

Graduate School Information

To Go Or Not To Go, That Is the Question...



The decision to go to graduate school should not be taken lightly. Before you begin searching for the perfect graduate or professional school program, first determine if pursuing a graduate degree is the right step for you to take at this time by asking yourself these questions:

- **Is a graduate degree necessary to achieve your career goals?** This will take some research on your part. First, you must have clear and defined career goals. Talk to people in your field and ask their opinion about the necessity and the pros/cons of having an advanced degree. You may discover that a graduate degree might actually make you a less desirable candidate, but on the other hand, you might discover that a graduate degree is a requirement for the type of position you are seeking.
- **Are you ready for graduate school?** Most graduate or professional programs are quite rigorous and intense. Do you have the drive and motivation necessary to complete a 2-4+ year program? Graduate school is also a huge investment of not only your time, but your money as well. Do you have the resources necessary to pay for and support yourself through school?
- **Are you considering graduate school for the right reasons?** Make sure that you're choosing to attend graduate or professional school because it makes sense within your overall career goals, and not

Factors to Consider when Choosing a Graduate Program

Admission Requirements:

Each program's requirements will differ somewhat. Your decision to apply to certain schools may, in part, be determined by how well you meet these requirements. However, if you don't meet all of their standards, don't let that deter you from applying. Many times, if you are weak in one area, but really strong in another, they will compensate each other.

Program Faculty Reputation:

Find out what the national reputation of the school and program is, and the reputation within your field. Also, verify that the program is accredited by the appropriate organization.

Program Content:

Evaluate whether the program meets your educational and professional needs and interests. Is there a particular faculty member or lab that interests you and matches your goals?

Job Placement Rates/Job Search Assistance:

Inquire about the percentage of graduates who were able to find employment upon graduation. You might also ask where these graduates were employed (organization and geographic location), their position titles, and their starting salary (if that's important to you). Also, find out what types of career services are available for graduate students.

Cost:

Graduate programs can be very expensive, especially if you are an out-of-state student and the program doesn't provide any financial assistance to its students. Some of the key information surrounding cost that you might want to obtain include the following: Are there assistantships, grants, scholarships, or fellowships offered by the department, college, or university? What percentage of students generally receive this type of assistance? Is financial aid available? How much would you qualify for?

Program Culture:

Culture of the program is an important thing to consider because this will help you determine if the environment is a good fit for you.

General Application Timeline



The application process for graduate school can be time-consuming, so make sure you start yours as early as possible to ensure success. Below is a general timeline to follow for applying for graduate school, but it might vary depending on the specific programs you are applying for, so be sure to keep track of these different deadlines, so you don't overlook them! It could cost you to miss out on a great opportunity.

Graduate School Checklist

- Develop a list of schools that offer programs in areas that interest you.
- Gather information about the programs and rate them.
- Obtain information about the research professors are conducting there.
- Score competitively on the GRE or other required professional tests and maintain high GPA.
- Acquire high quality letters of recommendation.
- Gain experience in the field you want to pursue in graduate school.
- Ensure that you have met all undergraduate prerequisites for the graduate school program(s) you apply for.
- Develop a plan for how you will pay for graduate school.
- Determine which degree will be most beneficial to you in your career growth, i.e. M.S., Ph.D., M.D., or D.V.M..
- Meet with career counselors and academic advisors to discuss your plans for graduate school.
- Visit the various graduate schools you are considering.



Common Reasons Graduate School Applicants Are Rejected

- Inappropriate undergraduate curriculum
- Poor grades or lack of academic prerequisites
- Low admissions test scores
- Weak or ineffective recommendation letters
- Missed deadlines
- Incomplete application or file

Application Timeline

IMMEDIATELY:

- Maintain highest GPA possible.
- Gain relevant field and research experience.
- Get to know your faculty members.

JUNIOR YEAR:

Spring/Summer

- Start researching graduate programs and potential faculty advisors.
- Send out requests for information from schools.
- Determine application procedures, exam requirements, and application deadlines.
- Study for and possibly take required entrance exams.
- Think about additional classes you may need for senior year.

