



Graduate School Application Guide

WHY ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL?

There are only 3 reasons to attend graduate school¹ (in the following order of priority):

1. To qualify you professionally
2. To improve your career posture economically or in terms of responsibility likely to be attained
3. To provide the satisfaction that higher learning offers

Option 3 should only be considered after you have established yourself in the career field of your choosing. If you are not satisfied in your career and/or industry, it is not recommended that you attend graduate school.

Have questions about whether grad school makes sense for you? Talk with the Advisor for Vocation & Career Development: Visit the Southern Seminary & Boyce College Office of Career Development in Williams Hall, Room 112 or email careerdevelopment@sbts.edu to make an appointment.

SHOULD YOU GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL?²

Whether you intend to attend graduate school in the fall immediately following graduation or you intend to wait for a season, you **should ask yourself the following questions:**

- **Time:** Can you carve out enough time from your career and other responsibilities to stay on course and complete graduate school?
- **Money:** Do you have the financial resources to invest in a graduate study now?
- **Motivation:** Do you have the energy and interest to keep you on task?
- **Need:** Do you really need an advanced degree to accomplish your career goals?

¹ Rowan University Office of Career Advancement. *How to Prepare for Graduate School*. Available [here](#).

² Virginia Military Institute Career Services Office. *Graduate School*. Available [here](#).

- **Experience:** Do you need to acquire firsthand experience in your career in order to be competitive in a graduate program?
- **Timing:** Is this the right time in your life? in your career?
- **Geographic Location:** Do you have to move to attend a particular graduate school?
- **Selectivity:** Can you find a program/school that fits your needs where you are a qualified candidate for admission?

TIMELINE FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL³

This timeline is a guide for students interested in going to graduate school in the fall after their undergraduate graduation in the spring. While this is not the only workable application schedule, it is a good place to start. The important thing is to draw up a schedule at the beginning of the application process, make sure you account for all foreseeable factors, and most importantly, follow it throughout the application period to ensure that you have met all of the necessary criteria. Regardless of the schedule you use, be sure to **prepare your application materials and apply early** to avoid last minute mistakes and unnecessary stress.

JUNIOR YEAR

September

- Complete the Career Planning Foundations modules and Self-Assessments in FOCUS 2 Career and list your top 3 – 5 career choices. You can sign up for your *free* FOCUS 2 Career account [here](#).
- Meet with the Advisor for Vocation & Career Development to review your results and discuss potential career paths and grad school options.
- Begin your online research of graduate programs that match your interests, values, and career goals.
- Create a “Schools of Interest” spreadsheet to organize your research.

October

- Begin researching summer internships in your field of interest to gain exposure to the field and a sense of whether you need a graduate degree. Your boss, mentors, and colleagues can also recommend graduate programs to you.

November

³ Adapted from Seaver College Career Center. *Applying to Graduate School Guide*. Available [here](#).

- Register for spring classes that are pre-requisites for the graduate programs you are interested in. Also, consider registering for research and writing intensive courses to give you a strong background in these areas.

December

- Contact your mentors and professors. They are great sources of career advice and can likely recommend some good programs. In addition, some professors will be able to make professional connections for you and help when it is time to ask for letters of recommendation. Developing a strong relationship early on in your academic career will help them write you a meaningful recommendation.

February

- Continue your online research of graduate programs that match your interests, values, and career goals.
- Visit the official websites for the graduate programs you are interested in to learn about the program's requirements, the school's mission statement and values, and the structure of the program.
- Follow schools on social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) to get a sense of daily life at the school.

March

- Identify the necessary test(s) for your programs of interest.
- Take a practice test. The Princeton Review offers a *free* [GRE practice test](#).
- Consider registering for a prep course. Although they can be expensive, these courses educate you on test-taking best practices.
- If you are not interested in a prep course, start studying on your own with a study guide, such as those available from [ETS](#) or [Princeton Review](#).
- Create a study plan for yourself to ensure that you stay on track, allotting enough time to each area to review.

April

- If you are not already sure, research and decide on your specific area of concentration within your field of interest. For example, if you are interested in history PhD programs, determine whether you are interested in American or World History.

