



Framingham

State University

INFO TO GO

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Career Services and Employer Relations

**<https://www.framingham.edu/career-services/>
McCarthy Center Room 412
508-626-4625**

THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT GRADUATE SCHOOL

Have you thought about graduate school? Depending on your career, you may need a graduate degree to advance in your field, or maybe you want to increase your marketability by continuing your education. But grad school is not for everyone: it can interrupt your work schedule, consume a great deal of your time, and be very expensive. Applying to grad school, in other words, is often a difficult decision.

The following questions will help determine if graduate school is right for you. We encourage you to meet with a counselor to discuss any additional questions or concerns you may have.

1. Is graduate school necessary for your career/personal goals? Should you go to grad school immediately after receiving your Bachelor's degree, or should you consider working in your field for a period of time before applying?
2. Do you know what you are hoping to accomplish through graduate work? Do you want to master a particular specialty, or acquire a job that requires advanced study?
3. Are the graduate programs in your field of interest looking for applicants with some work experience?
4. How do you feel about studying? Do you feel ready to continue your studies in a more intense and specialized manner for eight or more hours a day?
5. Do you know what course of study you want to pursue in graduate school? If so, what do you hope to achieve with an advanced degree in this field?
6. Can you afford more schooling? Keep in mind that graduate school in the short term is not an income-producing venture, and financial aid for graduate students is limited.
7. Would you be able to acquire an entry-level position in your field and have your employer pay for all or part of your graduate work?
8. Are you going to graduate school as a last resort because you can't find a job in your field? Are you afraid to tackle the employment market, or do you not know what else to do?

BEFORE YOU APPLY...

Look into your *finances*.

Graduate school is expensive. You will not want to accumulate more debt and student loans without looking over where you stand financially. Start saving money and, if possible, clear up your debt and credit card balances.

Assess Your Work Schedule.

If you are planning on working while in graduate school, review the *class schedule* to see if your classes are in the evening or during the day. Ask your employer if they can be flexible with your hours.

Obtain Letters of Recommendation.

Recommendations can be from people who have worked closely with you in an *academic, professional, or community service* setting. Start asking your supervisors and professors if they would be willing to write you a recommendation. Most graduate schools will supply you with their own recommendations forms, but sometimes a simple letterhead will suffice (check your application).

The Standardized Test.

Don't forget to review the application requirements for your graduate program. Your program may require a standardized test, such as the GRE, the MAT or the LSAT. You should start studying for these exams as soon as possible. It is a good idea to take the *standardized tests* a few months prior to your application deadline, in case you need to take them again.

The Portfolio.

Some programs require a portfolio of written, visual or audio work (most often these are MFA programs, professional writing programs, and some communication programs). Your program will have specific guidelines for the portfolio, so you will want to follow the directions and prepare well in advance. After determining what they are looking for, select your strongest academic and professional work; if necessary, create additional pieces to strengthen your portfolio. Don't forget to look over and polish your written documents for grammatical errors. And if possible, ask one of your undergraduate professors to review your portfolio.

The major components of the application process include the following:

- Researching and selecting graduate programs
- Taking the appropriate standardized graduate admissions test(s)
- Forwarding the test scores to your school(s) of interest
- Obtaining letters of recommendation from faculty members and employers
- Obtaining transcripts from all of your undergraduate schools of record
- Drafting, rewriting, and polishing a compelling statement of purpose
- Assembling a portfolio of written, visual or audio work (if applicable to your program)
- Completing the application form or applying online
- Sending your materials to your target schools via a guaranteed carrier
- Verifying that all of the above have been received by your program

Career Services & Employer Relations have many resources available to support you throughout the application process. Stop by our office (CC412 in the McCarthy Center), and visit our web site:

<http://www.framingham.edu/careerservices>.

Please feel free to schedule an appointment with a counselor by calling our office: (508) 626-4625.

RESEARCHING GRADUATE SCHOOLS

The first step is to establish what *type* of program you are interested in.

For example, if you want to get your Master's in communications, you will find both general and specialized programs, such as broadcasting, mass communications, and speech communication. It is important to carefully review your program of interest and to request additional information from the office of graduate admissions. If possible, attend a graduate information session on campus.

You will need to decide on your *geographic preference*.

You may not want to relocate far away from family and friends, but the more you limit where you are willing to go, the fewer schools you will have to choose from. Your decision should ultimately be based on the program that best satisfies your specific needs, not the preference of others.

Look through directories.

In addition to conducting research online, look through *directories* (such as the Peterson's Guides) to find information on graduate schools—the programs they offer and where they are located. To find links to schools and additional information on graduate programs, please visit the Career Services and Employer Relations web site: <http://www.framingham.edu/careerservices>.