SENIOR YEAR:

September/October

- Request letters of recommendation from faculty.
- Take required entrance exams if you haven't done so already.
- Contact prospective faculty advisors.
- Start preparing your application materials.
- Inquire about assistantships/funding and research other financial aid possibilities.

November/December

- Order transcripts.
- Mail applications (possibly earlier, depending on the program).
- Apply for assistantships, fellowships, and grants.

January/February/March

- Arrange school visits and schedule an interview (if applicable).



Tips and Advice from the Faculty on Applying to Graduate School

- Get field experience, especially if it involves close interaction with a professor.
- Demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm and dedication to the field.
- Read the journals in your field to explore potential research topics and come to your initial interview prepared to discuss a possible research topic
- Tailor each letter of intent/statement of purpose to the specific school to which you are applying.
- The written material is the most important part of your application. It is evaluated from every angle.
- Establish contact with prospective advisors.
- Obtain strong recommendation letters from professors, especially those with whom you've done research.
- Write a letter of intent stating WHO at that school you would like to work with, not just a general letter about why you want to go to graduate school.
- Keep your G.P.A. as high as possible.
- Make sure all of your application materials are sent on time



Masters vs. Ph. D

Deciding whether to pursue a masters degree or a Ph.D. will depend on your ultimate career goals as well as the job market. Sometimes having the more advanced degree makes you a less desirable candidate. Discuss these issues with your career counselor and a trusted faculty member to help you make the best decision for you and your professional goals. Below is a summary of the main differences between a masters and Ph.D. program.



Masters

- Takes 1-3 years to complete
- Usually requires you to pay your own tuition and fees
- More coursework focused vs. re-search focused
- May require completion of a re-search thesis and/or comprehensive exams

Ph.D.

- Takes 4-6 years or more to complete
- Often includes financial support (tuition and/or a stipend)
- Usually entails 2 years of coursework, then 2 or more years devoted to full-time research
- Requires you to conduct research for and write a dissertation

Curriculum Vitae

A curriculum vitae (C.V.) is a more comprehensive and detailed version of a resume traditionally used when applying for faculty/administration positions in academia. However, there are other uses for a curriculum vitae such as: tenure reviews, grant applications, public speaking engagements, fellowship opportunities, publishing, etc. There is not a universal format to follow for C.V.s. To get the best results, you will need to tailor your vitae to match the position in which you are applying.

Because a vitae is often the first thing a potential employer sees, it is important that it is completely error-free and up-to-date.



Differences Between Curriculum Vitae and a Resume

Curriculum Vitae

- Average length ranges between 2 and 10 pages
- In general, there is more of an emphasis on your academic and research background.
- There is not a standard format for a C.V. The format is usually determined by the amount of information and the choice of items to be emphasized.
- Usually does not include an objective statement.
- Typically used by job seekers with extensive academic and professional credentials applying for positions in education or research.

Resume

- Length is usually 1 to 2 pages.
- In general, there is more of an emphasis on relevant skills, experience, and projects.
- There are standard formats for resumes, which include chronological, functional, or combination.
- Objective statements are used more frequently on resumes to state specific position applying for.
- Typically used by job seekers applying for non-academia and non-research oriented positions.

Helpful Hints

- Create a vitae that is visually attractive and will grab the reader's attention. Be sure it is well organized and easy to read.
- Balance information on the pages so that the total effect is pleasing to the eye. If possible, focus your strongest assets around the optical center of the page, about 1/3 of the way from the top.
- Organize the first page so it highlights your greatest strengths when matched with the specified requirements for the position. Put the most important information on the top half of the page.
- Do not staple pages together, and make sure your name page numbers appear on each page.
- Omit personal information such as age, marital status, number of children, ethnicity, etc.
- For faculty positions, a C.V. generally does not have an "objective" statement. Objective or background statements are sometimes used on a C.V. if an applicant is applying for a position outside of their area of training or experience.
- The language of a C.V. has a distinctive brief and upbeat quality. Know the language of the field in which you are applying. Speak their language, but do not use slang or jargon.
- Be brief, concise, and to the point.

