

The Role of GPA in Graduate School Admissions

Your grade point average (GPA) is important to admissions committees, not because it signifies your intelligence, but because it is a long-term indicator of how well you perform your job as a student. Grades reflect your motivation and your ability to do consistently good or bad work. Generally, most master's programs require minimum GPAs of 3.0 or 3.33, and most doctoral programs require minimum GPAs of 3.3 or 3.5. Usually, this minimum is necessary, but not sufficient, for admission. That is your GPA can keep the door from shutting in your face but many other factors come to play in getting accepted to graduate school and your GPA usually won't guarantee admission, no matter how good it is.

Course Quality Can Trump Your Grade

Not all grades are the same. Admissions committees study the courses taken. A "B" in Advanced Statistics is worth more than an "A" in Introduction to Pottery. In other words, they consider the context of the GPA: where was it obtained and of what course is it comprised? In many cases, it's better to have a lower GPA composed of solid challenging courses than a high GPA based on easy courses like "Basket Weaving for Beginners" and such like. Admissions committees study your transcript and examine your overall GPA as well as the GPA for the courses relevant to the programs to which you are applying (GPA in science and math courses for applicants to medical school and graduate programs in the sciences). Ensure that you are taking the right courses for the graduate program to which you plan to apply.

Why Turn To Standardized Exams?

Admissions committees also understand that applicants' grade point averages often can't be meaningfully compared. Grades can differ among universities: an "A" at one university may be a "B+" at another. Also, grades differ among professors in the same university. Because grade point averages are not standardized, it's hard to compare applicants' GPAs. Therefore admissions committees turn to standardized exams, like the GRE, MCAT, LSAT, and GMAT, to make comparisons among applicants from different universities. Therefore, if you have a low GPA, it is essential that you try your best to do well on the standardized tests.

What If I Have A Low GPA?

If it is early in your academic career, preferably sophomore year or beginning your junior year, you have time to boost your GPA. Remember that the more credits you have taken, the harder it is to raise your GPA, so try to catch a spiraling GPA before it does much damage. Here's what you can do before it's too late:

- Try your best. (this is a given)
- Take high-quality courses. Sure, it's easy to raise your GPA with introductory courses and so-called "easy A's courses" but admission committees will see through those tactics. A lower GPA composed of high-quality courses will do you more good than a high GPA composed of "easy" courses.
- Take more classes. Don't just take the minimum number of courses needed to graduate. Instead, take more courses so that you have more opportunities to raise your GPA.
- Take summer courses. Summer classes are intense but they permit you to focus entirely on one or two classes, which mean that you're likely to do well.
- Consider delaying graduation. Spend an extra semester or more in school to take courses to raise your GPA.
- After graduation, take a few graduate courses or challenging undergraduate courses to show your aptitude. Point to your performance in these classes as an indicator of your capacity for graduate work.