Attend a graduate school fair.

Graduate school fairs are a great way to connect with a large number of institutions in one sitting. Many standardized tests and test prep companies hold these events throughout the year. You can visit the GRE web site for additional information: <http://www.ets.org/gre/>.

Request additional information.

After you establish the specific graduate program you are interested in, make a list of schools that offer this program and visit the school's web site for applications and financial aid information. Don't forget to request information on graduate teaching and research assistantships.

Visit the campus.

You should visit the schools you are considering—this will give you a better feel for the unique “flavor” of the schools, and how comfortable you feel on campus.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO ASK GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

1. Does your program have a certain focus or special emphasis?
2. What makes your program/school unique?
3. What kinds of courses will I be taking in my first year?
4. What kind of preparation does your admissions committee recommend to applicants (major, coursework, etc.)?
5. Do you require a portfolio of written, visual, or audio work? What should I include in my portfolio to make it competitive?
6. What factors are taken into consideration during the admissions process? How important is my undergraduate GPA and work experience?
7. Which standardized tests are required of applicants? If I don't do well on a test, could I still be considered for the program?
8. What can you tell me about Career Services at your school?
9. Are there opportunities available for me to gain work-related experience (e.g., internships, graduate teaching, research assistantships)?
10. What kinds of positions do your graduates obtain?
11. Do you offer financial aid? Is financial aid need-based, merit-based or both?
12. Is financial aid guaranteed for the length of the program? What kinds of financial aid forms are required?
13. What opportunities are available to assist students in financing their education (student teaching, research assistantships, etc.)?
14. From what geographic areas do your students come from?
15. How diverse is your student body?
16. What is the climate like in your school/program for students from underrepresented groups?

17. Are your facilities accessible to people with disabilities?

BEGINNING THE APPLICATIONS PROCESS...

The application process can be time consuming and stressful, and the most feared obstacle is often the standardized test. But companies that administer standardized tests—GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MAT, and MCAT—have web sites where you can obtain valuable information on the test and review practice questions. You may be able to take a free practice test on these web sites.

If you need additional preparation...

Many schools and educational sites offer classes to help you study for the standardized test. There are a variety of books that have practice exams and test-taking techniques—*Cracking the New GRE*, *Barrons New GRE 9th Addition*, and *The Kaplan New GRE*. If you want more information on test preparation resources, the book, *Graduate School Test Preparation Information*, is a great place to start.

Obtain letters of recommendation...

After someone agrees to write a recommendation for you, supply him or her with the form your school provides (this can usually be found on their website). A letterhead is sometimes acceptable, but only if the program does not have their own form. Also, don't forget to provide the person writing your recommendation with a copy of your resume.

Start your personal statement as soon as possible...

Schools will sometimes use your statement in place of an interview: they want to know what motivated you to apply, what experience (both professional and academic) you can bring to the program, and what you plan to do with your degree. Career Services and Employer Relations can help you choose a topic for your personal essay and critique your draft.

- If you're applying on paper, make copies of the application so you don't make mistakes on the original.

WHAT IS THE GRADUATE ADMISSIONS ESSAY?

Your graduate school application will reveal many things to the admissions committee: your grades, your standardized test scores, your professional experience, and what others think of you (recommendation letters). But the admissions committee will also want to know you as an individual. This is where your personal statement comes into play.

Your personal essay is your opportunity to sell yourself to the committee. Your essay should include who you are, your ambitions, and why you are a good candidate for the program. This may sound simple, but writing about yourself can be difficult. If you look at it positively, however, the essay will give you a chance to express yourself in a way test scores cannot—it will reveal you as a person, not a number.

Where do I start?

Depending on the program, you may be asked to answer a specific question: how has an influential person affected your life? what are your career goals? why did you choose this program? It is important to fully answer the question being asked and to provide a concrete answer. If you are applying to more than one program, you may find similar prompts, but make sure you answer the exact question being asked. It is not a good idea to recycle your essays.

Many programs will ask for a broad personal statement.

This lack of guidance can be a curve ball for applicants, but a good place to start is the first paragraph. The opening is the reader's first impression of you, and it should hook their interest. A well-developed opening paragraph will also be your road map for navigating the rest of your essay.

Be Original!

You should find an interesting angle that will set you apart from other candidates. The admissions committee will be reading hundreds of essays, so the last thing you want to do is be boring and “part of the crowd.” Instead, aim for originality and make yourself memorable.

Know your audience!

You should research the ins and outs of your graduate program. Read about the faculty members and find out what interests them. Learn about the curriculum by reading the course descriptions (usually listed on the program's website). Do include any professional experience you have in the field—notable academic classes and seminars,

notable books you have read on the subject matter, and any other significant experiences (i.e. volunteer work, community service, internships).

