

Considering and Applying to Graduate School

There are many things to consider about whether or not to attend graduate school, such as the cost, time commitment and potential it has to help you achieve your career goals. Use these tips as a basic guide for making a decision and getting an overview of the application requirements.

Considering Graduate School

Is grad school right for me?

Ask yourself and research:

- 1 What am I looking to gain from a graduate degree? Skills? Knowledge? Career advancement?
- 2 Is having a graduate degree required in my profession or helpful in getting my target job? Would I get a higher starting salary or faster advancement?
- 3 Is it better to go to graduate school right after my undergraduate degree or to get relevant work experience first?
- 4 Am I prepared to make the adjustments necessary to succeed at the hard work required by graduate school? Are the people in my life who would be affected prepared?

Am I right for grad school?

Graduate schools are highly competitive and have strict criteria for being accepted. Candidates are often selected based on:

- 1 Undergraduate GPA, entrance exam scores, relevant experiences or abilities
- 2 Candidate suitability for the program – the link between your interests and the program’s focus
- 3 Quality of application, references selected and reference letters
- 4 Performance at an interview or multiple-mini interviews

Which programs are a good fit?

Once you decide to pursue graduate studies, start researching what programs are available in your areas of interest. Speak with your professors, employers, program advisors, potential supervisors, the institutions you’re considering and current/past graduate students to get their insight and discuss your options.

You might want to ask about program requirements, length of study, delivery modes, learning options, all costs associated, financial support, career possibilities and other relevant resources.

Applying to Graduate School

The requirements and deadlines for applying to graduate school will differ between schools, so do your homework. Admission requirements may include an application form, application fee, transcripts (GPA), undergraduate prerequisite courses, references, reference letters, statement of intent/purpose, CV and/or completion of entrance exams.

Start applications at least one year before you intend to begin a program. Give yourself sufficient time to complete your applications well before the deadlines and strictly follow each school’s directions on how to submit.

| Curriculum Vitae (CV)  | CV basics   |
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| <p>A CV is a kind of resume meant to provide a complete picture of one’s professional and academic life. They can be anywhere from 2 to over 30 pages long. The sections you add will vary depending on what the graduate school is looking for, but will most likely include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact Information</li><li>• Education</li><li>• Awards/scholarships/honours</li><li>• Professional experience (relevant to discipline)</li><li>• Research</li><li>• Publications/conferences/presentations</li><li>• List of references</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use letter size paper, black ink, a simple 11 or 12 point font, and 1-inch margins.</li><li>• Use page numbers and section headings. Under the headings, arrange your information in reverse chronological order by end date.</li><li>• Use easy-to-read language and avoid first person (I, me, my) statements.</li><li>• Do not list information from high school or earlier.</li><li>• Keep everything relevant. Don’t add trivial information or repeat things to add length.</li><li>• Have multiple people read over your CV to get feedback.</li></ul> |

**Tip:** Ask grad schools for their format or content guidelines/restrictions for CVs and other application documents, and read about the faculty and program for clues about what’s important to them.

| Letter of intent / Statement of purpose / Personal statement  | Essay basics   |
|---|--|
| <p>This type of document is your chance to present yourself as a suitable and valuable candidate. Usually, the admissions committee will give you a topic or specific questions to address. Here’s what to do:</p> <p><b>Opening paragraph</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce yourself: who you are, what career aspirations you have and what you expect to study and research.</li><li>• Explain why you’re interested in the program and why you are a good fit.</li></ul> <p><b>Body paragraphs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show the reader you are ready for grad school with your understanding of the field, relevant skills, projects and accomplishments through academic and professional work. Provide examples to support this.</li><li>• Highlight what you have done beyond “other students” that makes you qualified and would add value to their program.</li></ul> <p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss your research goals and interests if choosing a thesis-based program.</li><li>• Connect your goals with what the program offers. Reiterate how the program will help you find success.</li><li>• Share what contribution you hope to make to the field of study, the community or the world by attending the program.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present ideas in paragraphs with blank lines in between.</li><li>• Use 11 or 12 point font, 1-inch margins and 1.5 or 2 line spacing.</li><li>• Write using a first person, active voice. Show genuine interest and personalize your content.</li><li>• Keep your audience in mind, which is usually a selection committee made up of faculty.</li><li>• Avoid negativity, humour and cliches.</li><li>• Don’t go off-topic; choose quality over quantity.</li><li>• Provide evidence for your claims in the form of personal examples and experiences.</li><li>• Stay within the word count limit and meet all other requirements.</li><li>• Have your document proofread and edited multiple times for grammar, tense, consistency, accuracy and style. Don’t repeat information already on your CV, unless you are explaining gaps.</li></ul> |

| Reference letters  | Reference letter basics   |
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| <p>These letters help the admissions committee understand your skills, areas of interest and academic/research experience from an established professional’s point of view.</p> <p>Try to get 3 reference letters from professors who know you well and can speak to why you are a good fit for a graduate program. Or, if you are working in the field, ask your supervisor/manager/mentor.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure your reference knows the programs you are applying to and what skills, interests and abilities you have as they relate to your applications.</li><li>• Discuss letter requirements with each reference including expectations of specific information, delivery process and deadlines for each school.</li></ul> |

**Tip:** For more information on the process of applying to grad school and the timeline you can expect, [book an appointment](#) with Career Services.

**NEED MORE HELP?**  
**Book an appointment with us through [MyCareerHub](#).**

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