



CAREER DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

TRANSITION AFTER GRADUATION

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL DECISIONS

Graduate or professional school can be a strong next step, but it should be a thoughtful decision. Do not go to graduate school only because you are unsure what else to do. Make sure the degree connects to your career goals, licensing requirements, personal interests, and financial situation

Graduate School vs. Professional School

Graduate school usually refers to master’s or doctoral programs focused on advanced study, research, or specialized professional preparation

Professional school prepares students for licensed or specialized professions such as law, medicine, physical therapy, counseling, pharmacy, education, or other regulated fields

Questions to Ask Before Applying

- Is this degree required for the career I want?
- Would work experience help before applying?
- Is the program accredited?
- Does the program lead to licensure or certification, if needed?
- What are the admission requirements?
- What entrance exam is required, if any?
- What is the total cost?
- Are assistantships, scholarships, or tuition support available?
- What are the program’s job placement or licensure pass rates?
- Where do graduates typically work?

Application Materials May Include

- Online application
- Resume or CV
- Personal statement
- Letters of recommendation
- Official transcripts
- Entrance exam scores
- Writing sample
- Interview
- Portfolio or audition, depending on the field

Personal Statement

A personal statement should explain why you are interested in the field, how your experiences have prepared you, and why the program is a good fit. Avoid vague statements like “I want to help people.” Use specific examples from coursework, work, research, internships, service, leadership, or personal experiences when appropriate



Letters of Recommendation

Ask recommenders early. Give them your resume, program information, deadline, and a reminder of your work with them. Choose people who can speak specifically about your academic ability, character, work ethic, leadership, or readiness for the field

Red Flags

Be cautious if a program:

- Is not properly accredited
- Has unclear career outcomes
- Has low licensure pass rates
- Pressures you to enroll quickly
- Is vague about total cost
- Offers little support or advising
- Does not clearly connect to your career goal

Key Point

Graduate school is an investment. Make sure the degree is necessary, credible, affordable, and connected to the work you actually want to do.

GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

A 12-18 month plan to help you prepare, apply, and succeed



USING AI WISELY

AI can help you:

- Brainstorm essay ideas
- Organize experiences and improve clarity
- Review essays for structure and grammar
- Tailor materials to specific prompts
- Build application checklists
- Prepare for interviews and practice answers
- Create thoughtful questions to ask programs

AI should not be used to:

- Write essays for you
- Invent or exaggerate experiences
- Include information you can't explain
- Replace your own voice or judgment

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Be ready to discuss:

- Why this field?
- Why this program?
- Your relevant experiences
- Strengths and areas for growth
- How you handle challenges, feedback, and conflict
- Your long-term goals
- Questions you have for the program

Quick tips:

- Practice out loud
- Be specific
- Use examples
- Be yourself

HELPFUL SITES

Career and Planning

- [Career OneStop](#): career exploration
- [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#): job outlook and pay
- [Federal Student Aid](#): FAFSA and graduate funding

Application Systems

- [PTCAS](#): physical therapy
- [LSAC](#): law school
- [AMCAS](#): medical school
- [CASPA](#): physician assistant

Testing and More

- [ETS](#): GRE and TOEFL
- [ADEA AADSAS](#): dental school
- [PharmCAS](#): pharmacy
- [SOPHAS](#): public health

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Clear, respectful communication helps you make a strong impression with employers, faculty, supervisors, and professional contacts

SUBJECT LINE EXAMPLES

EMAIL BASICS

- Use a clear subject line
- Start with a professional greeting
- Keep your message brief and polite
- End with your name and contact information

Question about Internship Application

Follow-Up Regarding Interview

Resume for Marketing Internship

Thank You for Meeting with Me

SAMPLE EMAIL

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about the internship position. I enjoyed learning more about the organization and the work your team is doing. Please let me know if there is any additional information I can provide.

Sincerely,
Leo Lion

professional voicemail

Set up a professional voicemail greeting

Example:
Hello, you have reached Leo Lion. I'm sorry I missed your call. Please leave your name, number, and a brief message, and I will return your call as soon as possible.

Tip: Make sure your voicemail inbox is not full and can receive messages

texting employers

Do not text unless invited to do so

Use complete sentences

Keep the tone professional

Avoid text abbreviations and text talk

RESPONSE TIME & FOLLOWING UP

- Respond within 24 hours during the workweek when possible
- Check email and voicemail regularly during a search
- After an interview or application, wait about 7-10 business days before following up

Example:

Good afternoon,

I wanted to follow up on my application for the ___ position. I remain very interested in the opportunity and would appreciate any update you are able to share.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your Name



Key Point

Professional communication does not need to sound fancy. It should be clear, respectful, timely, and appropriate for the situation

STARTING STRONG: YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS ON THE JOB

FIRST WEEK

Focus: Learn

- Arrive on time
- Take notes
- Learn names and roles
- Ask how your supervisor prefers to communicate
- Review policies and expectations
- Avoid gossip and oversharing
- Ask questions when you are unsure

FIRST 30 DAYS

Focus: Understand Your Role

- Clarify your main responsibilities
- Learn how success is measured
- Ask for feedback
- Understand deadlines and priorities
- Build relationships with coworkers
- Learn workplace tools, systems, and procedures

DAYS 31-60

Focus: Contribute

- Complete tasks reliably
- Communicate progress to your supervisor
- Ask thoughtful questions
- Accept feedback professionally
- Continue learning the culture
- Notice how decisions are made

DAYS 61-90

Focus: Grow

- Review your progress
- Ask what to keep doing, stop doing, or improve
- Identify skills to strengthen
- Set goals for the next few months
- Continue building your professional reputation

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SUPERVISOR

- What are your top priorities for me in this role?
- What does success look like in the first 90 days?
- How do you prefer updates or questions?
- What should I learn first?
- How will I receive feedback?

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Acting like you already know everything
- Missing deadlines without communicating
- Using your phone too much
- Ignoring feedback
- Treating entry-level work as beneath you
- Arriving late, taking long lunches, or leaving early regularly
- Oversharing too soon
- Waiting too long to ask for help

 **Key Point**

The goal of your first 90 days is not perfection. The goal is to become dependable, coachable, professional, and useful



About This Guide

This guide was developed by Caryn J. Atwater, M.A., Director of Career and Personal Development, using a combination of professional expertise, current career development best practices, and generative AI as a productivity tool. AI was used to support brainstorming, drafting, editing, and visual development. All content was reviewed, fact-checked, and curated by the author.