

GUIDE TO GRAD SCHOOL

If you are considering grad school and wondering how to navigate the process or what you need to do, the following guide will help you explore and plan with more clarity.

1: Reflect

- What is your motivation for more education?
- When is the best time for you to pursue graduate or professional school?
- What is your career vision? Will graduate school help you get there?

Be honest with yourself and be clear with your motivations.

2: Explore your options

Gather info from internet resources and people!

- [Career Cruising](#)
- [University Study](#)
- [CanLearn](#)
- Professional association websites
- Professionals working in the career field: Use LinkedIn or the [Alumni and Partner Advisor Network](#)
- Professors or students in the programs of interest
- Admission Coordinators or Program Coordinators of the programs

Not sure what you are searching for? Then take a moment and do some career exploration.

3: Research and know your options

There are many types of graduate programs such as research-intensive master's or PhD programs, professional programs with internships or projects and course-based graduate-level programs. Some require subject knowledge in same field and some will accept a wide range of undergraduate programs. You can also consider post-graduate certificates at college or university continuing education.

When researching the programs, some things to think about include:

On the graduate studies school website:

- Search for general graduate admissions application requirements, application fees and processes, financial supports, student supports, etc.

On the program-specific website, ask yourself:

- Does the program and course listing fit with your academic and professional goals?
- What is the structure of the program, and what is the Faculty focus or specialty?
- If it is a professional program, is it accredited with the professional regulatory body?
- If it is a research-based program, are there supervisors that match your research interests?
- What is the cost of the program, and are there scholarships or funding options?



After thoroughly reviewing the website information, direct your program questions to the program admission coordinators.

4: Gather the application details

Gather the facts for each program and review the details:

- What is the minimum and competitive GPA? How is the GPA calculated?
- Are there required courses, and do you need to have a minimum grade requirement?
- Does the program require academic and/or professional references?
- Does it require a resume/CV? What kinds of experiences are relevant/applicable?
- Do you need supplemental materials like a letter of intent, personal statement or supplemental questions?
- If there are entrance exams, when are results needed and what are the competitive results?
- Will there be interviews? If so, when?
- What is the selection process?
- What are the deadlines for fees, application materials and references? They may vary.
- What are the admissions costs? When are the program fees due?

Create a spreadsheet to help you keep track of the details. Use our [Further Education Research Organizer](#) to help you get started.

5: Take a pause

The whole process of exploring, researching and wondering if the program is a right fit or if you will get accepted can be a lot to deal with. It's quite common to have questions and experience uncertainty. This is a good time to pause and clarify and reflect. Reflecting on your goals for grad school and then evaluating the programs you are considering can help you gain more confidence in your decisions.

Clarify your Goals for Grad School

Academically	Professionally	Personally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to learn? • What will help you be successful? • What skills or knowledge do you want to develop? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you hope the program will provide, career-wise? • What opportunities do you hope the program will provide to support your career goals? • What supports do I hope the program/school has to help me transition after the program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to achieve personally? • Financial considerations? • Location considerations? • Relationships to consider? • Time commitment and best timing for you?



Evaluate your options

List your academic, professional and personal goals and then evaluate your programs based on your own criteria to help you with your decision.

Priorities/Goals	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	Program 5
Academic priorities					
Professional priorities					
Personal priorities					

6: Get organized!

- Create a chart/spreadsheet with all the details, requirements and deadlines.
- As new questions emerge, make a note of them and search for an answer.
- Make a list of requirements for your applications and develop a plan to meet them.
- Create a timeline with deadlines in mind to help you stay on track.

7: Apply!

- Focus your application to each program and follow the instructions for each program and apply!
- Keep all account information, documents and records secure.
- Seek out supports as needed. The Student Success Centre and Alumni Career Services at McMaster offers career counselling and application support to help you on your career journey.
- Follow up with your references to thank them for their support.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How can I increase my GPA?

- You can increase your GPA by taking more courses or a second degree. Contact the admissions office of the program you are applying for to confirm the best strategy.
- The way admission GPA is calculated varies with each program. It is highly recommended to calculate your GPA. (Then, calculate the number of courses + hypothetical grades that you would need to obtain a competitive GPA.)

How do I make up missing prerequisites?

- The best way to confirm this is to contact the program admissions office. For some programs, you may take classes after graduating. Some programs will give a conditional offer dependent on your completion of these courses before you start. For other programs, prerequisites have to be done during your undergraduate degree.



How do I know if courses I take after graduation will count towards the prerequisites?

- Contact the program admissions office to inquire if the course will count. Some programs will include a list of prerequisites from different schools on their website. If the course you want to take is not included, contact the admissions office with the course description.
- Request information by email to create a record of communication.

How do I use my work experience to my advantage?

- To set yourself apart from others in your application, incorporate insights from your work experience and discuss transferrable skills where appropriate.
- View your work experience as a resume builder, even if it's unrelated to the program you're applying to.

Is standardized testing is needed? E.g. GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT

- Standardized tests are part of many application processes for professional and graduate programs. Be sure to research if your program(s) require standardized testing. The majority of U.S. graduate schools require some form of standardized testing (mostly GRE), and there are some select Canadian programs that will require testing.

Can I study abroad?

- Studying abroad can be an enriching and life-changing experience, but do your research.
- If you are studying abroad for a regulated profession (rehabilitation, law, medicine, etc.) and plan on returning to Canada upon completion, research to ensure that the program is/can be recognized by the regulatory association in the Canadian province you wish to work in. Become familiar with the process you will need to go through once you return to Canada.
- Talk to other students who have studied abroad and successfully returned to Canada.
- Remember to review the application for international students (usually different than regular application process).
- Consult with international education consultants who can help with your application and their knowledge of programs at their partner schools. This should be free of charge. E.g. OZtrekk, Austra Learn.

How do I get academic references?

- It's natural to be nervous, but remember, professors want to support your further education goals.
- Reconnect with your references well before the deadlines. Choose individuals who knew you best and excellent grades.
- Expect to reintroduce yourself, let them know what you have been doing since graduation and why you want to return to education. Ask them if they could write you a positive recommendation.
- Once they agree, offer additional materials like your resume and statement of intent to help with personalization.
- Provide them with all the information they require: program name, brief synopsis, deadline and method of reference (electronic or mail). If mail, you can provide an addressed, paid-postage envelope that can be tracked.
- If you have been out of school for more than five years, contact the program you're applying to and let them know your situation.



How do I get professional references?

- When selecting a professional reference, identify individuals who can comment on your suitability for the field. Give them an overview of the program and what to include in the reference letter as well.
- Don't be surprised if your professional reference asks you to write the first draft.

Who can help me with making a decision and the application process?

- Please feel free to connect with us through additional resources on the [Student Success Centre website](#) or through an appointment with our career professionals — book an appointment on [OSCARplus](#) > Student Success Centre > Appointments > Careers.

I'm worried about paying for my education.

- Check with the school's financial office to inquire about scholarships. Some master's and PhD programs offer funding through teaching or research assistant jobs. Consider lost income during your time at school and reflect on your budget.
- Talk with a finance professional at Mac's Money Centre. Book an appointment on [OSCARplus](#) > Student Success Centre > Appointments > Mac's Money Centre.

