change/Advancement

People with several years of working experience often realize that their career path slowly becomes limited, or even spares no room for professional growth. Some also discover that their skill set is no longer applicable to their field of exposure and subsequently pursue specific training in their industry as a means to move forward.

On numerous occasions, a rank-and-file employee may have already acquired a knowledgeable understanding of how a company is managed, and may wish to pursue a supervisory position in the company or in another enterprise. Whether planning to switch careers or aiming for advancement, a graduate education can greatly offer more flexibility.

Increased Salary

Higher earnings directly correlate with higher education. Management and/or supervisory positions are often restricted to those with advanced degrees, thus limiting your earning potential if you do not have these advancements. According to studies, a graduate degree holder in the United States can earn an average of 33% more than someone with a bachelor's degree alone.

Personal Improvement/Intellectual Stimulation

Discounting future career and income potential, other people opt to pursue graduate studies simply because they love to learn and are genuinely interested in acquiring more knowledge on their chosen field.

II. Determining if Graduate School is the Right Choice for You

Graduate school is perfect for people who enjoy research and learning. It is not ideal for people who merely want to take more courses, or for those who are in a rush to get a job.

Undergraduate study differs from graduate education in that it requires more of your time, motivation, and effort. It also entails forming professional and personal relationships with professors and other students. Generally, it challenges you in what you want to achieve in your life.

III. The Right Time for Graduate School

The right time to pursue an advanced degree is situational. You can embark on graduate school right after you receive your bachelor's degree, a year after graduation, or even several years later.

If you are approaching graduation, and you have decided that graduate school is the next step for you, it may be helpful if you ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Are you ready for another three to eight years of studying?
- 2) Should you take time off before moving on to graduate school?
- 3) If you want to take time off, why?

If the main reason for taking time off is fatigue, then ask yourself if the two or three months of vacation before graduate school can help you revitalize yourself. If you are convinced that graduate school is the next step for you, then there is no reason why you should delay your application.

Right after Graduation

If the knowledge you acquired in your undergraduate education is specifically relevant to your graduate program, then this option may be the right one for you. Other reasons for going straight to graduate school include your excellence as a student; your current status of having few (or no) obligations, both personally and financially; and your interest in pursuing an area of expertise that requires a graduate degree.

Take time to ensure that graduate school is right for you. Advanced study requires a considerable amount of motivation and the ability to work independently. Sometimes, a vacation from studying may help intensify your motivation and enhance your skills. As such, you may want to consider the following option.

After a Sufficient Rest Period

Many graduates take a year off before they start their graduate program. You can use this time to work, both to help you fund your studies and to gain experience. Perhaps, you simply want to travel. If you are traveling, remember to apply for courses at the right time, keeping in mind that you might be asked to attend an interview or an admission test. You will need to plan well ahead, sometimes as long as 18 months prior to application. In the case of some overseas programs, it is common for students to put together a timeline before they begin focusing on their time off.



It is important to understand that pursuing a graduate degree a number of years after undergraduate study is not uncommon. Some time off can be valuable if it improves your qualifications and primes you for the pressures and rigors of graduate school.

After Working Full-time

The reasons for acquiring work experience before graduate school include acquiring a better understanding of your professional objectives, obtaining relevant work experience, and developing a more responsible attitude toward studying. If you know in advance that you intend to pursue a graduate education after several years of work, look for an employer with a tuition reimbursement program. Often, employers are willing to finance part, or all, of the expenses entailed in graduate study.

While Working

The biggest percentage of the graduate school student population consists of part-time students. The idea of supplemental education is a growing trend because rapid industry changes affect almost all fields of expertise. Continuing to work, whether on a part time or a full time basis, can also be a means of paying for expenses incurred during the course of your graduate study.

IV. Master's vs. Doctoral Degrees

It is a common misconception that a prospective PhD student must possess a Master's degree to enter a doctoral program. Although majority of graduate programs do require this, it is not always the case. It is better to conduct your own research and investigate the degree requirements for a program as opposed to making an assumption.

In this booklet, we provide some of the more significant differences between being a Masteral and a Doctoral candidate.

