

Quick Tips: Grade point average

Transcript

Let's take a look at some quick tips on the topic of Grade Point Average for graduate and professional school applications. Be sure to read all of the information in the "What you need to know" and the appropriate "Program Information" section to get you started on planning for your further education and studies.

Admission requirements usually state the minimum GPA required to be admitted to a program. If this is not clear, contact the school to find out the GPA requirement and how it is computed: a cumulative average, your grades for the last two years, your grades in your major, the last year of study, or marks in courses related to the program, and so on. The minimum requirement varies by program and a competitive GPA is typically higher than the minimum. The minimum cGPA for a research or course-based master's program is usually 75% with the expectation that your 3rd and 4th year are a bit higher. If you have a lower GPA in your last year or last 2 years of studies, this will be a red flag for admission's officers as it often indicates that you will not be successful in a graduate program, or you have not grasped the core concepts required for graduate/professional school.

The required GPA for professional programs, like law or rehabilitation, tends to be in the low 80's. Medical school requires a much higher GPA, with almost all of your courses at 85% or higher. If you are applying while completing your 4-year degree, most programs only consider 4A term marks and earlier, or in some cases your 3B marks and earlier, depending on when you apply. For example if your application is due in October, November, or December, then your fall grades from the current semester will not be included in your application. This doesn't mean schools won't expect you to keep your average up – usually any offers given are conditional on you maintaining a similar academic average.

Some Ontario medical schools use weighted GPAs (where some years are weighted more than others, or certain courses can be dropped from the calculation). As well, the Ontario rehabilitation programs calculate your GPA based on your last 20 courses – however – if they need to use courses from part of an academic year (for example they need 5 courses from your 2B term), then they will average the entire year (so both your 2A and 2B term) and use that number as many times as they need to get to their 20 courses for evaluation (in this example the average would be used 5 times).

For Ontario professional programs, make sure to read the OUAC instruction booklet associated with your law, teaching, medicine, and rehab program in detail to understand the grade calculation. If you have questions you can meet with a Further Education Career Advisor to clarify the process.

When institutions ask for a GPA instead of a percentage average, they use either a 10-point or a 4-point scale, so it is important to ask how your average will be converted. Visit the program website to see if GPAs are posted for previous years. If you are applying to faculties of law, medicine, or rehab sciences in Ontario, the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) has GPA conversion charts for each program. For an international or exchange term, the program may need a World Education Service (WES) conversion of your grades. Allow enough time for grade conversion through WES and to order and send a transcript by the deadline date.

This is the GPA conversion chart found on the OUAC website. Waterloo falls under column 3. To calculate your GPA on the 4.0 scale before you apply, use this chart, and individually convert each course grade to the 4.0 scale before adding everything up and averaging to find your GPA. Confirm whether you are calculating every undergraduate level course you have ever taken (cumulative GPA) or the last 20 courses you have grades for etc.

If you have lab courses where you earned a separate .25 credit, they will be worth half as much when averaging your GPA. We recommend using Excel to make your calculations easier.

In Excel, set the columns up like this:

With your transcript Percent grade as the first column, and the GPA converted grade (on the 4.0 scale), as the second column. The 3rd column will be the Length of the course (each lab will be .5 and each lecture will be 1), and finally the Value column (this is your GPA multiplied by the course length).

Then add up the Length and Value columns, and divide the **total** value by the **total** length to find your cumulative GPA! Using these two lectures and 1 lab as a brief example, you can see that the lab grades are weighted half as much as the lectures.