Edit Your Work!

You have likely written many essays during your undergraduate career and developed good writing skills, but even the best writers make frequent spelling and grammatical errors—you are only human! Proofread your work and have others read it, too. A good trick is to read your essay backwards, starting from the end and working your way to the beginning. Reading out loud can also catch careless mistakes. A misspelled word or a grammatical error will stand out in your essay, but not in a good way!

How long is the essay?

This will vary depending on the program, but it is often between 500-1200 words (2-5 pages). Do not write a five-page essay if they only want 500 words; it is best to follow the directions.

Be personable, but not too personable....

It is a good idea to write your essay in the first-person. This will make you sound more personable and show-off your voice. You do not, however, want to sound too friendly in your essay, and you certainly do not want to sound unexciting. A little humor can go a long way, but less is usually more. A professional tone is not a bad thing as long as you are careful not to sound too serious. A good balance, in other words, is what you are aiming for here, and this can be difficult to achieve. It is helpful to have someone proofread your work and to give you feedback on the tone of your essay. If they say you sound pretentious, then you need to rewrite parts to make yourself more modest. If you are overly serious, then you want to add some enthusiasm.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN A GRADUATE SCHOOL INTERVIEW:

Some programs will only ask for a personal statement or essay, but many competitive graduate schools will require an interview. Of course, interviews can be a stressful and daunting part of the application process. The purpose of the interview is to get a closer look at you and to determine if how you appear on paper translates to you, the actual person. They will want to know many things about you: your ambitions and goals, your skills, your interests and hobbies, your work and academic experience, and your character and motivation.

But don't worry too much about how you are acting—just be yourself! The good news is that the committee chose you because they saw something they like in you. It is important to remain calm and to show them what they already know: your strengths and positive attributes.

How to prepare:

- Know what questions to expect. They will most likely ask what you know about their program, so make sure you learn about the faculty members and their research interests. If possible, look over the course descriptions on the website.
- Be prepared to answer why you are a good match for the program. Look over your resume, your work experience, and the skills that you can bring into the classroom.
- Be careful not to dominate the conversation; instead, show that you are a good listener. But make sure you confidently communicate your strengths and why you are a good match for the program.
- They may ask you about other programs you are applying to and why you chose their program. What is it about their program that appeals to you?
- Know your career goals and what you plan to achieve from graduate school. Do you have any previous experience in the field?
- Review your undergraduate course-work and be ready to talk about specific research projects, challenging courses, and what you accomplished in your education.
- Be prepared to talk about your greatest accomplishment(s), both academic and professional. But also talk about any challenges or major obstacles that you have overcome. What have you learned from these experiences?

- They may ask about your hobbies and interests. They not only want to know about your academic and professional experience—they want to get to know you as a person. What makes you unique?
- Make sure you sleep at least eight hours the night before, and eat a large breakfast.
- You do not want to be late for the interview! Make sure you have accurate directions and arrive early, just in case.
- Make a list of thoughtful questions that you want to ask.

What to ask during a graduate admissions interview:

A graduate interview is not only about impressing the admissions committee—it is also a great opportunity for *you* to interview the graduate program. You should be prepared to ask questions that will provide you with the information to decide if the program is right for you. In short, good questions will help you get a better feel for the program, but they will also impress the graduate committee.

- How is this program different from similar programs at other schools? What is specific about this program that makes it stand out from competitors?
- How is the student life on campus? Do most students live on campus, or do they commute?
- How successful are your alumni? Do they leave the program with skills and experience that make them competitive in today's tough job market?
- Do you offer internship opportunities? Where have your students done their internships?
- How long does it take to complete the program as a full-time student? And part-time?
- Do you offer scholarships or teaching fellowships? What about teaching assistantships or adjunct positions?
- How are the student's relationships with their advisors and professors? Is it possible to have a one-on-one mentorship?
- What is the average class size for graduate courses?
- Do most students complete a master's thesis/ dissertation during the graduate program?

- What is the most important factor in the admission's decision? Do you offer financial aid? If so, how much and how do you apply?

