## Questions About Graduate School

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# What is graduate school? Why would I go to graduate school?

Graduate schools offer degrees beyond the bachelor’s degree (e.g., master’s degrees and doctoral degrees). There are two primary reasons to attend graduate school.

1. Career Advancement

Many professional careers require advanced study beyond the bachelor’s degree.

1. Intellectual Curiosity

If you have a passion for a particular field of study, pursuing advanced degree is one way to feed that passion.

[Essay: Why go to Graduate School?](http://www.gradschools.com/article-detail/why-grad-school-62)

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# When should I start thinking about graduate school?

The decision to attend graduate school (and which one to attend) is a big one. Therefore, it is never too early to start thinking about it. If you are reading this as a freshman, you are ahead of the curve. If you are reading this as a senior, it is never too late to start.

The early stages of your undergraduate career will help you define your interests and aptitudes. If you think graduate school is in your future, you should dedicate some of the later stages of your undergraduate life (junior and senior years) to searching for and applying to graduate schools. This can be a lengthy process. If you wait until your senior year to think about graduate school applications, you may find that you have already missed crucial deadlines and will have to wait for an entire year to apply.

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# How do I find appropriate graduate programs?

The internet is a great resource for finding graduate programs. If you are not sure how to start, you may find these links helpful.

[GradSchools.com](http://www.gradschools.com/)

[GraduateGuide.com](http://www.graduateguide.com/)

Chowan professors are another valuable source of information. Most have more than one graduate degree. Therefore, within any one department there are personal insights about a variety of graduate schools.

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# When should I apply to graduate school?

As a general rule, graduate schools begin screening applicants in the fall for admission the following fall. Therefore, you should be applying to graduate schools during the fall of your senior year. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. Some programs have rolling admissions (candidates can submit applications any time within a given time frame) and others have no specified end date (applications are accepted until all spots are filled). The best way to determine when to apply is to visit the web site of the school you are interested in. Pay close attention to deadlines and start your preparation well ahead of the deadline to give yourself time to assemble the required application materials.

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# What do I need to do before I apply?

First, do everything in your power to produce an exceptional set of transcripts to submit with your application materials. Now is the time to start looking at admission requirements. Do you have a GPA that will make you competitive? Have you taken the kind of coursework that will make you competitive? If not, shoulder this responsibility right now and make it happen.

Second, do everything in your power to produce an exceptional set of recommendations to submit with your application materials. At least one of these recommendations (probably several) will have to come from faculty members who are familiar with your academic work. Faculty members will provide an honest assessment of your academic abilities. Their assessment will be based on your performance in the classroom. What actions have you taken to ensure an exceptional recommendation?

Third, identify a program that is compatible with your goals. This takes time. If you start exploring during your junior year, you will have plenty of time to narrow the field before you start applying during your senior year. In addition to finding programs that match your interests, in many cases, you will need to identify faculty members that you want to work with. Read some of their publications. Call and ask them about their department, their research, their former graduate students, their current graduate students, whether they will be accepting new graduate students, etc.

Fourth, find out what kind of financial assistance is available. This varies widely from discipline to discipline and from program to program. In some disciplines (e.g., medical school) it is customary for students to pay handsomely for their education; in others, it is customary for students to receive help from the institution in the form of fellowships, research assistantships, teaching assistantships, etc. It is important that you educate yourself about these options and ask about their availability.

Finally, give yourself enough time to assemble your application materials. Does the program require an entrance exam (GRE, MCAT, LSAT, etc.)? If so, how often are these exams given? How long does it take to get an official report of your scores? Does the program require recommendations? If so, who will you ask? How much time will they need to prepare a recommendation?

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# What is the GRE (MAT, MCAT, DAT, LSAT, or GMAT)?

Most graduate or professional programs require an entrance exam. Scores from these exams (along with undergraduate transcripts, letters of recommendation, and other application materials) are used to screen applicants. The most common entrance exam is the GRE (Graduate Record Exam), but there are other types of entrance exams. The type of exam you should take depends on the program that you are applying to. If you are unsure which exam is appropriate, check admission requirements for the schools you are interested in. The links below provide information on the most common graduate entrance exams.

[GRE](http://www.ets.org/gre/) The GRE General Test is required by most graduate programs that require the GRE. Some programs (those in the biological sciences, physical sciences, computer sciences, math, or English literature) may require a GRE Subject Test in addition to the GRE General Test.

[MAT](http://psychcorp.pearsonassessments.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/site/Community/PostSecondary/Products/MAT/mathome.htm) The MAT (Miller Analogies Test) is accepted by *some* graduate programs as a “substitute” for the GRE. To determine if the MAT is appropriate, check admissions requirements for graduate programs where you are planning to submit an application.

[MCAT](https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/46412/mcat/) The MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) is for students applying to medical school.

[DAT](http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx) The DAT (Dental Admission Test) is for students applying to dental school.

[LSAT](http://www.lsac.org/JD/LSAT/about-the-LSAT.asp) The LSAT (Law School Admission Test) is for students applying to law school.

[GMAT](http://www.mba.com/mba/thegmat) The GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) is often required for admission to graduate programs in business administration.

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# When do I take the GRE (MAT, MCAT, DAT, LSAT, or GMAT)?

Most entrance exams are administered several times each year (check the appropriate web site for exam dates). Take entrance exams well in advance of graduate school application deadlines. Depending on the exam, it may take two to four weeks to receive official scores (check the appropriate web site for exam dates and score release dates). If there is a possibility that you will take an entrance exam more than once (to get a better score) you should start this process even earlier.

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# Should I apply to more than one school?

In most cases, the answer to this question is yes. Unless you have a clear commitment that a faculty member will accept you into a graduate program once your application materials are processed, you should prepare for the possibility that your application will be denied. If you apply to only one school and are denied, it may be too late to apply to another program for that calendar year.

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