

Psychology Grad School Guide

- Developed by Dr. Julia Soares, in consultation with Dr. Ty Stafford, Dr. Hilary DeShong and with help from Dr. Annie Ditta and Dr. Emily Stafford.
- Topics Covered (see outline/table of contents on the left):
 - Selecting a Graduate Program
 - Materials for Applying to Grad School
 - Revising/Refining Your Personal Statement
 - Interviews
 - Selecting a Program
 - What if I don't get in or I'm not ready?

Additional Resources:

- Resource Hubs:
 - [UCSD's resource page for graduate applications](#)
 - [Application Statement Feedback Program's FAQ Page](#)
- Other Guides:
 - General
 - [APA's Graduate Study in Psychology Guide](#)
 - [Dr. Jamil Zaki's Guide to Doctoral Applications](#)
 - [Dr. Laurel Gabard-Durnam's resource guide](#)
 - [Dr. Emily Balceris's Guide](#)
 - Cognitive/Neuroscience:
 - [Sokol-Hessner Lab's Guide](#)
 - Clinical:
 - [Mitch Prinstein's guide to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology](#)– also includes information and overviews of other types of mental health degree options
 - [A Student's Perspective on Applying to Graduate School in \(Clinical\) Psychology: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)

Selecting a Graduate Program

Do I need a graduate degree?

- Sometimes students assume that they will need a graduate degree to get a job, or that they should aim for the highest graduate degrees to be the most competitive or make the most money. This is not always the case—different graduate degrees offer different types of training, so a PhD is not just a master's with more steps, the degrees are geared toward different things.
- Here is a link to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which provides overviews of different jobs and the degrees they require: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>. This resource also provides information about job growth for various titles and forecasts demand for jobs in the next 10 years.
- If you have career options in mind, see if you can find people who have graduated fairly recently and are now in your preferred career path. See what kind of degree programs they completed to help inform your decision.
- Here are some common careers for psychology majors and the degrees required to reach those careers:
- **Non-Clinical/Counseling**
 - Assessment Specialist/Developer—degree depends on role: Bachelor's for psychometrics, Master's/PhD for developing psychology tests (assisting in the development of standardized testing)
 - Career Counselor—Bachelor's (assisting college students and other job-seekers on career pathways)
 - Data Scientist—Bachelor's, but may need extra experience in computer science or mathematics
 - Forensic Science Technician—Bachelor's (collect and analyze crime scene evidence)
 - Human Resources Management—none for entry level, but bachelor's often required by employers
 - Industrial/Organizational Psychologist—Master's or PhD, depending on position, but many get to management positions with a master's
 - Instructional Designer—Master's (works with instructors or organizations to optimize teaching & learning)
 - Legal Psychologist—Master's (works with lawyers to assist in jury selection, evaluate witnesses, etc.)
 - Marketing/Advertising Management—none, but a bachelor's can help
 - Professor—PhD (except for community colleges, which can allow master's degree holders to teach)
 - Sports Psychologist—Master's (often go on to doctoral degrees)
 - Statistician—Bachelor's, but may need to have taken a certain number of statistics courses
 - User Experience Researcher—depends, you can do this job with a bachelor's, but you will be more likely working in a leadership role/overseeing a research team

with a more advanced degree (works with users to improve their experience of using products like apps, websites, games, etc.)

- **Clinical and Counseling Careers (developed by Dr. Emily Stafford):**

Title	Accrediting Body	Licensure?	Degree
Psychologist (School)	APA	Licensed Psychologist	PhD
School Counselor	CACREP	Can get LPC	Master's
Clinical Mental Health Counselor	CACREP	LPC	Master's
Couple/Marriage & Family Counselor	CACREP	LPC	Master's
Student Affairs/College Counselor	CACREP	Can get LPC	Master's
Addiction Counselor	CACREP	Can get LPC	Master's (in most states)
Rehabilitation Counselor	CACREP	Can get LPC, Must have CRC Certificate	Master's
Social Worker	CSWE	LCSW	Master's
Psychologist (Counseling)	APA	Licensed Psychologist	PhD
Psychologist (Clinical)	APA	Licensed Psychologist	PhD
Psychiatrist	Medical Board	Licensed Physician Board Certified in Psychiatry	MD
Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse	ACEN	Nurse's license	Master's
Creative/Expressive Therapist	AATA (does not accredit)	Not only independently licensed, only certified	Master's
Human Service Practitioner (e.g., case manager, CPS)	Varies	May be certified	Associate's or Bachelor's
Psychometrist/Clinician	None	Works under a licensed psychologist	Bachelor's
Psychiatric Technician	AAPT	Certificate	None, but BA or AA helps

