

## POSSIBLE REASONS TO GO TO GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL:

In some disciplines, having a graduate degree is a necessity. That does not mean you should dive right in immediately after completing your undergrad degree. Make sure you think the decision through. All of the following are reasons people may decide to attend graduate or professional school.

- Greater earning power. This is a common reason why people go to grad school. However, it should not be the only reason, since getting a grad degree is a very serious commitment.
- Advance your career. A graduate degree can widen career opportunities: psychology, social work, and healthcare are examples of fields where this may be the case.
- Career change. Many people are finding their current careers unrewarding. An advanced degree can help transition to another career — whether out of desire or necessity.
- Enhance your education. A graduate degree can create an opportunity to explore your own theories.
- Get community recognition. You may receive recognition for your accomplishments.
- Research opportunities. Even if you do not explore your own theories, there are other opportunities to participate in funded research.
- Upgrade your education. Your knowledge of your field is outdated and you find it difficult to keep up with advancements without following up and pursuing an advanced degree.
- Enjoy travel opportunities. Some programs, such as archaeology, require studying abroad for research purposes.
- Teaching opportunities. Not everyone is suited to teaching, but for those who are, getting a Ph.D. can lead to a tenured position at a university or college, with a nice salary, a teaching or research assistant to help with workload, consulting opportunities (partly shared with your department), and a nice pension upon retirement.
- Work on advanced projects. The computer scientists who delved early into computer graphics set the standards for much of the CGI technology used in movies today.
- Access to advanced equipment and tools. In a similar vein, entering a grad program could mean having access to advanced equipment on campus — such as the astronomy lab, supercomputers, rare books, and even great minds.
- Higher potential for future promotion. While obtaining a grad degree does not necessarily always lead to a high-paying job right away, it can open up opportunities for future promotions.
- Employer incentives. Some large corporations have funds set aside used to pay partial or full fees for employees.
- Be part of a chain of knowledge. Just imagine that the knowledge handed to you by your professor came from another professor who learned it from someone...who learned it from a famous scientist or philosopher. You become part of that chain of knowledge.
- Because you want to. To learn, to think critically, to accept the academic challenge.
- To stand out. By attending grad school and completing a degree, you join an elite segment of the population.
- Free tuition. In some cases, a grad school might not only waive your tuition but will give you a stipend for living expenses, in return for taking on the work of a teaching assistant or research assistant.

## REASONS NOT TO GO TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Now for the flipside. Completing a grad degree has many rewards, but there are also many reasons not to go.

- Highly competitive. Grad programs always have fewer spots than undergrad programs. There's competition for seats, research positions, grant money, and often as a result, departmental politics.
- Enables the "professional student" mindset. Some students just don't want to leave school. One of the reasons for this is said to be a fear of going out into the workforce.
- Requires ability to set priorities. Successfully completing a grad degree requires a great deal of discipline and priority setting. This can be a strain on family and personal relationships, not to mention yourself.
- Relationship strains. If you're married, housing might be an issue. You might be offered a grad/research assistant position and free tuition, but no accommodations for your spouse in campus housing.
- Stressful. Emotionally exhausting. Completing a graduate degree, especially a PhD., requires emotional maturity.
- Writing a thesis. Some grad programs require writing a thesis on a topic that your degree supervisor picks out for you. Writing an original thesis is not easy, compared to course work, and is often the reason grad students take a lot longer than program duration. Each semester you delay might mean a "penalty" fee in the form of extra tuition that has to be paid.
- Requires support. You might need a strong support network to get through emotionally, when your thesis research is going nowhere.
- Might take 2–7 years of your life. Not everyone finds they can complete a grad degree in the typical one or two years. Personal obligations often intrude, or lack of finances make it difficult. Or your supervisor doesn't like your research. This doesn't even factor in the costs and how long it might take to pay back loans.
- Extra cost of education. Grad school can be very expensive. If you are not going to work during that time, or do not receive an assistant job and waived tuition fees, the cost of your education is going to mount.
- Graduating with a large debt. This state of financial affairs might push you into accepting any job after graduation, out of necessity.
- No guarantee of higher salary. Getting a grad degree does not necessarily mean you'll get offered a job with a much higher salary than you are getting now.
- Return on investment might be slow. Even with a higher salary, how quickly will that offset tuition loans and the zero or negative cash flow due to not earning while studying?
- Limited job opportunities. If the degree you get is in an academic field, finding work outside of teaching or research may be difficult, and thus not necessarily worth it to you.
- Undesirable job locales. Teaching positions offered after graduation could be in areas you simply don't want to live in.

If you are determined to go to grad school, consider spending a few years getting relevant work experience first. You could take the time to save the money for tuition and expenses, which would allow you to devote dedicated time to a degree. Or if you've built up trust in your employer, they might foot part of the tuition and give you time off each day to attend to studies.

# Is Graduate School Right for You?