- Continue your test prep.
- Register to take the test in June. Registering early will give you the opportunity to pick your most convenient test center, avoid additional late registration fees, and ensure you can take the test when you want to take it.

NOTE: Some tests, like the LSAT, close off registration over 1 month in advance, so it is essential to plan ahead.

May

- [Talk to professionals](#) in your prospective field to learn more about what it's really like to do this type of work and the long-term opportunities that are available.
- Join the [Southern Seminary & Boyce College Office of Career Development LinkedIn Group](#) to gain access to alumni who may be available for career conversations (informational interviews), resume critiques, or mock interviews.

June

- Take the test. If you are not happy with your scores, this gives you plenty of time to retake the test(s) by mid-October.
- Contact prospective graduate programs and request additional information, including course catalogs and financial aid information.

July

- Begin writing your personal statement. Starting your writing over the summer will give you plenty of time to get feedback from your professor(s)/mentor(s) well in advance of deadlines.

SENIOR YEAR

August

- Narrow down and finalize the list of schools you plan to apply to. Update your "Schools of Interest" matrix to reflect your changes.
- Register for the September or October GRE Subject Test if necessary for the programs you are applying to.

September

- Once you have isolated the most appealing schools, pick a professor or two from each program whose interests align with yours and start to familiarize yourself with their work. Learn about their current research and read their most recent publications.

- Try to establish contact with the department chair and/or faculty members at the prospective graduate program(s). Reaching out to these individuals can help you to get a better understanding of the program and its faculty members. It can also help you determine if they are accepting students for the upcoming year (particularly, PhD programs).
- Contact the admissions office to get connected with a current student. Current graduate students have been in the same situation as you, he or she is often willing to provide honest insight.
- Contact your two or three professors, or two professors and one supervisor to write your letters of recommendation. Some schools have specific requirements as to who can write your recommendations so **pay attention to instructions!**

October

- Look into merit-based grants and fellowships as possible ways to help finance your education.
 - Add any financial assistance application deadlines to your matrix schedule.
 - Look into scholarships offered by the school that you are applying to.
 - Research graduate assistantship, teaching assistantship, and fellowship positions.
 - For a list of helpful financial aid resources, refer to pages 7–9 of this guide.
- Keep polishing your statement of purpose.
 - Ask a professor, career ambassador, academic advisor, and/or the Advisor for Vocation & Career Development to review your personal statement.
 - Consider gathering feedback on it from other people who know you well, including family members and close friends.
 - Ask [the Writing Center](#) for a final review of your sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

NOTE: Having multiple proofreaders will give you more perspectives and helpful feedback to incorporate into your final document.
- Continue to prepare for the GRE Subject Test if you are taking one. Arrange to have scores sent directly to the schools you are applying to.
- Begin completing your online application forms.
- [Request official transcripts](#), paying careful attention to where they should go.

- Send your recommenders the appropriate forms, including the latest version of your personal statement, your CV/resume, and stamped-and-addressed envelopes to school sites (if applicable), carefully noting where each letter should be sent.

November

- Refine your personal statement, tailoring it to each school as necessary.
- Double check the details of your application and tie up any loose ends.
 - Do you know where your recommendation letters are?
 - Have you made sure that all your test scores have been sent to schools?
 - Are you aware of financial aid and scholarship deadlines?

December

- Complete and submit all your applications. Keep a copy of each part of each application for your personal records. **Congratulations on finishing this big step in the application process!**
- Verify that your recommenders have sent all of your letters to the institutions that require them.
- Research deadlines for funding opportunities in your program(s), including graduate and teaching assistantships.

January

- Focus on financial aid. Fill out the [FAFSA](#) online. To qualify for financial aid, you need to complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1st as possible.

February & March

- Try to relax while you wait to hear back. This may be the most relaxing time you will have for the next several years, so take advantage of it while you can!
- Send *hand-written* thank you letters to those who helped you during the application process.

April & May

- Acceptances:** Congratulations! Take a moment to celebrate your successes.
 - Assess your financial aid package and use financial aid comparison calculators online to compare packages that schools offer you.

