



Center for Student Experience & Career Development: Graduate School Guide

TYPES OF DEGREES

MASTER'S DEGREE: Usually takes one to two years to complete. Often, internships or fieldwork are included in degree requirements.

RESEARCH MASTER'S DEGREE: May involve writing a thesis or taking a comprehensive examination in addition to coursework. Usually takes two years to complete.

PROFESSIONAL AND DOCTORAL DEGREES: At the doctoral level, there are professional degrees and research degrees. The most common professional degrees are M.D. for medical or J.D. for law. The research doctoral degree (Ph.D.) involves coursework and research training, while the final component usually involves original research and reporting on the research through a dissertation.

GRADUATE SCHOOL RESEARCH

Use the following sites to begin researching schools that offer the program you are interested in. From there, continue your research on the university program's web page.

Find information about the program length, curriculum, required research, internship or practicum experiences, and program admissions requirements. You will also want to learn about the faculty and outcomes for students who have graduated from the program.

- gradschools.com
- princetonreview.com/grad-school
- petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx

BASIS FOR ADMISSION

- Undergraduate GPA and admissions test scores
- Recommendation letters from professors, advisors, or supervisors
- Personal statement or statement of purpose
- Internships, work experience, and/or prior research experience or experiential learning
- Related life experiences such as travel, volunteer work, and hobbies

STANDARDIZED TESTING

- GRE (Graduate Record Exam)—sciences, humanities, human services, psychology, education, public health, and some business programs
- GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test)—accounting, finance, and other business programs
- LSAT (Law School Admissions Test)—All law and various legal studies programs
- MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test)—Medical school
- DAT (Dental Admissions Test)—Dental school

TYPICAL APPLICATION MATERIALS

- Test scores
- Undergraduate academic transcripts
- Recommendation letters from professors, advisors, or supervisors
- Personal statement or statement of purpose
- Resume or CV
- Writing sample

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Your timeline will depend on the application deadline. Here is a sample timeline that can help you stay organized.

AT LEAST SIX MONTHS BEFORE:

- Determine a list of schools to send applications to and understand application requirements for each school.
- Begin studying for any required standardized test (GRE, etc.) or enroll in a prep course.

FOUR MONTHS BEFORE:

- Request letters of recommendation from professors, advisors, or supervisors (see program information for recommendation letter requirements).
- Write draft of personal statement and/or statement of purpose and take it to a writing tutor or professor for feedback. Keep in mind that each program may have slightly different personal statement requirements. You should devote significant time to your statement and write multiple drafts.

THREE MONTHS BEFORE:

- Continue editing your personal statement and/or statement of purpose.
- Update your resume/CV and take it to Career Services for feedback.
- Take the required graduate school test.

ONE MONTH BEFORE:

- Request official transcript from the university registrar's office of each college you attended.
- Make final edits to personal statement and resume/CV. Proofread them again.

AT LEAST ONE WEEK BEFORE THE DEADLINE:

Submit all application materials!

QUESTIONS FOR THE ADMISSIONS OFFICES

ADMISSIONS QUESTIONS

- Am I required to do an interview?
- How heavily are test scores weighted?
- How many students are typically admitted into the program? How many total applicants?
- What is the top thing faculty look for in application materials in a competitive candidate?
- Does this program prefer to admit applicants with work experience rather than applicants right out of college?
- When will final decisions be made? When will candidates be notified?

FUNDING QUESTIONS

- Are graduate assistantships available? If so, how are students compensated (stipend, scholarship money, etc.)?
- What scholarship opportunities are available for graduate students in this program? Do they have separate applications? When are the deadlines?
- Does the school offer need-based grants?

OTHER QUESTIONS

- Is graduate housing offered?
- Are there required field or practicum hours needed to complete the program? Will the school help with finding field placements?
- Where are graduates from this program working?

STRUCTURING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

A typical two-page personal statement will consist of the following:

I. Introduction: An introductory paragraph that provides your essay's theme

Your introduction is where you set the tone of your personal statement and capture the main idea of your essay. You want to define its theme and hook your reader. The introductory paragraph is like a snapshot of what the rest of your essay will say.

- Outline your essay so you know how each paragraph will build on the previous one.
- Clearly make your point.

II. Body: The body of your essay should contain at least two to four paragraphs that develop your theme. Use examples and detailed experiences. Each paragraph builds on the preceding one.

Use this traditional approach to writing each of those paragraphs:

- Begin with a topic sentence that continues your theme and makes a transition from the previous paragraph.
- Follow with sentences that develop this topic sentence.
- End with a sentence that wraps up what you are trying to say in this paragraph and helps to transition to the next paragraph.

Paragraph structure

- Topic sentence
- Supporting sentences
- Ending sentence

III. Conclusion: The concluding paragraph is not a repeat of earlier ideas in the essay; it helps expand and reaffirm the theme of your essay. The last paragraph will provide the conclusion by reiterating your points in a summary manner and explaining why you would be a good student for their program. Keep in mind that personal statements will vary in length by graduate program. Make sure to follow word count instructions provided in the application prompt.

Schedule a meeting with Career Development to review and edit your personal statement before submitting your application.