Testing Information

There are a number of different tests graduate schools use for admission, so it is very important to know exactly which test each school you are applying to requires. Scores on these tests are used not only for admission, but also for fellowships, grants, and assistantships.

Graduate Record Exam (GRE): The general test is computerized and consists of three sections: verbal (30 minutes), quantitative (45 minutes) and analytical (60 minutes). In addition to the general test there are subject area tests for particular areas (i.e. Biochemistry, Economics, Education, History, Psychology, etc). Some schools may require a subject test and others may be optional or not necessary.

See information on following pages

Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT): Offered solely via computer, the GMAT tests verbal, qualitative, and analytical writing abilities and includes 180 multiple choice questions as well as two 30-minute essays. This exam generally takes five (5) hours to complete.

GMAT Website: <http://www.mba.com/mba/TaketheGMAT>

Miller Analogies Test (MAT): Tests reasoning ability through 100 verbal analogies. Occasionally used instead of the GRE.

MAT Website: www.milleranalogies.com

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT): The test requires 175 minutes plus a 30 minute writing sample. It consists of five 35-minute sections of multiple-choice questions. 2 logical reasoning sections analyzing statements for errors in logic, 1 analytical section solving complex deductive reasoning puzzles, 1 reading comprehension section, 1 experimental section, and 1 writing sample on a specified topic.

LSAT Website: www.lsat.org

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT): This six-hour, paper-based test measures verbal reasoning, knowledge of physical science and biological science, and writing ability. The test consists primarily of reading passages followed by multiple-choice questions.

MCAT Website: www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm

Professional Associations: Association of American Medical Colleges: www.aamc.org,

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine: www.aacom.org

Other exams include:

Dental Admission Test (DAT): www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/index.asp

Professional Associations: American Dental Education Association (AADSAS):

www.adea.org

American Dental Association: www.ada.org

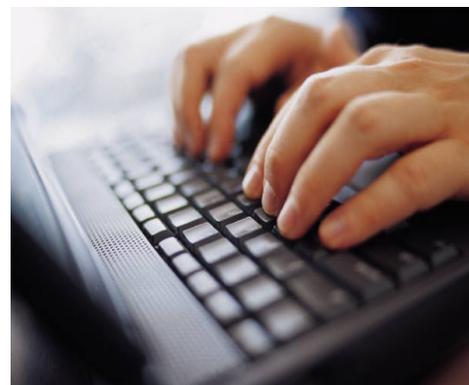
Optometry College Admission Test (OCAT): www.opted.org/info_oat.cfm

Professional Associations: Association of Schools of Optometry: www.opted.org

The American Optometric Association: www.aoanet.org

Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT): www.pcatweb.info

Professional Associations: The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy: www.aacp.org



GRE Testing Information

What Is The GRE?

Analytical Writing GRE Section

The Analytical Writing GRE Section has 2 essays. One asks students to "present their perspective on an issue," the other asks them to "analyze an argument." There are 2 essays, and it is 75 minutes long: 30 minutes for the "issue" essay, and 45 minutes for the "argument" essay.

Skills Tested

- Ability to communicate complex ideas in a concise and effective way
- Ability to evaluate claims and evidence
- Ability to support ideas using logical reasoning and relevant examples
- Ability to use standard written English to prove an argument

The GRE (Graduate Record Examination) is required by most graduate schools, and can be taken throughout the year.

The GRE is comprised of 3 sections: Analytical Writing, Quantitative, and Verbal.

It is a 2-1/2 hour computer-adaptive test. Your performance on previous questions determines which questions come next.

Quantitative GRE Section

The Quantitative GRE Section tests high-school level math. You'll need to know arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis. It has 28 questions and is 45 minutes long.

Skills Tested

- Ability to solve problems using math concepts
- Ability to understand basic arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis
- Ability to use quantitative reasoning

Verbal GRE Section

The Verbal GRE Section has sentence completion questions, analogies, antonyms, and reading comprehension questions. It is 30 minutes long and has 30 questions.

