

Major Differences between a GED and a High School Diploma

While a GED and a high school diploma both signify that a student has come to possess a set amount of knowledge, there are major differences between the two, including the amount of time one has to put into getting a GED versus a high school diploma. For example, there are varying minimum and maximum age requirements as well as a variety of other differences. Figuring out which option is right for you will take a thorough evaluation of all your needs and what you expect to get in return.

The first difference most people will notice is the difference in the age requirements. In most places, a person can take the GED at any time after they are 16 years old. The only thing is that they cannot have already graduated from high school and they cannot be currently attending a high school. Some states have other requirements that may have to be met in order to get a GED. As for being eligible for a high school diploma, there is no minimum age requirement, but you must have completed the course work stipulated by the state to the satisfaction of the degree granting school. Most states give students between one and three years after their 18th birthdays to complete their high school coursework on the taxpayer's dime. There are some states, however, that have high school completion courses for adults where the end result is a high school diploma, not a GED.

Another key difference between a GED and a high school diploma is the time it takes to complete. For a high school diploma, a student may need to invest as much as four years, although many people manage to complete high school in as little as three years. A GED is a 7 hour test on five subject areas. The GED is graded in an interesting way. Every few years or so some graduating high school students are selected to take the GED. In order to be awarded a GED, a candidate must do better on the test than 60% of the graduating high school seniors who took the test. This means that the passing grade on the GED may change over time. While no formal study is required, most recommend taking a prep course or otherwise spending a good deal of time preparing for the GED.

Lastly, your future plans may dictate whether to try for a GED or high school diploma. Many employers won't care whether or not you have a GED or a high school diploma. Similarly, most community colleges have no problems admitting people with a GED instead of a high school diploma. If you want to go to a university or a four-year college, you may want to consider getting a high school diploma, or, if that is impossible, spending a year at a community college so you can demonstrate your academic skill to a college or a university. If you simply plan on going to work, your references, resume, and the job skills you bring to the table will be much more important than whether or not you have a GED or a high school diploma.