

1

This **Getting Started Guide** is your source for up-to-date information about what you need to know before you choose a school or program. Use these tips to get organized and motivated—and get going on making your dreams a reality.

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» Now Is the Time

get ready to return to school



Choosing to go back to school is truly a bold move. Earning your degree will be challenging whether you attend full-time, or choose to fit part-time classes alongside family and work responsibilities. But with the job market getting more competitive every year, there's no better time to make a move toward improving your education and career.

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Education is life changing

Here are some great reasons why diving in could make you happier—and better off—than you’ve ever been.

job security

Degrees, diplomas, and certificates can open doors, plain and simple. When faced between the choice of hiring someone with a degree and one without, the majority of hiring managers would choose the degree holder, even though he or she would need to be paid a higher salary.

Also, according to a June 2012 government report, only 3.9 percent of college grads over the age of 25 are unemployed, compared to 7.9 percent of those who’ve only taken a few college courses.

family life

Just think about how incredible it will feel to finally graduate with that degree or certificate you’ve been thinking about for months—or even years. Make yourself and everyone in your life proud by enrolling in the program that will help you fulfill your longtime dreams and potential.

valuable connections

The students you meet in school—whether you attend on-campus or online—could be your friends for life. You never know who you’ll meet in class who may have connections to help you land the job you’ve always wanted.



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self-esteem

Imagine how amazing it will feel to finally be able to add that degree or certification to your résumé, or to demonstrate the knowledge from your coursework while in a job interview.

earning power

What's keeping you at your current job? How does the thought of staying where you are compare to becoming qualified to pursue the job you've always wanted?

Here are some encouraging charts and facts that tout some of the benefits of a grad school degree:

- The average college grad earns **64%** more than a high-school graduate.
- By 2018, **63%** of all American job openings will require some sort of postsecondary education. While employers will need nearly **22 million** new workers with postsecondary degrees, colleges will fall short of that mark by **3 million** graduates.
- At age 50, a college graduate out-earns a high-school grad by **\$46,500** annually.
- Employment for workers with a master's, professional, or associate's degree are expected to grow twice as fast as the overall job market.

Ready to rise above average?

The more education you have, the more you're likely to earn:

Unemployment rate	Education attained	Median weekly earnings in 2011
2.5%	Doctoral degree	\$1,551
2.4	Professional degree	\$1,665
3.6	Master's degree	\$1,263
4.9	Bachelor's degree	\$1,053
6.8	Associate degree	\$768
8.7	Some college, no degree	\$719
9.4	High-school diploma	\$638
14.1	Less than a high school diploma	\$451
7.6	All Workers	\$797

Source: U.S. Department of Education

- Investing in college is a better bet than investing in the stock market.
- Over a lifetime, the average college graduate earns roughly \$570,000 more than someone with only a high school diploma—a tremendous return on the average upfront investment of \$102,000.
- In 2009, young adults with a bachelor's degree earned twice as much as those who didn't graduate from high school (114 percent more, to be exact), 50 percent more than young adults who completed high school, and 25 percent more than those who had earned an associate's degree.

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No more excuses!

What excuses are keeping you from returning to school? Whichever reason's stopping you, there's an even better reason to go ahead and make the move:



1

I don't have money for school.

Neither do most students when they enroll. See our financial aid guide for specifics on how to hunt down scholarships and find grants (which don't need to be repaid), and, if needed, how to find student loans with the lowest interest rate possible.

2

I don't have time for school.

Try and gauge how much time you spend on things other than work or family. You'll probably realize that you have many hours each week—maybe even each day—that could instead be devoted towards school. For example, a recent news report shows that the typical American spends more than 4 ½ hours every day watching TV. Couldn't you be spending your time better? Online schools can save you time, too—no need to drive to campus.

3

I'll miss my kids when I'm in class.

Your kids will be happy for you when you've learned the skills you need to apply for your dream job—and thrilled for you when you get it. And, once again, online schools may be just what you need to fit in school with your home and work responsibilities.

4

My computer skills aren't great.

If you can type a text message, you can participate in an online class. On-campus schools offer computer training for students who need it, and there are tutorials on YouTube® that can assist you as well. Keep in mind you don't need to be a computer genius to attend school—just good enough to complete your assignments.

5

My study skills have never been good.

Study skills can always be improved. Check out our study skills guide for tips and tricks for note-taking, preparing for tests, writing and communicating clearly, and more.

6

What if I'm the oldest person in class?

It's much preferable to be one of the older students in class, or even the oldest, than never pursuing that degree.

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Get motivated

Heidi Grant Halvorson, Ph.D., is a contributor to *Psychology Today* magazine and the author of *9 Things Successful People Do Differently* and *Succeed: How We Can Reach Our Goals*. She recommends specific goal-setting tips to her clients with solid results. She says that you're more likely to achieve a challenging goal—like returning to school—if you do the following three things:

- » break a larger task into small and specific steps
- » set a time limit
- » announce your intentions as widely as you can to friends, family, and co-workers.

For example, you could make a goal for yourself of enrolling in school by this time next year. But you're more likely to achieve it if you start small. How about researching 5 schools this month, or exploring 3 potential majors or programs in the next 3 weeks? Next, set a goal of investigating the most appealing schools more thoroughly, then set a goal of applying to one or more—then enrolling.

By breaking down your overall goal of returning to school into smaller, less intimidating tasks, you're more likely to stay on track and succeed.



NOW ☒
LATER ☐

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Sample goal chart

Overall goal: Return to school in summer/fall/spring 2013

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Steps	Details	Deadline	Notes
1. Decide on a program	Research 5 programs and pick the one that best suits my career goals and needs as a student	2 weeks from today	
2. Choose a school			
3. Apply		December 1	
4. Find Financial Aid		Scholarship application #1 due January 15	
5.			
Last step: Enroll!			



My back-to-school goals

My goal: Return to school in **summer/fall/spring** 20____

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Steps	Details	Deadline	Notes
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
Last step: Enroll!			