

One website with information is:

<http://gradadmissions.about.com/education/gradadmissions/cs/generaladvice/index.htm>

## **Should you Go?**

You've planned on grad school, but with graduation just around the corner, are you ready for another three to eight years of education? Should you take time off before graduate study? This is a personal decision and there's no definitive right or wrong answer. However, if you have any doubts about your educational and career aspirations take your time and rethink your goals. What are your reasons for taking time off?

Are you tired? Exhaustion is understandable. After all, you've just spent 16 or more years in school. If this is your primary reason for taking time off, consider whether your fatigue will ease over the summer. You've got two or three months off before grad school starts; can you rejuvenate? Depending on the program and degree, graduate school takes anywhere from three to eight or more years to complete. If you're certain that graduate school is in your future, perhaps you shouldn't wait.

There are also many good reasons for taking time off. If you feel unprepared for grad school, a year off may enhance your application. For example, you might take a prep-course for GRE or other standardized tests required for admission. Improving your scores on standardized tests is essential for at least two reasons. First, it will enhance your chances of being accepted to the program of your choice. Perhaps more importantly, financial aid in the form of scholarships and awards are distributed based on standardized test scores.

Research experience will also enhance your application. Maintain contacts with the faculty at your undergraduate institution and seek research experiences with them. Such opportunities are beneficial because faculty members can write more personal letters of recommendation. Plus you gain insight into what it's like to work in your field.

Other reasons for taking a year or two off between undergraduate and graduate school include gaining work experience. Some fields, such as nursing and business, recommend and expect some work experience. In addition, the lure of money and the chance to save is hard to resist. Saving money often is a good idea because grad school is expensive and it's unlikely that you'll be able to work many hours, if any, while you're in school.

Many students worry whether they'll return to school after a year or two away from the grind. That's a realistic concern, but take the time that you need to be sure that grad school is right for you. Graduate school requires a great deal of motivation and the ability to work independently. Generally, students who are more interested and committed to their studies are more likely to be successful. Time off may increase your desire and commitment to your goals.

Finally, recognize that attending grad school several years after completing the BA is not unusual. More than one-half of grad students in the US are over age 30. If you wait before going to grad school, be prepared to explain your decision, what you learned, and how it improves your candidacy. Time off can be beneficial if it enhances your credentials and prepares you for the stresses and strains of grad school.

## **Graduate School Databases and Rankings**

Not sure where to go for grad school? These databases of grad programs and rankings will help you find the program that's right for you.

### **Customized Graduate School Rankings**

Weight rankings on graduate programs based on your own criteria with this engine from phds.org

### **College Rankings: Caution and Controversy**

A discussion (with links!) on the validity of college rankings. You decide.

### **All About Grad School**

The title is deceiving, but this is a great directory of links to graduate schools in the U.S.

### **Gradschools.com**

Comprehensive database of universities in the world. Search for programs by field and location

### **Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States: Continuity and Change**

Excellent dataset of descriptive info about programs, and ranking info, from the National Academy of Science.

### **US News Graduate School Rankings**

The famed (or infamous?) US News and World Report rankings of graduate programs in many, though not all, areas.