

Grad School Lingo

We all know that grad school is a lot of work, but did you know that it has its own vocabulary? Fancy words start cropping up in conversations with professors and fellow students before you ever even apply. They're words you've probably heard time and time again, but do you really know what they mean? Are you afraid to ask? Relax! We're here to take some of the mystery out of the lingo and explain to you in casual terms just what, exactly, everyone is talking about.

A.B.D.

This is an acronym for "All But Dissertation." These will be the initials behind your name if you've completed all your Ph.D. coursework, but not your thesis.

Academic graduate education

This is a graduate education that emphasizes performing and evaluating research in a specific field, such as literature or biochemistry.

Academic master's degrees

These are the broad Master of Arts (M.A.) or Master of Sciences (M.S.), usually awarded in the traditional arts, sciences, and humanities disciplines. M.S. degrees are also awarded in technical fields such as engineering and agriculture. These degrees may lead to your entrance to a doctoral program.

Assistantship

Assistantships are available at many schools with graduate programs, and can be teaching or research centered. In exchange for completing some work or research for the school, you're offered free or reduced tuition as well as other possible benefits, such as health insurance and a monthly stipend.

Defense

Generally an oral presentation to a committee of people where you provide a summary of your thesis and the research results you obtained. An Examining Committee then presents you with questions and you must respond and defend your work. There's usually a time limit.

Dissertation

The D word is a fancy synonym for "thesis." (See below).

Fellowship

Fellowships are essentially scholarships or grants that are awarded to doctoral students. Awards vary but could include enough money to cover the cost of everything, including tuition, housing, and food. Sometimes, they have strings attached, such as working on a very specific type of research, or publishing a set amount of articles in a specific field.

GMAT

Acronym for Graduate Management Admission Test, a standardized test required for admission to a graduate business school.

GRE

Acronym for Graduate Record Examination, a standardized exam usually required for admission to graduate schools.

Internship

Work experience as part of a field of study, which usually takes place over several months. It may be full-time, may require you to move, and you may be paid. Internships are required for graduation from some programs, but may be waived under certain circumstances.

LSAT

Acronym for Law School Admission Test, a standardized test required for admission to law school.

MCAT

Acronym for Medical College Admissions Test, a standardized test required for admission to medical school.

Orals

These are essentially final exams for graduate school, which are common for doctoral degrees and sometimes required for master's-level programs. These comprehensive exams are presented verbally and usually graded by a small committee of professors who will require you to demonstrate your mastery of the concepts you've covered in your studies.

Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy)

This is an advanced degree, beyond the master's level, which requires further courses as well as several years of original research culminating in a dissertation.

Practicum

A work experience or hands-on portion of a class. For instance, Clinical Psychology students may spend eight hours a week seeing clients to fulfill requirements for some classes. A practicum is smaller in scope than an internship and usually only lasts as long as the length of the course which requires it.

Professional graduate education

This is a graduate education that emphasizes learning the skills and knowledge necessary to practice a profession, such as attending med school or studying social work.

Terminal master's degree

These are also referred to as professional master's degrees and include degrees with descriptive titles, such as Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.), Master of Social Work (M.S.W.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), or Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.). These are degrees that prepare you for a particular profession. Any further education at the Ph.D. level isn't considered necessary to enter your career field. Other "terminal" degrees may include Journalism, International Relations, Architecture, Public Administration, and Urban Planning.

Thesis

In a nutshell, a thesis is one huge gigantic research paper! A thesis is almost always required if you're pursuing a Ph.D., but some master's programs require them as well. Your thesis is your shining academic achievement, an original and significant contribution to research in your field.