

Graduate School Pros and Cons, Timing and Materials

If you consider pursuing a master's degree, professional certificate or doctoral degree, **review the questions below** to make sure this is the right path for you. Research your career goals and consult with career and academic advisors before making a decision.

What should I expect from graduate school and how is it different from undergraduate studies?

Though programs and fields differ, some aspects of grad school are often alike:

- It's more **independent** and involves more reading and writing.
- It transitions from practical skills acquisition to **theory and inquiry-driven research**.
- You become a peer in your field, and the **expectations for your performance are higher**.
- In some programs you can **get paid** to go to grad school instead of paying for it. You're part employee, part student.
- **Conferences, presentations and publications** become more central to your experience.

How will graduate school impact my career goals?

Do market research, consult professionals and mentors in the field, reach out to alumni, and discuss the benefits with advisors. Reflect on the pros and cons to determine if graduate school is worth investing your time and money.

Grad school shouldn't be considered an assumed next step following your bachelor's degree. Evaluate what the graduate degree would help you achieve. Is it a required qualification for the career you want? Have you researched the job you're targeting and its education needs? Is your goal to become a subject-matter expert on a certain topic?

Do I have the means to attend graduate school?

Programs and institutions offer different financial arrangements for graduate studies. Some programs will waive your tuition and offer you a stipend to serve as a graduate research or teaching assistant employed by a faculty member while working toward your degree. These assistantships are particularly common in science fields.

A master's in business or a law degree are often paid for out of pocket. Research financial aid sources on the program website and meet with the **graduate program coordinator** to ask about **assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, loans** and other means of payment.

Does it matter if I've been done with my undergraduate degree for a period of time?

Many graduate students take time after they complete their undergraduate education to gain experience in their industry. Some graduate programs prefer candidates with work experience.

Graduate School

Graduate school is a **journey that requires guidance and mentorship from application to graduation**. Use the available resources to meet admission deadlines, understand requirements, explore funding and balance graduate school with life and career.

Graduate Resources

Meet with **Career Development Center** advisors for help with graduate school applications, program searches, understanding graduate school logistics, and résumé and CV.

The **OSU Graduate School** is also a great source of information about what graduate school is like and what it takes to be a successful applicant. For more information on Oregon State's offerings, visit gradschool.oregonstate.edu.

Researching Grad Schools

- Ask a trusted faculty member about program recommendations.
- Look at where researchers in your subfield went. Check conference listings, online CVs and names in scientific articles.
- Review industry association websites and online ranking services such as *The Princeton Review* and GradSchools.com.

Research Graduate Programs

- Are they research-heavy or course-based? Do they include a practicum? How does the curriculum compare to your dream job?
- Who are the faculty? Do they align with your interests?
- Where are graduates finding jobs? Check **LinkedIn** alumni search or program websites.
- What about the thesis, dissertation, projects and comprehensive exams?
- What are the application deadlines?
- Do you want to live where the program is located?

Master's vs. Ph.D.

Practice-Based – Cultivating Practitioners			Research-Based – Cultivating Researchers	
Master's Program	Professional Program (Master/Doctoral)	Doctoral Program (usually requires a master's degree)	Master's Program	Doctoral Program (usually requires a master's degree)
2-3 years	3-4 years	3-5 years	2-3 years	4-7 years
M.A. M.S M.Ed. M.B.A. M.S.W. M.S.N. M.P.H.	Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.) Doctor of Dental Surgery (D.D.S.) Doctor of Pharmacy or (Pharm.D.) Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.) Juris Doctor (J.D.)	Ed.D. Dr. PH. Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) etc.	M.S.	Ph.D.

Pros and Cons

Pros

- Immersion into your field and topics you love; becoming an expert researcher/peer alongside faculty.
- Required or preferred qualification for many jobs in industry and academia.
- Greater earning potential.

Cons

- Difficult academically and sometimes emotionally (grad students are six times more likely to suffer from depression/anxiety; Nature Biotechnology study).
- Becoming overqualified and screened out by some employers; you might need to relocate geographically.
- Foregoing full-time salary to remain a student for a period of years.

Graduate School Application

Before Applying

- When is the **application deadline**?
- What are the **program entry requirements** (education level, tests, essays, letters of recommendation, etc.)?
- How will you **fund the program**?
- What is the **funding deadline**?
- Are there circumstances to factor into your **timeline** (need to relocate, hours you can manage, etc.)?

Gather Your Materials

- Application form and fee
- Transcripts
- Personal statement or research statement
- Admissions exam scores—GRE, MCAT or LSAT (www.ets.org)
- Letters of recommendation
- A résumé or CV
- Double-check that you meet requirements for GPA, foreign language and prerequisite degrees.

Admissions Exams

Admissions exams like GREs are rigorous, difficult tests.

Programs differ in how they weigh (or don't weigh) these scores. Ensure that you understand scoring requirements and preferences for programs of interest. Then reserve ample time to study and take practice tests (often available online).

Study books can often be checked out from the library. These tests reward those who have invested time in learning how to navigate and perform according to their logic.

Application Timeline

JUNE

- Narrow down programs to apply to.
- Review application requirements of each program.
- Mark down the application deadline.
- Start preparing for admission test.
- Register for the admission test.
- Reach out to each program and find the contact person to ask questions.

AUGUST

- Take the admission test.
- Search for financial aid and apply.
- Start writing personal statement.

SEPTEMBER

- Request letter of recommendation.
- Request official transcript.
- Fill out applications.
- Polish your résumé.
- Polish your personal statement.

OCTOBER - JANUARY

- Submit application.

JANUARY - MAY

- Review acceptances and decide.