

*So . . . you want to go to
graduate school: A Workshop
on the Process and its Perils*



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Quick Assessment

- On a piece of paper, briefly describe your ideal workday.
- Briefly describe one thing you are infinitely passionate and curious about.
- Then, briefly describe one impact you want to have on your world.
- Finally, how do you want to be remembered when you're gone from this world?

Why Go to Graduate School?

- To become a college professor.
- To work as a professional in education administration.
- To be a writer.
- To be a professional scholar.
- To be a social activist.
- To be in the professions: law, medicine, psychology.

What kinds of Graduate Degrees are there?



- In literature/language:
 - MA (Master of Arts)—non-terminal: lets you teach part-time in a community college or full-time in a private secondary school; gives you a raise if you're already teaching; serves as foundation for PhD.
 - MA or MFA (Master of Fine Arts)—terminal: lets you teach Journalism or Creative Writing in a four-year college or university.
 - PhD (Doctor of Philosophy): credential required for university or four-year college teaching in literature, language, or education.

What about in other fields?

- **MBA: Master of Business Administration:**
Many arts management programs have either an MS/MA or a MBA program.
- **MS in Library Science**
- **MEd.: Master of Education**
- **MAT: Education Certification**
- **JD: Juris Doctorate**—typical law degree; also advanced degrees available in law.

Alternatives to Graduate Study in English

- Area Studies Programs such as Women's Studies or Rhetoric and Composition
- Graduate School in education: Plan to apply after you've taught a couple of years.
- Arts Management
- Law School
- Library Science
- Funded study abroad: The Rhodes Scholarship, The Fulbright, The Marshall
- Teaching Abroad: The JET Program; your study abroad office
- Publishing Internships The Peace Corps

What is Graduate School anyway?

- Professional Degrees (MA, MAT, MS-LS, induct you into their profession)
- Graduate school in literature or language is not undergrad “souped up.”
- Graduate study requires faculty work in miniature: research (principal responsibility), teaching (secondary responsibility), service (tertiary responsibility).
- Faculty work combines teaching, research, and service.
- If you go to grad school in literature or language, the work you do will be the kind of work you’ll do in a career in academia.

Choosing a School

- Don't be seduced by prestige alone.
- Use practical criteria for evaluation.
 - Ask institutions you're interested about placements and to speak with recent graduates.
- Follow your interests, but focus on developing skills marketable outside the academic classroom as well.
- Use your library databases to help you. Identify critics and researchers whose work intrigues you.
- Look at scholarly societies.
- Attend a conference to meet prospective faculty mentors.

Choosing the Schools: Getting What you Go For

- Choose a graduate program based on four main criteria:
 - Faculty guidance: with whom will you study?
 - Money: do they have fellowships?
 - Community: will you have one?
 - Facilities: what do they have?
- Thou shalt GO AWAY from home for a PhD in English.



Look for a Good Fit and a Healthy Program

- Do they offer meaningful economic support and health insurance to graduate students?
- Is there a graduate students' association?
- Are there at least four professors you can identify that can supervise your independent work?
- Is there an excellent research library?
- Does the department/school fund visiting speakers regularly?
- Are there strong interdisciplinary ties?

Show Me the Money

- Don't go into an unreasonable amount of debt (more than one year anticipated starting salary) for a graduate degree in English.
- Look for programs that offer teaching and fellowships.
- Ask if the programs support graduate research.
- Find out if the programs support graduate student professional development.
- Find out cost-of-living.

Setting Up the Timeline

- Collect information.
 - When is your graduation date?
 - When do you take a seminar class?
 - Do you have letters of recommendation available to you? Give recommenders six weeks notice at least. Plan to continue nagging them until you have confirmation the letter is received.
 - When do you take the GRE?
 - When are the school deadlines?
- Your materials should be ready to go by Thanksgiving before the deadlines.

Faculty Mentors

- Cultivate at least four faculty mentors at your college.
- Make sure they have high expectations.
- Find out if they're publishing; participating in national organizations.
- Do they support your decision?
- Will they write a good letter?
- Will they go to bat for you?
- Find out who from your college is already in graduate school and seek out their advice. Your Sigma Tau Delta adviser probably has a good idea of alumni in graduate school.

So...

- If no faculty member has required a long paper, do an independent project or honors thesis.
- Put together a writing group with other students.
- Always tailor statements for schools.
- Make sure grad school is what you really want.

Standardized Tests

- Find out if the schools require the GRE and the GRE subject test.
- Hold on to your anthologies from your survey courses or pick up discarded ones from faculty.
- Prepare to take the GRE and the subject test at least two test cycles before the application dates.

Writing Sample and Statement of Purpose

- Writing sample should be under 20 pages.
- Should demonstrate your abilities to argue, to synthesize and interpret texts and scholarship.
- Should be exceptionally well-written.
- Statement of Purpose really does that: it states your purpose in going to graduate school

Cautions about Writing Samples and Statements of Purpose

- Writing sample should never slam a critic on staff at the school.
- Writing sample should never, ever, ever plagiarize, appropriate, or misuse the work of others.
- Statement of Purpose should never be sappy.
- Tell them what you are going there to get.