TIMETABLE AND CHECKLIST

- Summer***
- _____ Start browsing through guides to graduate programs.
 - _____ Select the schools to which you will consider applying.
 - _____ Review standardized test information and test dates. (Plan to take the test well in advance of admissions deadlines.)
 - _____ Prepare for the standardized test.
- September***
- _____ Meet with faculty members to discuss programs.
 - _____ Determine the schools to which you plan to apply.
- Sept/Oct***
- _____ Request application and financial aid materials.
 - _____ Mark down all application and financial aid deadlines on your calendar.
 - _____ Contact colleges to arrange a campus visits, if possible.
 - _____ Ask for letters of recommendation from faculty.
 - _____ Write your statement of purpose.
- October***
- _____ Contact schools about applying for fellowships, assistantships, and grants.
 - _____ Order transcripts. Ask the Registrar's Office if a transcript with your fall term grades can be sent to programs in time to meet your application deadlines.
 - _____ Attend the Graduate School Workshop offered by CSER.
- December***
- _____ Complete application forms.
- Dec/Jan***
- _____ Mail applications.
- April***
- _____ If you applied for financial aid, file a copy of your Federal income tax return

Boston Center for Adult Education
www.bcae.org

GRE, LSAT, GMAT
617-267-4430

Kaplan Test
MCAT, MAT www.kaplan.com

GRE, LSAT, GMAT,
1-800-KAP-TEST

Olin Center for International Study
www.olincenter.com/

GRE, LSAT, GMAT
800-773-7669

Princeton Review
GMAT, MCAT www.princetonreview.com

GRE, LSAT,
800-273-8439

University of Massachusetts Boston
www.conted.umb.edu/testprep/

GRE, LSAT, GMAT
617-287-7900

TEST WEB SITES

GRE

www.gre.org

Free downloads, free POWERPREP software, FAQ's, description of the test

MAT, (Miller Analogies Test)

www.milleranalogies.com

Test registration information, free practice test

LSAT

www.lsat.org/

Online registration, free sample test, information on choosing a law school

GMAT

www.gmac.com/

Test overview, sample questions, mini-test

MCAT

www.aamc.org/students/mcat/

Online registration, FAQ's, writing sample prompts, information about financing a medical

Some Helpful Websites on Graduate School:

- **<http://www.gradschools.com/article-detail/planning-to-apply-111>** this site will help you prepare for graduate school; it reviews the basic steps of the application process: interviews, recommendations, test scores and the personal essay.
- **<http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/are-you-ready-for-graduate-school>** is a very useful site that will help you assess your finances, the benefits of a master's degree, and if graduate school is right for you.

Helpful Sites on Law School:

- **<http://www.princetonreview.com/law-school-rankings.aspx>** this site ranks law schools not in terms of overall quality, but on certain characteristics (most liberal students, most diverse faculty, best environment for minority students, etc.) and will help you decide which schools meet your specific needs.
- **<http://thelawschooldecision.com/>** provides a comprehensive overview of the advantages and disadvantages of law school, and the job prospects after obtaining a law degree.
- **<http://gradschool.about.com/cs/decisionmaking/a/law.htm>** contains valuable information on the application process and what law schools are looking for—your GPA, your LSAT scores, and your letters of recommendation.

Helpful Sites on Medical School:

- **https://www.aamc.org/students/considering/exploring_medical/** this site will help determine if medical school is right for you, what it takes to become a doctor, and the ins and outs of student life at medical school.
- **<http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/synopsis-medical-school-requirements>** this site summarizes the essential requirements for medical school; it also provides information on the licensing exam.
- **<http://www.medical-school.ws/financialaid.php>** is a very helpful site that will help you assess the cost of medical school, financial aid possibilities, and whether or not the price is realistic for you.

Helpful sites on Business School (MBA):

- <http://www.mbaprograms.org/mbaadmission> this site provides a detailed overview of the admissions process: tips for applying to MBA programs, the admissions criteria, and information on the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).
- <http://www.unhmba.org/mba-career-opportunities.html> has a helpful section on the different MBA programs—accounting, finance, marketing, etc.—and a section on career opportunities after graduation.

Helpful Sites on Paying for Graduate School:

- <http://www.gradschooltips.com/payingforschool.htm> this site will help you find scholarships, learn about student loans (FAFSA), and consider the possibilities of graduate school jobs and teaching fellowships.
- <http://www.scholarships.com/resources/after-college/> has valuable information on paying for graduate school with a section on financial aid and assistantships.

Helpful Sites on Online Degrees:

- <http://www.onlinecollegedegrees.com/> this site provides the advantages of going to school online, how online programs work, and the requirements for an online degree.
- <http://oedb.org/library/distance-vs-local/10-advantages-to-taking-online-classes> online degrees are becoming more and more common, and this site provides information on why an online degree program might be the best option for you.

Top Careers and Fastest-Growing Occupations for 2012:

- http://www.collegeboard.com/student/csearch/majors_careers/ has information on matching your degree to a career and on what careers require a graduate degree.
- <http://www.careerinfonet.org/oview1.asp?Level=BAplus> this site provides a list of in demand careers that require a bachelor's degree or higher.