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Evening\_Matter6515

## GIS vs QGIS for a complete beginner

### Student Question

I am an undergrad interested in going into ecology/environmental or public health related fields and I have read that GIS certification is useful for these fields. (For reference I am doing a double major in cognitive science/evolutionary biology with a minor in environmental studies)

When I looked for GIS cert programs they all look pretty expensive. However I heard about QGIS and that it's free/open source which is nice.

My question is, what is the difference between them? Will learning QGIS give me the GIS skills to be helpful in my career?

I don't have a ton of coding background (I took a course in matlab that I kind of struggled with and we didn't do any data analysis type stuff either, and I have a little bit of python knowledge but nothing high level) so how hard would either of these programs be to learn? Also wondering *when* it would be useful to learn? (As an undergrad or before grad school or after grad school or whatnot)

Also a disclaimer that I don't really know anything about GIS yet other than like... what it stands for so please let me know if I am mistaken about anything I said here or if you have any advice for someone starting out with this kind of skill. (Also sorry if this is the wrong flair I wasn't sure which to put)



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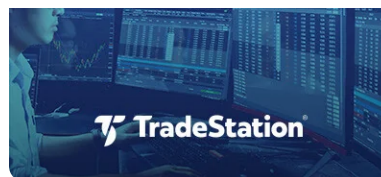
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GIS is a field of study, a profession, a topic of research. QGIS is a specific piece of software for doing GIS work, as are many other pieces of software.

ESRI (ARCGIS, etc.) is the thousand pound gorilla in the field, and lots of certs focus on learning not just GIS concepts but use of ESRI tools. QGIS is a free alternative, and the relationship between QGIS and ESRI tools is not unlike the relationship between the free Blender animation tools and paid products like Cinema4D, Maya, etc. One could make a similar comparison between something like GIMP and Photoshop but it's less apt; GIMP is a lesser tool compared to Photoshop than QGIS is to ESRI tools.

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Everything here is accurate except the last half of the last sentence. That's only arguably true when comparing QGIS desktop with ArcGIS Pro. QGIS Server is not in the same ballpark as ArcGIS Enterprise (arguably not even playing the same game). And there's no QGIS equivalent of ArcGIS Online.

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For students, it's probably easier to go with Esri, because they can likely get a license through their institution for free. In my experience, the Esri tutorials are much better than what's available for QGIS.

It also depends on location. In the US and Canada, Esri tools dominate, so people looking for work will want to know Esri tools. In Europe, QGIS is much more common (I'm not familiar with Latin America, Africa or Asia contexts).

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Thank you, I will check if my uni offers ESRI, that is a software like arcgis correct?

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ArcGIS is made by ESRI – there are various ESRI products and services, as orkoros noted above. See [here](#). Lots of universities and colleges are able to provide deals on software and there are generally student-oriented licenses for most big software packages provided directly by the maker (and not just in the GIS world). [ESRI's student license info](#).

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Oh I see, thank you so much for explaining! If I am just starting out with GIS related software should I start with QGIS or go straight to ESRI?



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I don't work in GIS and so am just an interested civilian who has occasionally done small GIS-related tasks; as such you may want to seek answers to this question from more people.

That being said, my *sense* of this is that a lot of people have been quite fed up with some aspects of ESRI's dominance for a long time; further that there is a huge amount of ongoing work being put into the QGIS project; and further still that there *may* be something like a slow movement in the industry to non-ESRI tools. QGIS seems to me to perhaps be less polished but *really* capable.



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QGIS is free, don't you have to pay for arcGIS? I'm in an intro to GIS class rn and we use QGIS, so I think it's a good starting point



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I think the most important thing is learning how to think about geography and how to do the operations that you need to do. You will probably have to use a lot of different software throughout your career, there's a lot more to GIS than learning how to use a certain software package.

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GIS Software Engineer

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