

Graduate School Guide:

It is important to determine if graduate school is right for you. This chart will help you decide.

Is Graduate School Right for You?

Label each statement below as True, False, or Unknown\*

Statement	True, False, Unknown
If I do not go to graduate school now, I may never go.	
I can get a job in my field without a graduate degree, but not in my specialized area of interest.	
I am unsure of my career goals and graduate school will help me clarify my interests.	
I am actively exploring both graduate school and direct entry into the marketplace.	
My professors are encouraging me to attend graduate/professional school.	
I cannot work in my field of interest without a graduate degree.	
The job market is crowded, and a graduate degree will make me more competitive.	
A graduate degree will significantly increase my entry level salary.	
I like school; I am not ready to leave the academic environment.	
I have career-related experience as part of my background.	
I have always known that I would go directly from undergraduate school into graduate study.	
Most students enter my field of graduate study directly from undergraduate school	

Do the answers to the statements indicate that you have a primary reason for considering graduate school now? If so, what are your reasons?

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*There are many good reasons to go to graduate school, but if you don't have a clearly defined career path/goals then attending graduate school may be a waste of time. It may be better for you to gain more experiences before making this decision that will cost you time and money.*

Resource: University of South Carolina Grad School Tip Sheet, "Is Graduate School for Me?"






Scroll to the next page for details regarding the graduate school application process....

## Graduate School Packet

Based on Information from the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/graduate\\_school\\_applications/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/graduate_school_applications/index.html)

Before & After Application	Notes
Research Different Graduate Programs	<p>When considering a graduate program, think about the experience from a personal and professional perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the location of the university (urban or rural), the campus community and culture, and any student life considerations that will affect how you will fit personally</li> <li>• Consider your research interests, the faculty, funding to cover expenses and tuition, the work requirements, and the supportive resources that will help you learn and thrive professionally</li> </ul>
The Application Process	<p>Research the Application Process for Each University You are Considering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every school will have a different application process and it is important to follow the instructions carefully</li> <li>• It is important to research the individual department's webpages as well as the university's to make sure you understand all the due dates</li> <li>• A complete, correct, and on-time application is expected and the consequences for missing a date could cost you admission into a program</li> </ul> <p>Create an Organization System to Track Your Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a simple filing system by creating physical or online folders with the individual universities' program's information or create a spreadsheet to stay organized</li> <li>• If you are unsure about any part of the application process, call the admissions office</li> </ul> <p>Be Thorough about All Correspondence and Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have many people proofread materials you submit, such as personal statements or essays</li> <li>• Keep copies of all that you turn in should something get lost</li> <li>• Be professional, polite, and courteous to everyone throughout the application process</li> </ul>
Entrance Exams	<p>The Graduate Record Exam (GRE)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The GRE is required by the majority of North American Graduate Schools</li> <li>• It is a timed test that measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing</li> <li>• Research the GRE website (<a href="http://www.takethegre.com">www.takethegre.com</a>) to get up-to-date information about testing dates and sites</li> <li>• Some schools may not require this entrance exam since COVID-19</li> </ul> <p>Other Common Entrance Exams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)</li> <li>• The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)</li> <li>• The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)</li> </ul> <p>Information Regarding Entrance Exams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each entrance exam will have its own website with important information</li> <li>• You will want to study and take practice exams before sitting for the "real" one</li> <li>• The more practice exams you take, the better your score will be</li> </ul>
Transcripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When first applying to a program, it may not be necessary to submit an official transcript</li> <li>• Upon acceptance, an official transcript will most likely be requested</li> <li>• Contact your Registrar's Office to find out how to secure an official copy and be prepared to pay for this official transcript</li> <li>• Always follow up with the graduate admissions office to make sure that your transcript was received</li> </ul>
Letters of Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most programs require three letters of recommendation and prefer them from an academic source</li> <li>• Only ask people who know you and your academic work to submit a letter of recommendation</li> <li>• It is important to ask permission before giving the name of the reference to the college and be sure to share a copy of your resume when you ask for the reference</li> </ul>
Required Documents	<p>The Statement of Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is the most important and challenging document to write and submit</li> <li>• This document reflects who you are and why you would be an asset to the program</li> <li>• It should make you stand out from other graduates, so give yourself plenty of time to write several drafts.</li> <li>• Consider your Clifton Strengths when writing this document. These can guide your statement especially when you use examples to highlight how you use your strengths.</li> <li>• Each program may have different questions to answer in the personal statement so each one you write may be different</li> <li>• Always have others proofread your work</li> </ul> <p>A Writing Sample</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some programs want a sample of your academic writing which could include a work of fiction, an article, or an analytical paper, depending on your discipline</li> <li>• If there are page number restrictions be sure to keep your writing within the prescribed guidelines</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum Vitae (CV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A CV outlines your entire academic life as well as any other experiences that are related to your interests and can explain the course of your life's interests</li> <li>• This document is typically at least 2-pages long for an undergraduate and will include all the sections found in a resume but may also contain information on research, hobbies, travel, and related interests</li> <li>• A Curriculum Vitae package is available from USCB Career Services</li> </ul>
Types of Graduate Study	<p>Master's Degrees and Doctoral Degrees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master's degrees typically take 18 months to 3 years to complete</li> <li>• Doctoral degrees typically take several years to complete</li> <li>• Most Master's programs are considered professional programs because they help you advance in a particular field</li> <li>• Programs that take longer to complete than a master's can also be considered professional programs – these include medical degrees and law degrees,</li> <li>• Most Doctoral programs are considered academic programs because they are designed to advance knowledge or research – these are typically Doctor of Philosophy or Ph.D. degrees</li> </ul>
Funding a Graduate Degree	<p>There are several ways to pay for graduate school and you should research these thoroughly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fellowships target the top 5% of students and pay for tuition and some living expenses</li> <li>• Assistantships may pay as much as 100% of tuition and offer a monthly stipend for 20 – 28 hours of work per week</li> <li>• Grants and scholarships can help defer the cost of the graduate degree and, some employers may provide tuition assistance</li> </ul>