Choosing a Program Topic

- **Applied Behavior Analysis**
 - Focus on using principles of behaviorism, including operant conditioning, to change behavior, often as treatment.
- **Clinical Psychology**

- Focus on studying and/or providing mental health care, including with clients experiencing psychopathology, or mental disorders.
- **Cognitive Psychology**
 - Focus on studying mental processes like perception, attention, memory, problem-solving, decision-making, and language.
- **Community Psychology**
 - Focus on studying communities, which can include the political, economic, ecological, and sociocultural contexts. Often involves collaborating with a community to do research and inform community actions.
- **Counseling Psychology**
 - Focus on working with clients to address social, emotional, and physical health concerns and improving client well-being, usually in response to everyday stressors.
- **Couple and Family Psychology (also called Marriage and Family)**
 - Focuses on studying and counseling clients belonging to couples or families on issues related to the function of the family or couple. May involve working with children and adults.
- **Developmental Psychology**
 - Focus on examining how people change across the lifespan.
- **Educational Psychology**
 - Focus on studying how people learn and use knowledge, including using psychological methods to improve learning in educational environments.
- **Environmental/Conservation/Climate Psychology**
 - Focus on understanding how humans interact with the environment, including how the physical environment can influence psychological processes.
- **Experimental Psychology**
 - Focus on using the scientific method, specifically experiments, to collect data that informs our understanding of psychology. Programs often include areas of study like sensation, perception memory, cognition, attention, and emotion.
- **Forensic Psychology**
 - Focus on applying knowledge about psychology to the legal system. Practice most often involves psychological assessment of people involved in the legal system.
- **Health Psychology**
 - Focuses on examining how health, wellness, and illness can be influenced by social, psychological, and biological factors.
- **Human Factors/Engineering Psychology**
 - Focuses on using psychology and psychological research to improve equipment on workplaces to work well with human abilities and behavior.
- **Industrial/Organizational Psychology**
 - Focuses on psychology in the workplace and other organizations, including understanding how organizations, and the groups and individuals that make them up, work effectively and solve problems.
- **Neuroscience**
 - Focus on studying the brain and nervous system.

- *Cognitive neuroscience* focuses on understanding the neural processes associated with cognitive processes.
- **Psychiatry**
 - Medical profession (requires medical degree) which specializes in mental health, often through diagnosis and treatment using medication.
- **School Psychology**
 - Work in schools with students to provide both educational and psychological services.
- **Social Psychology**
 - Studies social interactions, including how social interactions affect the individual.
- **Social Work**
 - Focus on working with clients to address behavioral, social, health, and economic problems.
- **Sports and Performance Psychology**
 - Use and develop psychological principles to optimize and support athletic performance and participation.

Types of Programs

- **Certificate/License Programs**
 - *Overview:* Certain careers or practices may require the completion of certificate programs which will train students on specific skills needed for a job or practice. Examples of certificate programs include programs aimed at training students to administer certain types of therapies (e.g., Applied Behavior Analysis) and teaching certifications to teach in K-12 schools.
 - *Other Requirements:* Certificate programs may include a requirement for trainees to complete a certain number of hours of training practice.
 - *Costs:* Certificate programs typically require trainees to fund themselves throughout the program and pay tuition or other fees. Many programs include online components or are conducted wholly online.
 - *Timeline:* Many certificate/license programs are designed to be completed in one year or less. Timelines may vary.
- **Master's Programs**
 - *Overview:* Master's programs usually focus on training applicants for a career, including by training students on specialized skills. Some master's programs also aim to give students additional experience to improve their readiness for doctoral work.
 - *Other requirements:* Certain master's programs may require students to complete a certain number of supervised training hours, particularly degrees focused on counseling or therapy.
 - *Costs:* Master's students typically pay tuition and fund themselves, but some master's programs provide opportunities for student fellowships or scholarships which help students to cover tuition and even living expenses.

