

Speak the Graduate School Language and Other Helpful Tips

- TA – teaching assistant
- RA – research assistant or residence assistant
- GA – graduate assistant
- Thesis – 50-75 page research paper completed after course work for master's degree
- Dissertation – 100+ page research paper completed after course work for a doctorate
- *Non-thesis option – taking 12+ additional hours as a substitute for the thesis. (*Varies by institution.)
- Comps – written and/or oral exams administered at the end of course work for graduate programs. Oral exams are administered by a committee of faculty members from your program. You may or may not be allowed to contribute to the composition of the committee.
- Full load – nine hours (nine hours is a heavy load.)
- Residency requirement – required on-campus full-time residence at the university (usually one year)
- Reading list – materials to be read in preparation for comps
- Thesis or Dissertation Committee – faculty who “guide” the development of your thesis or dissertation
- Failing grade – usually a “C”
- Expulsion – usually two “C” grades

Other Helpful Tips

- Go to every available library orientation meeting. Using a university library is really different than ours. Make friends with the research librarian for your area. He/she will save your life (on many occasions) before this is over. Never offend this person.
- Never offend the secretary in your graduate department. Your mail may be lost; papers you need may disappear. Also, avoid offending professors. They may end up on your comps or thesis committees.
- Do not throw anything away during registrations
- Check for hidden costs; for example, parking fees may be \$100+ per year.
- Your social life may be very limited, but try to keep some balance in your life that brings you pleasure and meets your personal needs.
- You will be expected to be responsible, competent, precise and servile. You will be punished when you are not.
- Try to enjoy yourself; it can be exhilarating to be surrounded by people with similar academic interests. If you can't enjoy yourself, just keep going, your endurance will pay off.

**Adapted from the University of Tennessee Career Services