The Masteral Candidate	The Doctoral Candidate
<p>You will spend, on the average, about two years in graduate school. The purpose of this program is to provide you with solid education in a specialized academic discipline.</p>	<p>You will spend, on the average, five to six years in graduate school. The purpose of the program is to provide you with comprehensive knowledge of your field, prepare you to conduct original and significant research, and make you ready to become a member of a teaching faculty.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Your First Year</p> <p>The enrollment process is similar to that for undergraduate study. You are required to fulfill the coursework requirements of your degree. However, the work will be heavier, the course topics will be more specialized, and much more will be expected from you than when you were an undergraduate. With your adviser's help (chosen by you or assigned by the program), you will start to solidify your academic focus.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Your First Three Years</p> <p>You will enroll in classes to fulfill your degree requirements and obtain comprehensive knowledge of your field of study. You will gradually establish your research direction, often consulting with an adviser (usually) appointed at the start of your graduate study. By the end of your second or third year, you would have completed a thesis or taken comprehensive exams, or both. The thesis and/or exams will allow your professors to evaluate your capabilities to continue with doctoral studies.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Your Second Year</p> <p>You may take more advanced classes to complete your course requirements. Having determined your research direction, you will gradually spend more effort toward the completion of your thesis. Depending on your pace, you may need one semester or an entire academic year for you to finish your masteral thesis, the objective of which is to show your mastery in your area of study.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Your Last Three Years</p> <p>Coursework becomes a minor component of your academic workload, and may even disappear as you conceptualize your dissertation, a novel and significant contribution to the available knowledge in your specialization. You will teach more and more classes and gradually collaborate more with senior faculty members. You will form a close professional relationship with a faculty member who shares the same research interests as you do, and he/she will become your dissertation adviser. Your program will end with the completion of your dissertation, which may entail an oral defense of your research before a panel of faculty members and/or experts in the field you are in.</p>

V. Selecting a Graduate Program

The following are some of the more important factors and questions that students need to consider and answer when deciding on what graduate program to apply to.

Specialty

This criterion will ultimately depend on your interests, but we always suggest job market consideration. Certain fields may undergo positive developments after a few years, while those that are currently experiencing rapid growth may become stagnant.

Ranking

A graduate program's ranking is critical for some prospective graduate students. They believe that a program's ranking signifies the quality of education they will receive and the level of resources that will be available to them. However, different sources of information – school Web sites, published rankings, and independent ranking organizations – all have specific criteria for evaluating a specific program. Students should therefore be aware of the factors that are considered in determining a program's ranking, as well as the evaluation methods (if any) that are implemented.

Location

Location can play a large factor in your graduate school experience. You will establish many ties in graduate school and should therefore consider if the school of your choice is located in an area that you would consider living in. On the other hand, if you are looking for temporary residence in a place you have no intention of living in permanently but desire to live in for a few years, graduate school is an opportune time to gain that experience. Wherever you are, you should be comfortable with the location because you will be (usually) staying in that place for the next two to eight years of

your life. Some questions you need to ask yourself are the following: Are you more partial to a small or large school? Urban or rural? Country or city?

Cost

Take into account all direct and indirect costs (tuition, miscellaneous fees, books, and especially cost of living) and the availability of financial assistance. The amount of financial assistance you receive often depends on whether you are pursuing a Master's degree or a PhD. It is not unusual for a university or college to waive tuition requirements if you are applying for a doctoral program. Moreover, many PhD students are given some form of funding or stipend.

Admission Standards

It is better to select a graduate program with stringent admissions standards. Schools with lower admission requirements may provide a lower quality of graduate education. Majority of schools and universities make this type of information available to the public. Look for the base requirements for admission; these usually include the necessary undergraduate GPA and standardized test scores.

Teaching Personnel

Narrowing down your program choices will prove much easier if you are definite about your research interests. It is recommended that you apply to programs where the faculty members have research interests that coincide with yours.

It has often been stated that a graduate program is only as good as its faculty. It is important to learn from and train under professors who are respected and recognized in their chosen specialty. The easiest way to evaluate the quality of a program is to look at the proportion of classes taught by full-time faculty. At the same time, indicators such as the number of scholarly publications and the professional experience of the teaching staff could also provide insights into the reputation of the faculty.

Facilities

Check if the program you intend to apply to has the facilities/amenities that you need. Can they provide you the tools necessary for your research? It is important to investigate whether the “state-of-the-art” facilities promoted by the school or university are truly as claimed.

Time for Completion

Ask yourself how quickly you want to complete the program. Do you want to finish in two years? Three? Four? Do you have other plans after earning your graduate degree and thus have to finish it within a specific duration of time?

Career Planning

If your reason for going to graduate school is career related, then it will be wise to find out what types of professional development activities are available in the program/university you are pursuing. Are there opportunities for networking or training with actual practitioners in the field of specialization you have chosen?

Many students love the field of study they are in, but are confused with what specific positions they can apply for after graduation. The program or department will have information regarding the average salary earned by their graduates and the proportion of students who land jobs after graduation. You can also check if the department has connections with various organizations/companies to assist its students in finding employment after graduation.