- *Timeline:* Master's programs typically take 1-2 years to complete. Some Bachelor's programs offer the option to complete a Bachelor's and Master's degree within the same program, and these are typically 5-year programs.
- **PsyD Programs**
 - *Overview:* PsyDs are doctoral degrees which focus on clinical practice. Though PsyD programs may include some research requirements, these requirements are much less extensive than those of PhD programs. Instead, PsyDs focus more on practice.
 - *Other requirements:* PsyDs include supervised clinic time as well as requirements to complete a one-year APA-accredited clinical internship.
 - *Costs:* PsyD students typically pay tuition and fund themselves.
 - *Timeline:* PsyD programs can usually be completed in 4-5 years.
- **PhD Programs**
 - *Overview:* PhDs are doctoral research degrees which usually require students to complete classes as well as develop research projects. The final research project a PhD student completes in their program is called a dissertation, which requires the student to take the lead in developing, executing, and writing a substantial research project. Other research requirements prior to the dissertation like a first/second-year, or master's project are also common. PhD students also complete coursework as part of their degree program, although this coursework is usually loaded toward the first few years of the program, with more senior doctoral students taking fewer classes.
 - Most PhD programs require a student to work closely with a particular academic advisor who is largely responsible for admitting the student into the program and helping the student develop their research projects. Most PhD programs include a *non-terminal* master's degree. That is, many programs admit students who do not already have master's degrees and students complete a master's degree as part of the program requirements.
 - *Other requirements:* Clinical PhDs typically include supervised clinic time as well as requirements to complete a one-year APA-accredited clinical internship.
 - *Costs:* PhD students typically receive department funding to cover tuition and living expenses. Funding may be contingent on the student completing particular research activities (e.g., research assistantships) or engaging in teaching activities (e.g., teaching assistantships, instructorships).
 - *Timeline:* PhDs (including a non-terminal master's degree) often take at least 5 years to complete, and some take several additional years to complete. Consult with program faculty and students about how long it typically takes students to complete their doctoral degrees.

Finding Programs

- **Open Houses**
 - Some universities offer Open Houses (in person and, recently, virtual open houses have become more common) to advertise the programs to prospective applicants.
 - Open houses can be useful for building connections with prospective advisors and learning about program requirements. In building connections, you can also lay

the groundwork for requesting fee waivers for application fees, if you have the financial need to request them.

- **Finding Prospective Advisors**

- Most doctoral programs and some master's programs require a student to name a prospective advisor. This is particularly important for PhD programs, where the student will work closely with an advisor to conduct research throughout the program. Finding a list of good prospective advisors can help you assemble your list of prospective programs.
- You will want to find a prospective advisor who shares your research interests, as you will be collaborating on research projects. Search the recent (last 5-10 years) published literature in your area of interest. Look for research articles that interest you and look at the author list. The advisor for the lab may not be the first author, they often take the last author position on a paper.
- Some prospective advisors or programs looking for students will post listings on the Psychology Grad School Wiki here: <http://psychgradsearch.wikidot.com/> Be aware that not everyone who is looking for students posts here, though, so if someone seems like a good fit, it's definitely worth reaching out to them! Many department websites also provide information on whether a prospective advisor is taking students for this cycle.
- Sample cold email:

Dear Professor [last name],

My name is [your name], I am a graduating senior at Mississippi State University, and I am applying to graduate programs in [area]. [If you have research experience, you could also write a sentence or two about what you're working on and with whom]. I am interested in studying [your research interests]. As such, I am particularly interested in your work on [SPECIFIC TOPICS—check out some recent publications from the lab and make it clear how they're related to your interests]. Will you be reviewing applications for doctoral students for this upcoming application cycle?

Thanks!

[email signature]

- Note about cold emails—some faculty will not respond. Don't take it personally, faculty receive a lot of emails and sometimes lose track. Sometimes faculty who are not currently taking students might also have recommendations for other professors you might have shared interests with, so that can be helpful as well.
- Some faculty might also offer to answer your questions, so take advantage of the opportunity if you have questions about the program. You can always ask about what work is currently going on in the lab, since that work won't be published just yet.

