

How do I plan for Graduate School? When is the best time to take my Test Prep Course and my Official Test?

Suggested Timeline

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18-12 months before you want to begin graduate school:

- 1) Research your prospective graduate programs through university websites, phone calls, and e-mails to admissions offices. Items to inquire about include:
 - Admissions requirements – application deadline, start date of program, etc.
 - Average scores on official entrance tests for the class just admitted *or* minimum scores for admission.
 - Degree requirements.
 - Internships, graduate assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships.
 - Job placement statistics for recent graduates.
- 2) Research the geographical area of each university. Look into:
 - Cost of living.
 - Demographics, including population, proximity to airports, trains, etc.
 - Climate and recreational opportunities.
- 3) Tell your undergraduate professors that you would like to attend graduate school and ask them about what you should do to prepare. Questions to ask include:
 - Do I need to join professional organizations, do volunteer work, complete an internship, publish papers, or perform other tasks that will make me a more desirable candidate?
 - Does someone with my career goals need an advanced degree?
 - Should someone with my career goals typically stop after receiving a master's degree or go on to obtain a PhD, EdD, or other advanced degree? Also, if I need a more advanced degree, is it advisable to go straight from my undergraduate studies into a program for that degree or should I go into a master's degree program first?
 - How long it will take me to get an advanced degree in my field?
 - What are the financial considerations of completing a graduate degree program in X field?
 - What do you know about the specific programs that I am thinking about attending?
 - What other advice do you have for me?
- 4) Research the GRE® Subject Tests as they relate to your graduate program. GRE® Subject tests are given in Psychology, Physics, Mathematics, Literature in English, Chemistry, Biology, and Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology. If you are planning to enter a graduate program in one of these areas, then you probably have to take the corresponding GRE® Subject Test. If so, research these questions:
 - What is the format of my particular Subject Test?
 - What kinds of study materials are available for my Subject Test? How do I obtain them?
 - When should I take my test? (Keep in mind that Subject Tests are currently administered only three times per year, in April, September, and October. Plan your testing schedule to allow for at least one retake before your graduate school and fellowship applications are due.)
 - Is there a local test site where I live, or will I have to travel? (Flagstaff currently does not offer a location to take GRE® Subject Tests, so research in advance the most practical place to take your test and figure out your means of travel and, if need be, where you will stay.)
- 5) Start a savings account dedicated to graduate school applications, test prep courses, and test fees.

8-6 months before your first graduate program application deadline:

- 1) Begin your graduate school application process. Be sure to accomplish the following tasks:
 - Compose a spreadsheet with your research: program contact information, application materials required, and deadlines.
 - Create a reference list that includes professors, employers, community service contacts, etc. **Cont.**

- Research what documents you will need to submit to each school (e.g. a personal statement, curriculum vitae or resume, a sample of your best academic writing, etc.) and begin to create or compile them. Leave time to write multiple drafts of each document.
- 2) Look into your Official Test registration process at your test maker's website - www.mba.com (GMAT), www.ets.org/gre (GRE), or www.lsac.org (LSAT). Items to investigate include:
 - How far in advance can I register?
 - What is the cost of taking the test?
 - Is there a local test site where I live, or will I have to travel? (Flagstaff currently offers locations to take both the GRE® and the GMAT®.)
 - What is the basic test format and in which areas do I need the most review?
 - What should be my test date? (Keep in mind that while the GRE and GMAT are available year-around, scheduling is difficult during busy times of the year and you may need to book a timeslot a month in advance. The LSAT® is currently offered only four Saturdays per year and three non-Saturday dates exclusively for Saturday Sabbath observers. Test dates are in February, June, September/October, and December.)
 - 3) Enroll in your GRE®, GMAT®, or LSAT® Test Prep Course.
 - 4) If you must take a GRE® Subject Test, then keep in mind the date of your test and begin studying at least 4 months in advance.

6-4 months before your first graduate program application deadline:

- 1) Take your Test Prep Course.
- 2) Take your Official Test soon after your Test Prep Course. Remember... no pressure! You can always re-take the test. GRE® offers *Score Select*SM which allows you to choose your best scores within the last 5 years to submit to four institutions for free. GMAT® will report all of your official scores within the last 5 years to five institutions for free. LSAT® will report all of your official scores. Some, but not all law schools will average these scores (You may wish to research this point for each program you are interested in.). For the GRE® or GMAT®, decide which—if any—programs will be your free score recipients prior to your test.
- 3) If you don't achieve your desired scores:
 - Take a break from the intense preparation process.
 - Re-register for the Official Test. GRE® currently allows re-takes every 21 days with a maximum of 5 tests in a 12-month period. GMAT® currently allows re-takes every 16 days with a maximum of 5 tests in a 12-month period. LSAT® allows a maximum of 3 tests in a 2 year period.
 - Review your Test Prep Course materials and study areas where you still struggle.
 - Try again with the confidence that you've already been through the official test experience. Know that most test-takers improve when retaking their tests.
- 4) Get your details in order for all of your graduate school applications:
 - Decide who among your professors and friends can best advise you about your writing and ask several people to proofread your essays, statements, and other written materials.
 - Research which delivery method(s)—electronic, postal service, or credentials service—your programs use to accept application materials.
 - Calculate how long it will take for your materials to arrive and plan accordingly.

2 months before your first graduate program application deadline:

- 1) Ask the references who know your work best to write letters of recommendation. Provide clear instructions concerning deadlines and methods of letter submission (web address, email prompt, sealed envelope), etc. Offer to provide references a list of courses taken, samples of your work, etc.

1 month before your first graduate program application deadline:

- 1) Send official transcripts from each undergraduate school that you have attended to any graduate schools that require them.
- 2) Send GRE® or GMAT® to any graduate schools that you did not list as score recipients when you took your Official Test. Law school applicants should ask LSAC's credentials service to send their application materials to the appropriate schools.
- 3) Put the finishing touches on your personal statement and other application materials.
- 4) Set your calendar dates for final application submission at least one week before stated deadlines.

Information on testing dates, retakes, GRE Subject Tests®, and testing locations is correct as of July 2016, but may be subject to change; be sure to confirm these important details early in your graduate school planning process.