

You Got Into Graduate School

Now What?

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You finally applied to that graduate technical communication program, and you got accepted. Congratulations! Now what? Whether you've been spending the past several years raising a family or working a full-time job, heading to graduate school after years away from college can be a daunting experience. If you're ready to return to campus, here are some tips to help you become a successful student and a better technical communicator along the way.

Start slow. Chances are, when you were an undergraduate student, school was your main focus and priority. Now you may have to squeeze studying in between working a full-time job, maintaining a household, and raising a family. Begin by taking one class during your first semester to get re-acclimated to the world of academics. The first class will introduce you to the workload and time commitment involved in being a successful graduate student.

Arrange your schedule. Depending on whether, where, and what time you'll be driving to school, you'll need to figure out how long it will take you to get there and if you'll need to leave work a few minutes early. Also, make sure any day-

care or meal plans are taken care of in advance. Time management is a valuable skill that will make school a lot easier.

Tour the campus. If you'll be attending class on a local campus, learn the location of the bookstore, student center, and library. When you have to get a book fifteen minutes before class starts, it's good to know where you're going and how to get there quickly. Also, know where you can pick up a snack or a copy of the student newspaper on those rare occasions when you have time to kill.

Refresh your grammar skills. Remember you'll be studying technical communication, not English. Get your hands on a good writer's handbook, especially if you didn't study English as an undergraduate. There are also Web sites where you can sign up to have daily grammar lessons e-mailed to you. A well-designed, user-friendly document that's full of grammatical mistakes won't get you very far in the classroom.

Prepare to learn. Your undergraduate degree is probably in a field other than technical communication. And while you may have picked up some knowledge of your graduate field in the workplace,

nothing compares to the classroom experience. After your first document design class, you'll see your professional work in a whole new light. Keep an open mind, and look for ways to apply what you learn in school on the job.

Know your classmates. You'll be in class with people who graduated from college three months ago and people who earned their bachelor's degrees years before you did. Take the time to get to know them and their experiences. Technical communicators are a tight-knit community, and classroom networking will be beneficial both when you're working on group projects and when you're looking for professional work in the future.

Embrace new technology. If your last school presentation was on an overhead, it's time to brush up on those *PowerPoint* skills. Not all classes will teach you the software necessary to complete the assignments. Use going back to school as a chance to learn new software technology. Not only will you benefit when it comes to getting homework done, you'll also have new skills to add to your résumé. As a technical communicator, the more software applications you know, the more work you'll be qualified to do.

Have fun. Being a student does have its advantages. Use your student ID to get discounts at bookstores, restaurants, and movie theaters. Make sure to reward your hard work at the end of the semester with a special night out with family or friends.

Going to graduate school is a big decision and a rewarding experience. Careful preparation and the right mindset between the time of your acceptance and the first day of class—as well as diligent completion of your assignments—will set you on the right path. And following the tips in this article will prepare you for academic and professional success as a technical communicator. **i**

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