



To Q or Not To Q?

(or to switch to pass/fail or risk the lower grade)

No admissions committee for any health professional school likes to see “Q drops” on a transcript. This is an indication that something became too much for you to handle and that you chose to drop the course rather than see it through. There are times when the Q-drop is the best course of action, however, keep reading to see how your choice may affect your competitiveness for professional school.

More of a problem if:

1. **Q-dropping is a pattern on your transcript.** Two Q-drops can signal a possible pattern; three Q-drops create a definite pattern.
2. **It occurs in a context of inconsistent grades.** To be competitive for professional school, you should be making A’s and B’s with more A’s than B’s. If you have semesters which include B’s and C’s – even one or two C’s, your grades are inconsistent by a professional school’s standard.
3. **It’s one of your prerequisite courses for professional school.** In this case, you might consider sticking with the class on a pass/fail basis. Then you only need to earn a D to earn credit. **Check with your academic advisor** about whether you can use the pass/fail option.
4. **It’s any science-based course,** since the bulk of professional school curriculum will be science based.

Less of a problem if:

1. **It’s the only Q-drop on your transcript at time of application to professional school.** You will want to choose wisely however, depending on the course. If you are taking a lower division or introductory course, keep in mind that upper division courses will be more challenging. You may want to hold on to that “one and only Q-drop” for later.
2. **It’s a non-science course.** While professional schools want you to do well in all classes, they are likely to be less concerned if you dropped a sociology or business class.

What if there are non-academic reasons for needing to Q-drop?

Sometimes personal or family emergencies and other special circumstances make it difficult to find time for and focus on your studies. Sometimes for new students it is difficult to make the transition to UT. If you are dealing with something that is getting in the way of your school work, it is very important that you get help.

1. Talk to your academic advisor and/or an advisor in your college student division office.
2. Check out the support services at the Counseling and Mental Health Center.

When is switching to pass/fail a better option?

This should really only be undertaken when you are reasonably certain that you can pass the class, in other words, earn at least a D. An F from a pass/fail course is just the same as an F from a letter grade course.

If you are taking a pre-requisite course that you must repeat (and you meet the above criteria of being reasonably sure you can pass), you should consider the pass/fail option. This will allow you to continue your exposure to the material for the entire semester. This will create a much stronger foundation when you repeat the course.

What if I keep the class and then I make a C or lower?

No one wants to explain a poor grade in a class, but there is actually much to be learned about being responsible for your grades (see exercise below) Talking about how you might change your strategy going forward can be not only a sign of maturity and integrity, it can also demonstrate your resilience. All of these qualities are important to future health professionals.

What did you learn from this experience?

While it can be tempting to blame others for the need to Q drop a class, you must understand that the responsibility is 100% yours. To help you identify your responsibility, ask yourself these questions.

1. Could I have met with the professor to see what I could do to improve my understanding?
2. (If my professor was difficult to understand or hard for me to follow) Did I look for other sections of the courses to sit in on so that I could learn the material in a different way?
3. Could I have identified that I needed assistance earlier in the semester? (In time to have possibly salvaged my grade)
4. Could I have managed my time better so that I had appropriate time to devote to the class?
5. Could I have checked out resources for tutoring through the Sanger Learning Center?
6. Could I have adjusted my priorities (lowering especially those which are non-academic) to allow focus on my studies?

Preparing for the possible professional school interview question

You will want to spend some time reflecting on what you could have done differently so that you did not have to drop the class (see above). If you are asked about the Q-drop, you should be able to explain where things went wrong, what you learned from the experience, and how you might choose differently in the future. Remember the Health Professions Office does mock interviews and can help you practice your response.

The Health Professions Office

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