## Graduate School Application & Planning Timeline

	Typical Time Period	Tasks
	Summer Before Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin Researching Graduate Programs</li> <li>• Register for Required Standardized Tests</li> <li>• Take Practice Tests to Build Skills</li> </ul>
	Early Fall Semester Senior Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take Standardized Tests with Time to Retake if Necessary</li> <li>• Speak with Admissions Counselors and Seek Faculty Advice Regarding Graduate Program Options</li> </ul>
	November-December of Senior Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order Transcripts to be Sent to Graduate Programs for which You are Applying</li> <li>• Finalize Personal Statement, CV, and any other Required Documents</li> <li>• Complete Applications</li> <li>• Request Letters of Reference</li> </ul>
	January – February of Senior Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit all Required Materials by Published Due Date of Submission</li> <li>• Get Confirmation that All Required Materials have been Received</li> <li>• Fill out FAFSA Application</li> <li>• Prepare for Phone and/or Campus Interviews</li> </ul>
	March – April of Senior Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most Graduate Programs Will Select, Reject, or Place Applicants on Waitlist</li> <li>• Double Check with Any Programs that have Not Notified You of Their Decision</li> </ul>

Resource: The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)

### After You Apply to Graduate School\*

<p><b>The Wait</b></p> <p>Graduate programs usually make their final decisions in March, so there will be a couple of months to wait after the application is submitted.</p> <p>During this time, practice interviewing for grad school. Ask professors about the graduate interviewing process and use the resource, <b>BIG INTERVIEW</b>, from USCB Career Services to help you prepare. (See USCB Career Services' Interviewing Guide for information on <b>BIG INTERVIEW</b>.)</p> <p>If you have not received any word by the end of April, it is okay to make a polite phone call. You may be on a waiting list and just need to be patient.</p>
<p><b>The Rejection</b></p> <p>If you are rejected, don't get down on yourself as typically factors beyond your control have influenced the decision. It is okay to make a polite phone call or email to understand why you were rejected and may be important to do so to avoid mistakes in the future.</p> <p>Don't be demanding when making a phone call, be direct to find out if there is a weakness in your information. Avoid the same mistake when applying to another institution.</p>
<p><b>The Acceptance!</b></p> <p>Congratulations are in order!</p> <p>Typically, acceptance notices are received by mid-April, so that in the event you get more than one offer, you have time to decide.</p> <p>Financial aid packages typically arrive separately.</p> <p>If you receive an offer from a second or third choice program before your first, find out the absolute last day to decide and call your first-choice institution to inquire about your standing.</p> <p>If you have not already done so, now is the time to schedule a campus visit.</p> <p>Take a second look at the costs and financial aid to make sure that the financial burden doesn't outweigh the advantages of the degree.</p>

Resource: Purdue Online Writing Lab (The OWL)