

Is Graduate School Right For Me?

Deciding whether or not to go to graduate school is a major life decision. Factors such as lifestyle, career field, cost, and timing all play important roles in this decision. Graduate school can be a fruitful and fulfilling experience, but it is important to use discernment in determining if it is right for you.

Should I Go?

Graduate school is NOT the place to go to discover your career direction. Rather, you attend graduate school because it is a way to attain your desired outcome. Here are some questions to evaluate:

- What are my short and long term career goals?
- Will an advanced degree help me obtain these goals?
- Am I choosing graduate school because I feel there are no other options at this time?
- Am I willing to invest the time, effort, and expense required for graduate study?
- Do I have the necessary academic and personal qualifications?

When Should I Go?

There is not a single right answer regarding the best time to enroll, but here are some factors to consider:

Pros of taking time off

- Better understand your career goals by working in the field for a few years
- Graduate programs sometimes favor work experience for admission
- An employer may pay a portion or all of your graduate school expenses
- Gain solid financial footing
- Give yourself time to study for entrance exams and possibly distance yourself from poorer undergraduate performance

Pros of attending right away

- You are accustomed to being a student
- Your study skills are sharp
- Fewer obligations outside of school
- Some occupations require an advanced degree even for "entry-level" positions
- Knowledge of the subject matter is fresh in your mind
- Life circumstances might change, making it harder to attend in the future

What Degree Should I Pursue?

Once you've decided to go to graduate school, make sure you choose the type of degree that is best for you! Some degrees require licensure in addition to your degree before you can work in the field. Do your research—don't assume you know all the facts!

- Professional Degrees are designed for employment or advancement within a given field and stress the application of knowledge and skills. Examples: JD, MD, LPC, MDiv
- Academic Degrees are designed for intellectual growth and (sometimes — at the master's level) are a prerequisite or doctoral work within a given field. They focus on advancing knowledge through original research in a given field. Examples: PhD, EdD, MA, MS

Do you need help deciding if graduate school is right for you?
Make an appointment with a Career Coach to discuss all your options!

So you've decided the next step for you is graduate school! This handout will give you various resources you may need when searching for the right school, as well as navigating the application process and preparing for entrance exams.

Search and compare

Depending on your program and location requirements, deciding which schools you will apply to can be a tedious process. The following tools will facilitate your search:

- [Petersons.com](https://www.petersons.com)– Petersons has a graduate school search function in which you can filter based on your desired location, college type, degree type, area of study, tuition and setting.
- [Gradschools.com](https://www.gradschools.com)– This website allows you to search based on area of interest and subject. It will then give you a list of both online and in-person schools that offer that degree program.
- [U.S. News Education](https://www.usnews.com/education) - If you are curious whether your school(s) of choice are ranked highly in the country, U.S. News now has a search function in which you can either search by just program or program plus school name.

Application timeline

Not sure when you should start your application process? Princeton review has a very helpful application [timeline](#)* that you can reference to see if you are on-schedule with your grad school application materials.

Entrance exam preparation

Most graduate schools require some sort of entrance exam. Do your research to find out which tests your schools of choice require, and then register and begin preparing early on.

Personal Statements:

The personal statement portion of a school's admissions application presents a great opportunity for you to market yourself to the school/program. A "Statement of Purpose" varies slightly from a "Personal Statement." Read about the differences at [Petersons.com](https://www.petersons.com).

Preparing for an Interview

An interview is a conversation and exchange of information to help you and the school determine if you are a good fit for the program. It's important to prepare for an interview to feel more confident and comfortable. Interviewing is a learned skill, and the more practice and preparation you do, the easier it becomes and the more competitive of a candidate you will be.

Below are some ways for you to gain knowledge and practice:

- **Big Interview:** <https://unwsp.biginterview.com/>
- **Career Development:** Schedule an appointment with one of our career coaches through [Handshake](#)