VI. Finding Top Graduate Schools

Seek Out Fellow Graduate Students

Seeking out and talking to students enrolled in your program of interest is one of the best ways to conduct research on graduate schools. Getting the “inside scoop” on what you can expect upon admission into a program will certainly help you obtain “real-life information” about the program. Aside from obtaining information on courses, tuition, and faculty members, you may also be lucky enough to hear personal experiences with regard to the quality of instruction, the rigors of the program, and other factors that will aid you in making a decision where to apply.

Graduate School Rankings

Graduate school rankings provide a practical guide for finding the school that is suitable for you. Aside from general rankings, information such as average grades and test scores are included in these records. This will help you establish whether or not your qualifications are competitive.

In fields such as medicine, business, and law, rankings can be very useful. Rankings in these disciplines are frequently determined based on meticulous scientific evaluations, and if applied properly, these can direct students toward organizing their applications by enabling them to highlight the aspects they will be competitive in.

Nonetheless, these rankings are not the end-all and be-all of selecting the right graduate school. Many students focus too much on international or national rankings. Combined with careful research, however, graduate school rankings can most certainly point you in the right direction.

VII. Applying for Admission

Materials

The following materials are generally required for applying to graduate school:

- a. A completed and signed application form
- b. The application fee
- c. Certified true copies of transcripts from colleges and universities attended
- d. Statement of Purpose or a Personal Statement
- e. Recommendation Letters
- f. Standardized test scores (see below)

VIII. Timetables for Applying to Graduate School

The earlier you complete your application, the better your prospects for admission. In this manual, we provide two options of a timetable you can utilize as you prepare for your application to graduate school. Carefully review each, and choose the one you believe will work best for you.

TIMETABLE (Option 1)

1. Conduct research

- Obtain information online — both institutional and external sites — and visit campuses (if possible).
- At graduate school fairs, speak with representatives from the schools. Collecting materials is often less effective than spending your time in verbal communication with people who are a reflection of the school. Generally, the material in brochures and distributed paperwork contains the same information as that of the online site. Talking to people may help you make better use of your time.

2. Prepare for the required standardized tests (i.e., GMAT and TOEFL)

- This is between one and six months ahead of taking the tests, depending on your initial level.

3. Start drafting your Personal Statement/Statement of Purpose

- Think about your accomplishments, relevant experiences, influences, and inspirations.
- Identify your goals and reasons for pursuing graduate study and/or the specific graduate program.

4. Obtain your Letters of Recommendation

- Decide on and speak to the people you wish to get recommendations from; make sure you give them plenty of advanced notice.
- Discuss your plans, and remind them of your academic/professional achievements and capabilities.
- Give them clear and realistic deadlines for writing the letter (six to eight weeks).
- Follow-up with a call three or four weeks after making your request to find out how the letters are progressing (and as some recommenders have busy schedules, to remind them to start writing the letter).

5. Request for your undergraduate transcripts

- Do this at least two months before you submit your application.

6. Take the standardized tests

- Request that the scores be sent to the schools.

7. Finish drafting your Personal Statement/Statement of Purpose

- Provide copies to friends and colleagues and ask them for their opinions regarding your work.
- Obtain the services of a professional English language review and editing

company like KGSupport to enhance your essay's content, improve English usage, and make your statement competitive.

- Type or write neatly. If your application is unreadable, it cannot be evaluated.

8. Mail all completed applications

- Do not wait for deadlines. Submit early!
- Keep photocopies for your records.

TIMETABLE (Option 2)

9-12 months before graduate school starts

- Select the programs you wish to enroll in.
- Obtain application forms and requirements from the university/school. Inquire from the admissions office if you have any questions.
- Decide who you will ask to write your letters of recommendation.

7-9 months before graduate school starts

- Start drafting your Personal Statement/Statement of Purpose.
- Collect your Letters of Recommendation.
- Complete the application in preparation for submission. Double-check that all necessary information has been provided. Read the instructions and follow them carefully.
- Keep photocopies of your application form, Personal Statement, undergraduate transcript, and Letters of Recommendation.

6-8 months before graduate school starts

- Submit your application documents. Check if there is a difference between deadlines for online submission and mailed applications.
- Begin looking for housing if required.

5-7 months before graduate school starts

- Request that your undergraduate transcripts be sent to your intended school/s.
- Acceptance letters are usually sent out around this time. If you have not heard from your school, contact them to make sure your application is complete.

3-6 months before graduate school starts

- Complete all your admission requirements
 - final transcripts
 - registration
 - medical checks
 - others

IX. Standard Tests/Exams Necessary for Application

GENERAL

1. GRE – Graduate Record Examination (General and Subject)

The GRE General Test measures a person’s verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills acquired over a period of time, and not related to any specific field of study. The standardized score serves as a yardstick for evaluating your qualifications as an applicant.