- Show that you actually know something about the prospective advisor and their research and tailor anything you send their way. Don't copy-paste interests from their website or titles of their papers. You should not be sending out CVs that say you are interested in cognitive, social, developmental and clinical psychology.

Programs

Below are lists of some programs based on topic. Please note that these lists are not exhaustive, and there may be more programs out there for you to find.

- **Applied Behavioral Analysis**

University	Degrees Offered
Pepperdine	MS
Northcentral University	MS
Boston College	PhD
Francis Marion university	MS
University of Massachusetts Lowell	MS
Jacksonville State University	MS
California State	MS
University of Florida	MS
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth	MA
William James College	MA
Minnesota State University	MA
University of North Carolina Wilmington	MA/PhD
University of Manitoba	PhD
University of Saskatchewan	MA/PhD

- **Behavioral Psychology**

University	Degrees Offered
Utah State University	PhD
University of Massachusetts Lowell	PhD
University of California Los Angeles	PhD
San Diego State	MA
University of Florida	PhD
Florida State University	MS
Washington University in St Louis	PhD
University of North Carolina Wilmington	MA
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	PhD
university of Nebraska-Lincoln	PhD
University of New Mexico	PhD
University of Texas at Austin	PhD

Mississippi State University	EdS
Wilfrid Laurier University	MS

- **Child & Adolescent Psychology**

University	Program Type
Yeshiva University	PsyD
University MBC	PhD
University of Alabama at Birmingham	PhD
DePaul University	PhD
Tufts University	MA/PhD
University of Minnesota	PhD
Oklahoma State	PhD
Texas Christian University	MS
Northcentral University	MS
Francis Marion University	School Psych SSP
Our Lady of the Lake University	MS School Psych Concentration
University of Denver	PhD
Bowling Green State University	PhD
Sam Houston State	SSp
University of Washington	PhD
University of Victoria	PhD

- **Clinical Psychology**

- Use this tool (<https://apps.apa.org/accredsearch/>) to find APA accredited clinical, counseling, and school psychology PhD and PsyD programs.

Clinical Master's Programs

University	Program Type
Eastern Michigan University	MS
Cal State University	MA
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs	MA
Brenau University	MS
University of Northern Iowa	MA
Roosevelt University	MA
Illinois State University	MS
Northwestern University	MA
Ball State	MA
Washburn University	MA
Murray State University	MS
Morehead State University	MS
Loyola University Maryland	MS

Towson University	MA
University of Michigan Dearborn	MS
Missouri State University	MS
Rowan University	MA
Cleveland State University	MA
University of Tulsa	MA
Pacific University	MA
University of South Carolina Aiken	MS
University of Houston	MA
West Texas A&M University	MA
Saint Michael's College	MA
Seattle University	MA
University of Alaska Anchorage	MS
Pepperdine University	MA
Barry University	MS
Augusta University	MS
Western Illinois University	MS
Carlow University	MA
Francis Marion University	MS
Texas A&M University-Commerce	MS
Midwestern State University	MA
University of Denver	MA
University of Central Florida	MA
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth	MA
Bridgewater State University	MA
Michigan School of Psychology	MA
University of Minnesota Duluth	MA
Minnesota State University	MA
SUNY Brockport	MA
Middle Tennessee State University	MA
Lamar University	MS
University of Texas Permian Basin	MA
University of Vermont	MA
Ryerson University	MA
University of Waterloo	MA
University of Regina	MS
Queen's University	MS

- **Cognitive**

List here with cognitive science programs:

<https://cognitivesciencesociety.org/programs-in-cognitive-sciences/>

University	Cognitive program name
Arizona State University Campus Immersion	Cognitive Science
Auburn University	Psychological Sciences
Binghamton University	Cognitive Psychology
Colorado State University-Fort Collins	Cognitive Psychology (Cognitive Psychology + Behavioral Neuroscience)
CUNY Graduate School and University Center	Behavioral And Cognitive Neuroscience - Part Of The CUNY Neuroscience Collaborative
CUNY Graduate School and University Center	Cognitive & Comparative
Florida International University	Cognitive Neuroscience
Florida State University	Cognition And Cognitive Neuroscience
George Mason University	Cognitive And Behavioral Neuroscience
Georgia Institute of Technology-Main Campus	Cognition & Brain Science + Neuroscience
Georgia State University	Cognitive Sciences
Indiana University-Bloomington	Cognitive Science, Dept Psych & Brain Sci
Iowa State University	Cognitive Psychology
Kansas State University	Cognitive/Human Factors
Kent State University at Kent	Cognitive/Cognitive Development
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	Cognitive And Brain Sciences
Michigan State University	Cognitive Science
Michigan State University	Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience
Mississippi State University	Cognitive Science
North Carolina State University at Raleigh	Human Factors And Applied Cognition
North Dakota State University-Main Campus	Visual & Cognitive Neuroscience?
Ohio State University-Main Campus	Cognitive Psychology
Ohio University-Main Campus	Cognitive Psychology
Oklahoma State University-Main Campus	Cognitive Psychology
Oregon State University	Applied Cognition
Purdue University-Main Campus	Cognitive Psychology
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	Cognitive Psychology
Stony Brook University	Cognitive Science
SUNY at Albany	Cognitive Psychology + Behavioral Neuroscience
Temple University	Cognition And Neuroscience

Texas A & M University-College Station	Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience
Texas Tech University	Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience
The Pennsylvania State University	Cognitive
The University of Alabama	Cognitive And Brain Sciences
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	Cognitive And Developmental Science
The University of Texas at Arlington	Experimental
The University of Texas at Austin	Cognition, Brain, & Behavior
The University of Texas at Dallas	Cognition And Neuroscience
The University of Texas at El Paso	Bilingualism, Language And Cognition
The University of Texas at San Antonio	Psychology
University at Buffalo	Cognitive Psychology Area
University of Arizona	Cognitive Science Program
University of Arkansas	Experimental - Cognitive Psych
University of California-Berkeley	Cognition
University of California-Davis	Developmental Psychology & Perception, Cognition And Cognitive Neuroscience
University of California-Irvine	Dept Of Cognitive Sciences
University of California-Los Angeles	Several Programs (Behavioral Neuro, Cog Neuro, Cognitive Psych, Computational Cog, Learning & Behavior)
University of California-Riverside	Behavioral Neuroscience + Cognition And Cognitive Neuroscience - Developmental
University of California-San Diego	Cognitive Psychology (Also A Cog Neuro Program)
University of California-Santa Barbara	Cognition, Perception, And Cognitive Neuroscience + Neuroscience And Behavior
University of California-Santa Cruz	Cognitive Psychology
University of Central Florida	Human Factors And Cognitive Psychology
University of Cincinnati-Main Campus	Cognition, Action, & Perception (Cap)
University of Colorado Boulder	Institute Of Cognitive Science
University of Connecticut	Language And Cognition; Perception Action And Cognition;
University of Delaware	Cognitive Psychology
University of Florida	Behavioral And Cognitive Neuroscience
University of Georgia	Behavioral & Brain Science
University of Hawaii at Manoa	Cognition, Neuroscience, And Social

University of Houston	Developmental, Cognitive, & Cognitive Neuroscience
University of Illinois Chicago	Brain And Cognitive Sciences
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Cognitive Psychology (Also A Cog Neuro Program)
University of Iowa	Psychological & Brain Sciences
University of Kansas	Cognitive And Brain Sciences
University of Kentucky	Cognitive Neuroscience
University of Louisville	Experimental - Cognitive
University of Maine	Cognitive And Biological Psychology
University of Maryland-College Park	Cognitive And Neural Systems
University of Massachusetts-Amherst	Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience
University of Memphis	Experimental - Cognitive
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	Cognition And Cog Neuro
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	Cognitive And Brain Sciences
University of Missouri-Columbia	Cognition & Neuroscience
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Social And Cognitive Psychology
University of Nevada-Las Vegas	Psychological And Brain Sciences
University of Nevada-Reno	Cognitive & Brain Sciences
University of New Hampshire-Main Campus	Brain, Behavior, Cognition
University of New Mexico-Main Campus	Cognition, Brain, & Behavior
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Cognitive Psychology
University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus	Cognitive Psychology
University of Oregon	Cognitive Neuroscience
University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus	Cognitive Psychology
University of South Carolina-Columbia	Cognitive & Neural Sciences
University of South Florida	Cognition, Neuroscience, And Social Psychology
University of Utah	Cognition And Neural Science
University of Virginia-Main Campus	Cognitive Psychology
University of Washington-Seattle Campus	Cognition & Perception
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Cognition And Cog Neuro
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Psychology