- Investigate applying for alternative sources of funding if the financial aid package offered does not meet your needs.
 - Visit campus, if possible, especially if you have not had the chance to see the school yet.
 - Set up informational interview sessions with professors, current students, program advisors, and financial aid officers.
- **Waitlists:** Decide whether or not you want to stay on a school's waitlist. How long can you afford to wait for a decision?
 - **Rejections:** Almost every applicant for graduate school will receive at least one rejection throughout the application process. While that will not be fun, it does not have to be the final word on the matter. Contact the specific department and politely express your regret over not being admitted. Do not expect them to be able to give you a lot of their time, but do take advantage of the opportunity for some useful research. Ask them if they can give you some suggestions on how you might strengthen your candidacy in the future, or if they can highlight the weaknesses in your application that resulted in your rejection. Soliciting feedback will allow you to learn from the rejection.

GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES⁴

The following resources may help you as you prepare for the school search and application process.

[Accepted:](#) A personal statement site that provides writing tips and samples for graduate and professional schools.

[AAMC:](#) Provides detailed information on the medical school admissions process.

[GradSchools.com:](#) An online resource for graduate school and graduate program information.

[Graduate Guide:](#) A convenient reference tool for college students to quickly locate schools offering the programs they want.

[MBA.Com:](#) Information on the benefits of obtaining an MBA degree.

[MyGraduateSchool.com:](#) Offers the latest advice on how to apply to graduate school successfully in the arts and sciences and includes regularly updated articles on the application process, interviews with graduate program directors and more tips straight from the experts.

⁴ Adapted from Seaver College Career Center. *Applying to Graduate School Guide* (available [here](#)) and Rowan University Office of Career Advancement *How To Prepare For Graduate School* (available [here](#)).

[MyGREtutor.com](#): Free GRE practice tests, tutorials, hundreds of practice questions, and a vocabulary tutor complete with thousands of words, all at no cost.

[Peterson's Education Center](#): Profiles of national and international graduate programs.

[Princeton Review](#): Princeton Review helps students, parents, and educators achieve the best results at every stage of their educational careers.

[How to Write a Personal Statement](#): From Pepperdine University

[How to Ace Your Grad School Interview](#): From USA Today

[Avoid the Biggest Mistake Prospective Graduate Students Make](#): From US News & World Report

PAYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL WITHOUT LOANS⁵

The following resources may help you as you consider how to fund your graduate school goals without using loans. If you must take a loan, seek out *unsecured* debt because it will not be tied to your financial assets.

[Fastweb](#): A searchable database of more than 275,000 private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants, and loans.

[Finaid](#): A comprehensive listing of financial aid resources.

[Scholarships.com](#): A scholarship search service and financial aid information resource that allows students to search 2.7 million college scholarships and grants worth over \$19 billion and quickly arrive at a list of awards for which they qualify.

Internal Scholarships: While there are typically fewer scholarship options for graduate students, many universities have some aid for graduate students.

Fellowships & Graduate Assistantships: Many organizations offer fellowships based on your research interests or other factors, while many schools offer graduate assistantships for students. Like a Resident Advisor position, students are given free housing and meals in exchange for on-campus work. Sometimes these assistantships are with professors, where students serve as Teacher Assistants or Research Assistants. In other cases, they are departmental, with students helping undergraduate students in offices such as Housing and Resident Life or the Career Center.

Work full-time while in school by applying for part-time graduate programs: Many schools accommodate working professionals by offering part-time graduate programs, weekend classes,

⁵ Adapted from Seaver College Career Center. *Applying to Graduate School Guide* (available [here](#)) and Rowan University Office of Career Advancement *How To Prepare For Graduate School* (available [here](#)).

and/or evening classes. This style allows students to make money while in school. **Some companies offer tuition reimbursement programs**, which can help you save money. Likewise, **sometimes students who are working full-time for the university that they are attending are able to take classes for free**. For example, full-time employees at Boyce College and/or The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary may take one free class per semester.

Work part-time while in school: Students can work part-time to gain work experience while in graduate school.

Babysitting, dog walking, tutoring, private lessons, and housesitting: These jobs often have flexible schedules, allowing you to work around your class and homework schedules.

Have a garage sale before going to graduate school: This is a good way to clean out the closet so that you can pack all of your things for graduate school while also making a little extra money.