The GRE Subject Tests measure undergraduate proficiency in the following eight disciplines:

- | | | |
|--|-------------|----|
| Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology | Literature | in |
| English | | |
| Biology | Mathematics | |
| Chemistry | Physics | |
| Computer Science | Psychology | |

2. IELTS - International English Language Testing System

The IELTS is an internationally recognized English language test. It enables students to show their ability to pursue courses in English. It is accepted by universities in the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. However, it is not accepted by most universities in the United States. The score that students must obtain to be eligible in a university that requires IELTS depends on the course and the university.

3. TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language

The TOEFL is the most widely accepted English language test in the world. It measures the spoken and written ability of non-native, English-speaking students. It is best to check the Web site of the university/school you wish to apply to before deciding on which English test to take.

4. TOEIC – Test of English for International Communication

The TOEIC assessment measures the capability of non-native English-speaking people to use English in everyday work activities.

5. TSE – Test of Spoken English

The TSE assessment measures the verbal communication ability of non-native English speakers in an academic or professional environment.

SPECIFIC

1. LSAT (Law)

The LSAT is intended to measure skills regarded as indispensable for success in law school: accurate reading and comprehension of complex texts, organization of information and the capacity to obtain logical inferences from it, critical reasoning, and analysis and assessment of the reasoning and opinions of others.

2. GMAT (MBA)

The GMAT is a standardized test that aids business schools in evaluating the qualifications of applicants for advanced degrees in business and management. It is often used by business schools as a predictor of academic performance. The GMAT measures basic verbal, mathematical, and analytical writing skills that have been developed through education and employment.

GMAT requirements vary depending on the school. You should research on the average GMAT scores at the universities you wish to apply to. This information should be readily available. Remember that top business schools view a score of at least 600 as competitive.

Average GMAT scores in top business schools*

Harvard 707	University	University of Chicago 703
Stanford 720	University	Dartmouth College (Tuck) 710
U Penn 714	(Wharton)	UC Berkeley (Haas) 707
MIT 702	(Sloan)	Columbia University (NY) 708
Northwestern 702	(Kellogg)	New York University (Stern) 700

**US News and World Report, Best Business School, 2008 edition*

3. MCAT (Medicine)

The MCAT is a standardized, multiple-choice test intended to evaluate an applicant's problem-solving, critical-thinking, and writing skills as well as knowledge of scientific concepts and principles essential to medical study. These scores are considered by medical schools as an essential factor in their evaluation process. Majority of medical schools in the United States require applicants to submit MCAT scores.

4. DAT (Dental)

General academic competence, grasp of scientific concepts, and perceptual ability are among the factors measured by the Dental Admissions Test.

X. The Admissions Interview

Although not all graduate programs conduct admission interviews, it is better to be prepared for this possibility, especially if the university, program, or field you are applying to is particularly competitive.

What is the purpose of the admissions interview? Sometimes, graduate school applicants are not as ideal for a program as they appear on paper. Therefore, the interview helps the people involved in the selection process to identify if a candidate can be successful in their program. It often provides insights into a person's motivation, fundamental knowledge, and interpersonal and communication skills.

The interview process is different for each university and program. It may even vary within the program itself, depending on the person or panel handling the interview. During your interview, do not expect the interviewers to remember anything about you. They may have read your application essay or have gone through your transcript or resume, but keep in mind that they have likewise reviewed hundreds if not thousands of applications. Therefore, be ready to repeat certain details that are already presented in your file.

Before the Interview

- Conduct research about the program and faculty. Identify the program's strengths and the faculty's research interests.
- Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. What is it about you that makes you suitable for the program?
- Step into the faculty members' shoes. Try to determine what it is they want from a graduate student. Will your qualifications enable you to positively contribute to their program and research? What skills do you possess that will prove valuable to a professor as he or she conducts his or her research?
- Think about obvious questions that will be asked, prepare potential answers, and rehearse them with a friend (or even by yourself in front of a mirror).

During the Interview

- Always keep your goals in mind during the admissions interview.
- Try to sincerely communicate your passion, enthusiasm, and proficiencies.
- Be natural. Do not attempt to second guess what the interviewers are looking for. Be yourself, and most importantly, do not invent stories or accomplishments to impress the interviewing panel. You may succeed one time, but it could cost you your opportunity to get into the program if you are found out.
- Listen carefully to what the interviewers are saying and/or asking. When answering, remember to speak slowly and clearly.
- Establish and maintain eye contact with the interviewer/s and remember to smile. Show them you are happy for this chance to talk to them.
- Some interviews involve social affairs like a small gathering. Keep in mind that although it is a party, it is still part of the interview. You might not see it or feel it, but you are being evaluated all the time.

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