

18 Graduation

You need to apply to graduate when you finish your degree: it doesn't happen automatically. Your institution will invite you to apply to graduate toward the end of your degree. You can graduate either by:

- attending a graduation ceremony, or
- graduating “in absentia,” which means you receive your diploma/graduation or degree certificate by registered mail without attending a ceremony.

You don't have to attend the first ceremony after you finish your degree. If you want, you can defer (postpone) your graduation ceremony until the next ceremony for graduates of your course.

Note that you cannot graduate if you owe your institution money. Make sure you pay any outstanding debts (e.g. library fines, unpaid course fees).

Important documents

Diploma in the US and degree certificate in the UK and Australia

Your diploma/degree certificate is the official certificate you receive when you graduate. It contains:

- your full name;
- the name of the degree you completed;
- the date when you graduated;
- the official University Seal and coat of arms;

- the signatures of the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor (for universities: smaller institutions may have the Director's signature).

Let your institution know if there are any mistakes on your diploma/degree certificate. They should be able to give you a corrected one. If your name has been printed wrongly or misspelled, you may be asked for identification to prove that the name you want printed is your legal name. If your diploma/degree certificate is lost or damaged, you can pay for a replacement. You may be asked to let people know how to say your name if you're worried about how it might be pronounced during the graduation ceremony.

Academic transcript

Your academic transcript is the official record of your studies. It contains:

- your full name and student ID number;
- the date when you completed your studies;
- the date when you graduated;
- the degree you completed;
- a list of the subjects you studied with the grades or marks you received;
- any awards or scholarships you won.

Your institution will send you one copy of your academic transcript when you complete your degree. You can pay for more copies if you wish. Ordering a few extra copies is a good idea for future jobs or graduate school.

Certified copies of important documents

When you apply for jobs, you may need to show employers your diploma/degree certificate and/or academic transcript. They may request a "certified copy." This is a photocopy or scan that has been signed by someone who has seen

the original document. The person signing usually needs to be someone in a respected profession (a doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, justice of the peace, etc.). In many situations, however, you'll have to have it certified by a notary public. Check online to find out which professionals can certify documents in the country where you're studying.

Graduation ceremony

Many international students stay in their host country after their course to attend a graduation ceremony. This is a formal event where graduates are called forward one at a time, congratulated, and given their diploma/degree certificate by a senior member of college/university staff.

Guests

Do any of your family members want to come to the graduation ceremony? Check how many guests each student is allowed to have before they book their flights. Often there's a limit of two guests per student. If you'd like to have extra guests, contact your institution's graduations office. They may be able to arrange more tickets.

- **Accommodation:** Your institution will probably give you a list of hotels near the ceremony venue for your guests. If these are full or unsuitable, contact your local tourism office to find an alternative.
- **Transportation:** Make sure your guests know how to get to the graduation venue. Check timetables if they plan to catch public transportation, book cabs/taxis a few hours in advance, make sure there's plenty of parking near the venue if they plan to drive.
- **Meals and entertainment:** Your guests will probably be staying for a few days. Play tour guide! Talk to them about what they might like to do, see, and eat, and come up with some rough plans.

What to wear

Regalia (Academic dress or robes)

Your institution will tell you what regalia you need to wear at your graduation ceremony. They'll also tell you where to rent your regalia. Most institutions rent out regalia on campus, where your regalia can be picked up on the day and taken back the next day. In North America, you can buy your cap and gown or rent it from your college/university bookstore or other places online.

Most graduates (also called “graduands” on the day of the ceremony in the UK) wear an academic gown and some kind of headwear. The headwear will be different depending on which degree you've completed. In the US, a “hood” is worn on the back of the gown if you're graduating from a masters or doctoral program. These hoods, along with the tassel on the mortarboard, will have different colors depending on your major. In the UK, a mortarboard is usually worn by undergraduates. A bonnet is usually worn by graduate (or postgraduate in the UK) students.

Under your regalia

Your graduation ceremony is a formal occasion where people will take photos of you. Wear something reasonably formal and modest: something you might wear to a work function during the daytime. This could be a suit, a shirt with a skirt or pants/trousers, or a reasonably conservative dress.

- Make sure your shoes are comfortable. You may be standing for some time, and walking around afterward having photos taken.
- Don't wear denim, sneakers/trainers, T-shirts, or other very casual clothing.
- Don't wear anything too revealing or glittery. Save evening wear for the party afterward.

Graduation photos and souvenirs

Most institutions will have professional photographers at the graduation venue. You and your guests can line up after the ceremony to have photos taken. If you like these photos, you can order them right away. Sometimes you have to preorder them. These photos will usually be high quality but expensive.

Your institution may also sell gifts and souvenirs at the venue. These may include flowers, items with the college/university crest on them (mugs, clothing, pens, etc.), teddy bears wearing academic gowns, and so on.

In the US, you might have a chance to have your photo taken with the school's mascot.

Saying goodbye

Your graduation ceremony may be the last time you and the friends you made on your course are together. Make sure you exchange contact details and say your goodbyes. You may have made friends with people from all over the world, in which case, you may be able to visit them in the future. In your last few weeks together, you might like to:

- hold a farewell party;
- go to your favorite places together and take photos of each other;
- organize to see each other again.