

Preparing for Graduate School



Academic Writing

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Graduate School
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Introduction

Graduate school is all about writing. Are you prepared to write 15-20-page academic papers? How about 200+ pages of a thesis or a dissertation? Do you know how to take a blank page and create a scholarly research project? Most graduate programs do not offer a course that prepares you for this level of professional writing. However, without strong writing skills, you will not succeed in your master's or doctoral program.

"Preparing for Graduate School Academic Writing" assesses your readiness for graduate learning through surveys, exercises, and succinct introductory lessons on the most essential aspects of graduate writing, such as standards, style, plagiarism, source evaluation, and digital library research skills.

As a potential, current or returning graduate student, you must become familiar with peer-reviewed articles, literature reviews, abstracts, references, and annotated bibliographies before advancing too far into your program of study. Otherwise, you might get overwhelmed by the expectations to immediately produce this kind of content with very little instruction. Therefore, equipping yourself for the rigors of academic writing is worth the extra time and effort to avoid stress, confusion or burnout.

The difference between undergraduate and graduate-level writing is the difference between student and scholar. As a graduate-level writer, you engage other scholars as peers, building on and challenging their ideas to advance your area of research. What does that mean exactly? For example, I actually engaged in graduate level writing as an undergraduate. In order to graduate from the honors program, I needed to write a senior thesis on any topic that received the blessings of my committee. I researched the growth of mental illness facilities within my state. As it turns out, no one had ever done that before.

For one year, I researched and wrote from primary sources like old newspaper articles from the 1800s preserved on microfiche. I interviewed older people with memories to share about my topic. I typed my project on an old *Brother* word processor and saved it to a floppy disk. Yes, definitely old school! What emerged from all of that hard work was "The History of the Arkansas State Hospital 1859-1930," which won a local history award, and was published in the *Pulaski County Historical Review* in 1995. Still today, other researchers and state historians who write on this topic quote my work. In this instance, I moved from being a consumer to a producer of knowledge that turned into a published, peer-reviewed article. Since there were no other sources from other scholars that I could include in my work, I became the source. Similarly,

you must find an area of research within your discipline that lacks a particular perspective that you will offer through researching and writing your thesis or dissertation. Instead of creating original research, you will shed light on established ideas, analyze the assumptions of another person's work, and contribute your own thoughts about a topic. In a nutshell, this is the crux of graduate level writing.

You might be thinking, *I don't want to be a celebrated scholar. I just want to pass my classes so that I can get my degree.* Of course. To that end, this book will walk you through typical graduate student activities like writing discussion posts, papers, and conducting online research while providing show-and-tell examples for fast and easy comprehension.

Along the way, you will have opportunities to assess your current academic skills and identify strengths and weaknesses to improve upon before diving into your program of study. Doing so will boost your confidence in completing complex writing assignments before tackling a full master's or dissertation proposal. Remember, writing is the primary basis for assessment in graduate school, not quizzes or tests. Therefore, you must actively increase your academic writing abilities to ensure success in your classes.

Some of you reading this book might be brand new to graduate learning, returning from a long break, or transitioning directly from an undergraduate program. No matter your starting point or previous academic experience, the information in the chapters that follow are an asset to anyone brave enough to pursue the highest levels of educational achievement.

Chapter One

Graduate School Readiness



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Are You Ready for Graduate School?

Regardless of what type of graduate school you enroll in, some things are common to the lives of all graduate students. Number one, you will write...a lot! Number two, you will read...a lot! Whether online or in person, reading and writing complex materials are required activities for all graduate level classes. You will also create discussion posts, send plenty of emails to instructors and fellow students, as well as submit long and short research papers.

If you do not adopt a proper growth mindset and organization strategies before entering graduate school, you will faint at the amount of work you must accomplish in a short amount of time. There are plenty of drop-outs around to prove that this is more than a theory. Have you ever met anyone who didn't quite finish their master's or doctoral degrees? Of course, you have.

So, to avoid this fate, ask yourself some questions to really gauge your skill levels and attitudes about the task you are getting ready to undertake. The following survey questions prompt you to think about your writing and research skills in addition to your readiness to join a new academic community. Use the space provided to note any information you might need to learn or update prior to your first class.

Writing Skills Survey

Consider your prior or current writing experiences when answering these questions. Use the space provided at the end of the survey to note any unfamiliar terms that appear within the questions.

In the past, I have written:

1. An academic paper that is at least 10 pages long.
 - yes
 - no

2. An academic paper that is 15-20 pages long.
 - yes
 - no

3. An academic paper using APA style.
 - yes
 - no

4. An academic paper using MLA or another academic style.
 - yes
 - no

5. An annotated bibliography with at least 10 sources.
 - yes
 - no

6. A literature review.
 - yes
 - no

7. A conference paper or a published academic article.
 - yes
 - no

8. I have written more than one paper at the last minute.
 - yes
 - no