

Guide to Graduate School

Going to graduate school is an investment you make in yourself—personally and professionally. This guide will walk you through the steps of the entire application process, from planning and GRE® prep up to your final decision.



2 YEARS BEFORE GRAD SCHOOL

PLAN

Maybe you already know what you want to study in grad school, or maybe you're still deciding. Narrow down your interests and determine your field before forging ahead.

- Compile a list of disciplines and programs that interest you. Find advisors at your school to offer their firsthand perspectives on various professions. Visit programs' websites, request brochures, and attend open houses.
- Learn the difference between master's, professional, and doctoral programs in your field. Which best suits your timeline and career goals?
- Research specific schools. Consider factors like location, cost, reputation, competitiveness, and whether the school is public or private.
- Look into the average credentials of matriculants at your prospective schools to determine which ones you should target.
- Explore the earning potential of each of your possible degree paths.
- Come up with a timeline for taking the GRE, and then schedule your GRE test prep.

Tip: If you want to live in a specific state after grad school, research any state-wide regulations that might affect you in your chosen profession. For instance, some states require a doctorate for practicing clinical psychology; others only call for a master's.

1 YEAR BEFORE GRAD SCHOOL

PREPARE

Time to get down to business. Put your best foot forward when getting your application materials together and taking the GRE. Don't panic; prepare.

- Choose your GRE test date and reserve your seat. Many locations offer year-round testing.
- Make sure you choose a GRE test date that's early enough for your prospective grad schools to get the results in time. If you think you might want to take the exam twice to boost your score, schedule your GRE test date even earlier.
- Allow yourself at least three months before your test date to study and prepare for the GRE. Show up on Test Day well-rested and feeling confident.
- Register for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and start looking into private scholarship and grant applications.
- Take note of all deadlines for both grad schools and financial aid applications.
- Consider which professors know you well enough to write strong, positive recommendations. Contact them as early as possible so they'll have plenty of time to meet submission deadlines.

Tip: Take a free practice GRE early this year to see where you stand. Consider other GRE prep options, like enrolling in a GRE course to help boost your score.

9 MONTHS BEFORE GRAD SCHOOL

APPLY

Time to complete your graduate school applications. It's key during this phase to stay organized and focused.

Here's how:

- Start working on your applications early so you'll have enough time to review and revise them. Give yourself plenty of time to polish your personal statement(s) and get feedback.
- Make sure all relevant materials—test scores, transcripts, personal statement, and letters of recommendation—are included in your application packets or en route to your prospective schools' admissions offices.
- Check and double-check that everything is accurate. Have someone familiar with the application process review each application before you send it in.
- Submit your applications on time—online or via mail—according to each school's specific requirements.
- Before each interview, do your homework. Research all you can about the particular school. Anticipate common questions and prepare your answers. Revisit what you wrote about in your personal statement and think about how you want to come across.
- Wait for acceptance letters!

Tip: Be sure to keep your GPA strong, since grad schools will be looking at that final number. If you find yourself waitlisted, be patient. Talk to your advisor about ways to enhance your application at this stage.

6 MONTHS BEFORE GRAD SCHOOL

DECIDE

Here comes the fun part: deciding where you will go to grad school. Keep these things in mind while you're narrowing down your top choices.

- Consider your options carefully, weighing the pros and cons of each program. Beyond rankings and reputation, look for the best fit for you, taking into account each school's mission statement, student culture, and location.
- Don't forget to consider non-academic factors, including climate, extracurricular opportunities, setting, cost of living, and financial aid availability.
- Look into ways to finance your education: fellowships, scholarships, research opportunities, and other financial aid options.

Tip: When you're making your decision, talk to current students at your top-choice schools. They can offer firsthand perspectives on student life, courses, workload, and other factors that might help you make your choice.

Let Kaplan help you get your graduate education off to the right start with our comprehensive GRE test prep options. For more information—and to get an overview of all we have to offer—visit [Kaptest.com/GRE](https://www.kaptest.com/GRE).

KAPLAN TEST PREP

GRE[®] is a registered trademark of the Educational Testing Service, which neither sponsors nor endorses this product. All other test names are registered trademarks of their respective owners. None of the trademark holders are affiliated with Kaplan. Test names and other trademarks are the property of the respective trademark holders. None of the trademark holders are affiliated with Kaplan.