Applying to Graduate School: Answers to FAQs

Marine and Natural Sciences

February 2, 2022

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Background and Opening Remarks

- **Taylor professional training background:**
  - **B.A. Biology (Bucknell University, PA)**
  - **M.S. Marine Science (North Carolina State University, NC)**
  - **Ph.D. Oceanography (University of Rhode Island, RI)**
  - **Postdoc. Marine Ecology (Rutgers University, NJ)**

- **Mattaini professional training background:**
  - **B.S. Chemistry (Providence College, RI)**
  - **Postbac. Fellowship (National Cancer Institute, MD)**
  - **Ph.D. Biology (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MA)**
  - **Postdoc. Bio Research & Teaching (Tufts University, MA)**

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Background and Opening Remarks

- **Miscellaneous points:**
  - **Origin of presentation**
  - **Not all grad programs are structured the same**
  - **"Fact" vs. "Opinion"**
  - **Seek input from other faculty and people in positions of interest**
  - **Request presentation by emailing dtaylor@rwu.edu, or access via the MNS Seminar Series website:**

    https://www.rwu.edu/academics/schools-and-colleges/fssns/mns-seminar-series

Should I go to grad school?

- **But, consider the following:**
- **What are your short- and long-term career goals?**
- **What are your job prospects with a Bachelors, Masters, or PhD degree?**

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Should I take time off before going to grad school?

- **No right answer. It's a personal decision.**
- **<u>Advantages</u> of taking time off before grad school:**
  - **Recharge batteries**
  - **Better define areas of interest**
  - **More experience to improve application**
  - **Devote more time and focus to applications**
  - **Earn a more substantial income and pay off student loans?**
- **<u>Advantages</u> of starting grad school right away:**
  - **Maintain "academic momentum"**
  - **The quicker you start, the quicker you'll finish – maybe?**

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How do I pay for grad school?

- **Don't. Students pursuing degrees in STEM should expect tuition waivers and stipends.**

- **Tuition waivers:**
  - **Eligible for full-time grad students**

- **Stipends:**
  - **Assistantships: Research (RA) or Teaching (TA)**
  - **Fellowships: Internal and External**

- **Expect that grad school will be your only job. You should be paid enough to support yourself if you live frugally.**

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Should I pursue a Masters (MS) or Doctorate (Ph.D.)?

	Time	Credits	Expectations
MS	2-3 yr	42 credits (12 research)	1 manuscript
PhD	4-7 yr	72-75 credits (30 research)	>1 manuscript

Job prospects

MS	Improves research, analytical, and computational skills In some fields: Expands job opportunities (industry, education, government); Prepare for a PhD
PhD	Preparation for academia; High level positions in industry and government

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What is the structure of grad programs in my field?

- **Option 1: Enter grad school with advisor identified:**
  - **Often includes programs in:**
    - **Ecology & evolution**
    - **Organismal biology**
    - **Some chemistry programs**
- **Option 2: Enter program first & identify advisor later**
  - **Often includes programs in:**
    - **Cell & molecular biology**
    - **Some chemistry programs**
    - **Math**
- **Check far ahead for any programs that interest you**

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What's important when identifying grad schools?

- **Quality of school/department**
- **Research advisor:**
  - Type of research conducted in lab
  - Productivity of lab (grants, publications, presentations)
  - Success of grad students (see above, job market)
  - Average length of MS/PhD
  - Advisor and lab personality
- **Funding opportunities**
- **Geography**

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OPTION 1:
Should I contact potential grad advisor(s)

- **Why?**
  - **Learn more about program and advisor's research interests**
  - **Identify advisor's interest and willingness to accept new students**
  - **Have an important advocate for your grad application**

- **What?**
  - **Initial communication:**
    - **Identify your interests and how they complement advisor's lab**
    - **Ask if they are accepting students the following year**
  - **Later communications:**
    - **Funding availability**
    - **Possible projects**

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OPTION 1:
Should I contact potential grad advisor(s)

- **How?**
  - **Brief email (attach CV)**
  - **Phone call**
  - **Campus visit**
    - **Meet advisor, other faculty, and students**
    - **Gives valuable insight into people and place**
    - **Note: Some programs/schools cover visitation expense**

Be prepared for no response

- **When?**
  - **Start in summer and early fall of senior year**
  - **Too early = advisor doesn't know if they are accepting students**
  - **Too late = advisor has made a commitment to another student**

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What's considered in a grad school application?

- **GPA**

  > 3.0 (> 3.5 preferred)

Research experience

- **Courses taken**

- **GRE**

  Almost always "General"

  Sometimes "Subject"

- **Personal statement**

- **Letters of recommendation:**

  Typically 3 are required

- **Connections:**

  "It's not what you know, but who you know that's important."