Skills Tested

- Ability to draw conclusions based on an analysis of written materials
- Ability to recognize relationships between concepts and words
- Ability to analyze relationships between different parts of sentences

How The GRE Is Scored?

Scoring is based on how you perform on each section of the GRE: Verbal Score (200 to 800 points); Math Score (200-800 points); Analytical Writing Assessment (0 to 6 points).

How To Prepare For The GRE

The first thing you should do is take a free GRE practice test to see how you'd do on the real thing. Then you can gauge your strengths and weaknesses, and see what GRE test prep options might be best for you.

Source: <http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/gre-information.aspx?uidbadge=%07> and <http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/gre-sections.aspx?uidbadge=%07>

GRE FAQ



How important are my GRE scores?

Schools vary tremendously in the weights they place on the different factors in the admissions process, so be sure to contact the specific schools to which you are applying in order to determine their unique requirements. Some programs weight GRE scores very heavily, and/or have a minimum score for applicants, while other programs consider GRE scores more of a formality. It is important to note that your GRE score is a major factor in determining your eligibility for financial aid.

Can I cancel my scores?

Yes. You can cancel your scores immediately after you take the GRE test. This is the only time you can cancel your scores. Unfortunately, you must make the decision to cancel at the testing center before you see your scores. In addition, the fact that you cancelled your scores will be noted on your official GRE score report.

How do I know if I am ready for the GRE Test?

Try Princeton Review's free online course demo, which includes a free GRE practice test. When you finish the practice test you'll get a complete report detailing your strengths and weaknesses.

When Should I Take the GRE?

First find out the application deadlines for the graduate schools to which you are applying. Then work backwards from your earliest deadline. Build some extra time into your planning process for unexpected delays because you can only take the GRE test once per calendar month. It can take as long as four weeks for your official scores to arrive at your designated schools.

The GRE is offered at testing centers almost every day. Call your local center for details and to book your test. While in theory you could sign up for the GRE with only two days' notice, don't depend upon this luxury. Call at least one month prior to your desired test date.

What fees are associated with the GRE Test?

The fee to take the GRE test is \$140 within the United States, some U.S. Territories, and Puerto Rico. The fee is \$170 in all other locations (except China, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan).

What are the GRE Subject Tests?

The GRE Subject Tests are intended to measure your knowledge of specific subject matter. Subject Tests are available in eight disciplines: biochemistry, cell and molecular biology; biology; chemistry; computer science; literature in English; mathematics; physics; and psychology. These tests are given in paper-and-pencil format three times per year, in November, December, and April.

These tests are given separately from the GRE General Test and require additional fees. Check with the graduate schools to which you are applying to determine whether any of these extra tests are required.

Where can I get more information about the GRE?

You can contact us by calling **800-2Review**. Or you can contact the Educational Testing Service (ETS) at 800-GRE-CALL, 609-771-7670, or www.gre.org.

Source: <http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/gre-faqs.aspx?uidbadge=%07>

Personal Statements and Essays

What Is A Personal Statement?

- A statement of your interests and goals
- A reflection of your writing ability
- An opportunity to tie all of the pieces of your application together
- Usually 2 different types of essays: A general, comprehensive essay OR a response to a specific question(s)
- It is NOT an elaborate resume
- The main purpose of writing a personal statement or essay is to help graduate programs determine whether your interests and goals can be met through their program. The information being evaluated in an essay usually falls into 4 areas:
 - Background Information (i.e., research interests, education, research and work experience)
 - Future Oriented Expectations (i.e., reasons for pursuing degree, expectations of program, short/long-term goals)
 - Personality Factors (i.e., maturity, unique characteristics, your enthusiasm and commitment)
 - Writing Ability



Steps For Writing

Before writing your response to an essay/personal statement, think about it. Perform self-exploration/self-reflection and review your personal history.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where am I coming from? Why am I coming here? Where am I going after this?
2. What makes me unique, different or unusual?
3. Who and what have been my intellectual influences?
4. What experiences have influenced my decision?
5. Why have I chosen this path? What attracts you to this career?
6. What details of your life might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
7. When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it that has further stimulated your interest?
8. How have you learned about this field?
9. If you have worked during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills) and how has that work contributed to your growth?
10. Are there gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you need to explain?
11. Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships in your life?
12. What personal characteristics do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession?