- **RESEARCH ADVISOR (OPTION 1)**

  Need a research advisor to accept you into a lab

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FAQ about the GRE

- **What is it?**
  - **Graduate Record Examination = computer-based, standardized exam (offered monthly at designated testing centers)**
  - **Admissions requirement for many schools**

- **Do all grad schools require the GRE?**
  - **Majority require "General" GRE, but trend toward "optional" testing**
  - **Some others also require "Subject" GRE (e.g. *Biology*)**

- **How important is the GRE?**
  - **Varies greatly across schools and programs, ranging from: (i) not required, (ii) mere formality, or (iii) important selection factor**

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FAQ about the GRE, continued

- **What's tested on the GRE?**
  - **Verbal Reasoning (2 sections, 20 ques each, 30 min per section)**
  - **Quantitative Reasoning (2 sections, 20 ques each, 35 min per section)**
  - **Analytical Writing (2 essays, 1 hour total, external review)**
  - **Experimental (1 section)**

- **Can you study for the GRE?**
  - **Yes – review of math and vocabulary?**
  - **Yes – develop comfort level with test!**
  - **Test prep courses are not necessary. Borrow test prep books from a library for free!**

FAQ about the GRE, continued

- **How much does the GRE cost?**
  - **Usual fee is $205**
  - **Those who meet criteria of demonstrated financial need can apply for a 50% Fee Reduction Voucher: https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/register/fees/reduction/**
  - **On test day, you can select 4 programs to receive your scores. Each additional score report (ordered later) is $27**

- **Note:**
  - **Many grad programs may also have an application fee waiver for those with demonstrated financial need!**

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FAQ about the GRE, continued

- **What's a good score on the GRE?**
  - **60th percentile = Fair**
  - **80th percentile = Good**
  - **90th percentile = Very good**

- **Should I retake the GRE if I am not satisfied with my score?**
  - **Yes, but consider the cost**

- **Should I send my GRE scores to a grad school?**
  - **GRE scores will need to be submitted to a grad school to complete your application package**
  - **But, recommendation is to send scores after you know exam outcome (this comes at an additional cost)**

Scaled score	Verbal reasoning percentile
170	99
169	99
168	98
167	97
166	96
165	95
164	93
163	91
162	89
161	87
160	84
159	81
158	78
157	73
156	70
155	66
154	62
153	58
152	53
151	49
150	44
149	40
148	36

130

Scaled score	Quantitative reasoning percentile
170	98
169	97
168	96
167	95
166	93
165	91
164	89
163	87
162	84
161	81
160	78
159	75
158	72
157	69
156	65
155	61
154	57
153	53
152	49
151	45
150	41
149	37
148	33

130

Analytical Writing score	Writing %
6	98
5.5	92
5	81
4.5	63
4	41
3.5	23
3	10
2.5	3
2	1
1.5	0
1	0
0.5	0
mean	**3.9**

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http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/powerprep2/

General Test

About the Test

Registration

Prepare for the Test

Verbal Reasoning ▼

Quantitative Reasoning ▼

Analytical Writing ▼

Test Prep Videos ▼

POWERPREP Practice Tests ▼

System Requirements

Using with Accommodations

Frequently Asked Questions

Books and Services

Materials in Accessible Formats

Strategies and Tips

On Test Day

POWERPREP® Practice Tests: Preparation for the *GRE*® General Test

Use the *POWERPREP*® practice tests to help you prepare for the *GRE*® General Test. The practice tests are designed to help you:

- understand what's being tested
- gain familiarity with the various question types
- become familiar with the testing tools, including the on-screen calculator
- practice your test-taking strategies, such as time management, by taking a test under timed conditions
- understand scoring

Three powerful tools to meet your preparation needs. Use one or all three!

POWERPREP® Test Preview Tool (FREE)

Contains information to help familiarize you with the question types, test features and help tools that are available during the actual GRE General Test. This free tool can be found in the "My Test Preparation and Services" section of your ETS account.

Access the Preview Tool

POWERPREP® Online (FREE)

Two **free** practice tests that simulate the actual test and include the test-taker friendly design features you'll encounter on test day, like moving back and forth between questions, changing answers within a section and the on-screen calculator. *POWERPREP* Online also provides the following accommodations: extended time, extra breaks, screen magnification, selectable colors, and screen reader and refreshable

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General Timeline

Take GRE

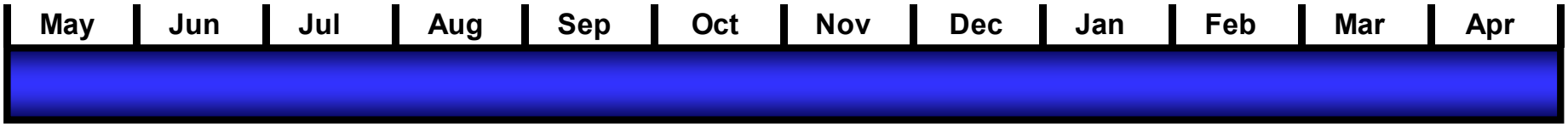
Research schools

Contact grad advisors (Option 1)

Visit grad schools

Applications due

Decision



Note: Timelines vary across disciplines and schools.
Check your programs of interest for exact schedule and deadlines.

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