Once you have answered those questions:

- Organize your thoughts.
- Upon completion of your statement, circulate it among your professors, advisors, employers, and career counselors/liaisons at The Career Center for critiquing, editing, and proofing.
- Be absolutely sure the final draft of your essay contains NO spelling or grammatical errors and that you've answered each question fully.

Key Elements In A Personal Statement

1. Insight into your character – a generic piece will not convince a program head that you're poised to contribute to and enhance the academic community. Focus on details that give a clear portrait of your goals and motivations.
2. Sincerity – forget what you think the admissions committee wants to see and become an interesting applicant.
3. Background and Motivation – you are aspiring to become a professional in your field. Make clear, without overdoing it, that you're aware of current trends and issues, and touch upon what you hope to contribute.
4. Goals – an attractive applicant is a motivated applicant.
5. Fit for the Program – highlight how the attributes of the program appeal to you.
6. Writing Ability – your statement **MUST** be well written. You need to demonstrate intellectual clarity and attention to detail.

Helpful Hints On Personal Statements

- If there is a question(s), read it carefully and answer it completely.
- Avoid repeating verbatim the information found in your transcripts and resume.
- Concentrate on the opening paragraph – What is most important for the admissions to know about you?
- Tell a story through concrete experience. Distinguish yourself through your story to make yourself memorable.
- Stress your strong points and discuss what led you to this field or events that influenced your educational and/or career goals.
- Substantiate your dedication to your career goals. Use this to set yourself apart from the other applicants and to demonstrate how you would be a good fit with their program.
- Do NOT include high school (some exceptions), controversial topics, or a lengthy discussion regarding poor grades.
- Keep it positive and succinct.
- Be specific – your desire to become “X” should be logical, the result of specific experience. Provide the reader with insight into what drives you.
- Do some research on the school if needed so you can talk about what sets their program apart from others.
- Write well and correctly – be meticulous.
- Avoid clichés – don't write that you are “good at science” or want to “help people” if you want to go into medicine.



Source: D. Asher, *Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way Into the Graduate School of Your Choice* (2000), p. 94.

Top Personal Statement Mistakes

1. Careless errors—proofread and have others look over your application.
2. Vague generalities—these are the ones that have been used so many times they are now clichés. For example, “I learned the value of hard work.”
3. Summarizing your resume—the statement should be more future oriented than past oriented.
4. Sensitive topics—don't get on a soapbox and preach to the reader. Avoid coming across as fanatical or extreme.
5. Gimmicks—avoid cuteness, you want to sound professional
6. Long-windedness—watch for irrelevant details
7. Big words—using longer, fancier words does not make you sound more intelligent. Simple language demonstrates your ability to think and express yourself clearly.
8. Do not complain or whine about the “system” and the circumstances in your life.
9. Do not talk about money as a motivator.
10. Do not remind the school of its rankings or tell them how good they are.
11. Do not talk about a significant other's employment opportunities while you are attending school.

Examples Of Personal Statements

This opening immediately grabs the attention of the reader and sets this personal statement apart from all the others. It shows uniqueness and personality, as well as passion and commitment to the career.

The middle section of your personal statement should detail your experience and interests in a particular field. Develop your story in this section. You can also clarify career goals, as well as goals for your time in graduate school. Usually personal statements contain information about why this particular program and school fits you best.

The closing paragraph needs to wrap up thoughts from your introduction and the meat of the statement and tie the whole story together.

I stood in the emergency room on my first shift as an EMT when two paramedics rushed in with a woman, cyanotic, and a body temperature of 84° F. Trying to let the more experienced staff take control of the situation, I stepped back, until the doctor in charge looked at me and said, “Start CPR.” With nearly ten people in the room trying to run IV lines, place EKG tabs, and initiate intubation, I climbed upon the stool next to the gurney and began CPR for the first time in my life. The EKG monitor mounted on the wall reassured me my compressions were effective; however, I never imagined seeing the lines continue on, in the same shark tooth pattern once I had stopped.

Later that day, I debriefed in the break room with a life-flight paramedic who told me something I’ll never forget: “In a time of crisis, it is that patch on your sleeve that makes someone come to you, rather than anyone else around you. That patch makes a total stranger trust you, and invite you into his home and his life.” Trust is empowering; and, it is that trust, along with all the responsibilities it entails, that I’m seeking. I want people to look at me and have the utmost confidence in my abilities, and in my work; but most of all, I want to be a part of a professional team capable of changing people’s lives.

Although I entered college without a clear research direction, the _____ Institute helped develop my interest in the field of Genetics. I found much of my laboratory training at _____ to be extremely rewarding. For example, one experience that convinced me early on to seriously consider genetics was a project involving the construction and characterization of a recombinant plasmid. Since I worked independently for the most part, the project played a key role in increasing my confidence and helping me understand various concepts pertaining to genetic analysis. It was this experience that motivated me to seek a position as a teacher’s assistant for a course in Microbial and Viral Genetics. As a TA, I learned how demanding the teaching situation is and how much teaching a course can contribute to my own learning.

By this time, after discovering my passion for research and the joy of teaching, I began to seriously contemplate graduate schools. To excel in graduate school, I decided I would not limit my experience to my formal education. Instead, I wanted the opportunity to explore my career options to make a well-informed decision as to the area of my future research. With these goals in mind, I chose to take advantage of _____ Cooperative Education Program, which meant earning my Bachelor’s degree in five years instead of four. In December of 19xx, _____ hired me as a research assistant in the Electrophysiology department.

Although I am years from becoming a MD and practicing as a surgeon, my personal definition of being a good doctor motivates and drives me to pursue a career in medicine. Like I did nearly two decades ago with riding, you have to start somewhere. It is not always fun or easy, but the goal of becoming good drives me while knowledge and experiences fill in the gaps along the way. While I continue working towards being a great rider, I eagerly await the next step in my challenge of becoming a good surgeon, and possibly one day a great one.



Graduate and Professional School Interviews

Helpful Hints

- An interview may or may not be required by the program.
- Remember, it's an information exchange. This is a great time to find out more about the campus, program, your potential faculty advisor, and other students currently in the program. You want to be certain that the program is a good fit for you.
- Treat your graduate school interview like a professional job interview; dress and act professionally and be prepared.
- Bring along a list of questions to ask, copies of your GRE scores and transcripts, interview confirmation letter, and any course catalogues, brochures, directions, or maps that the school has sent you.
- Prepare by thoroughly reading the university's literature, anticipating questions you are likely to be asked, and practicing your responses.
- Send a thank-you note to each interviewer within 24 hours.

Sample Interview Questions

In general, graduate and professional schools will ask questions about you, their program, and their faculty members.

Questions about you:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your career goals? How will this program help you achieve these goals?
- Why do you want to pursue a graduate degree in ____?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your plans if you are not accepted? Do you have a Plan B?
- What unique qualities and contributions would you bring to this program?
- How do you feel about the many ethical issues that face the profession?
- How do you motivate yourself?
- How do you deal with stress?
- Explain a situation in which you had a conflict and how you resolved it? What did you learn?
- Describe a group project you've worked on and what role you took.
- Why did you decide to become a ____?

Questions about their program and faculty:

- Why did you apply to our program?
- What appeals to you most about our program?
- How do you see yourself fitting in?
- What do you think will be challenging as a grad student in our program?

Sample questions for you to ask the interviewer(s):

- What do you consider the greatest strength of this program? Greatest challenge/weakness?
- What makes a student successful in your program?
- Where do graduates of your program typically find employment?
- How would you describe the culture/environment of your program?
- What career services, counseling, medical, and housing facilities are available for graduate students?
- What assistantships and scholarships are available and what proportion of graduate students in the program receive one?





**THE CAREER
CENTER**

**The Career Center
Main Office**
Lory Student Center,
Lower Level—Rm 26
970.491.5707