Utah State University	Brain And Cognition
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Psychology/Cognitive Neuroscience & Biopsychology
Washington State University	Cognitive Psychology

• **Developmental Programs**

Name	Program Type
UMBC	PhD
University of Alabama at Birmingham	PhD
Arizona State	PhD/ Master of counseling
University of California Riverside	PhD
Claremont Graduate University	PhD/MA
Catholic University of America	PhD
Florida International University	PhD
Illinois State University	MA
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	PhD
Northern Illinois University	PhD
Indiana University	PhD
Tufts University	MA/PhD
Clark University	PhD
William James College	ABA MA
University of Minnesota	MA
Cornell University	PhD/MA
Fordham	Mental Health Counseling
New York University	PhD/MA
Ohio State University	PhD
Miami University	PhD
Carnegie Mellon University	PhD
University of Southern California	PhD
Northwestern University	PhD
University of Maryland College Park	PhD
North Dakota State University	PhD
University of Nebraska Omaha	MA
The New School	MA
University of Arizona	PhD
University of Denver	PhD
University of Connecticut	PhD
Yale University	PhD
Florida Atlantic university	PhD/MA

University of Florida	PhD
Florida State University	PhD
University of Hawaii	PhD
University of Iowa	PhD
Loyola University	PhD
University of Notre Dame	PhD
University of Louisville	PhD
Suffolk University	PhD
University of Massachusetts	ABA MA
Johns Hopkins University	PhD
University of Michigan	PhD
Washington University	PhD
University of Missouri	PhD
University of North Carolina	PhD
University of New Mexico	PhD
Bowling Green State University	PhD
Akron	PhD
University of Oregon	PhD/MA or MS
Portland State University	PhD
Pennsylvania State University	PhD
University of Pittsburgh	PHD
University of Texas at Austin	PhD
University of Texas at Dallas	PhD/MS
Utah University	PhD
University of Virginia	PhD
Virginia Tech	PhD
University of Washington	PhD
University of Vermont	PhD
University of Chicago	PhD
University of British Columbia	PhD
University of Victoria	PhD
University of Manitoba	PhD
University of Waterloo	MAS
Wilfrid Laurier University	PhD/MA
Queens University	PhD/MS

● **Forensic**

Name	Program Type
Alliant International University	Online PhD/PsyD
Chicago School of Professional Psychology	PsyD
Drexel University	PhD

Northcentral University	MS
Carlow University	MA
Marymount University	MA
University of Denver	MA
University of New Haven	MA
The George Washington University	MA
University of North Dakota	MS/MA
Montclair State	PhD
Sam Houston State University	PhD
John Jay College of Criminal Justice	MA
Carleton University	PhD/MA

- **Health Psychology**

Name	Program
Yeshiva University	PhD
University Of Alabama at Birmingham	PhD
Cal State University	MA
University Of Colorado at Denver	PhD
University Of Michigan	MS
University Of North Carolina	PhD
Rowan University	PhD
Drexel University	PhD
University Of South Carolina	PhD
Uniformed Services University of The Health Sciences	PhD
University Of Arizona	PhD
University Of Florida	PhD
East Carolina University	PhD
Syracuse University	PhD
University Of Pittsburgh	PhD
Middle Tennessee State	MA
Virginia Tech	PhD
University Of Miami	PhD

- **Human Factors Psychology**

- List of programs here: <https://www.hfes.org/Resources/Graduate-Programs-Directory>

- **School Psychology**

- List of programs accredited by the National Association of School Psychologists by state here:
<https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/graduate-program-approval-and-accreditation/program-approval/approved-programs>

- **Social Psychology & Personality Psychology**

- A list of programs in personality and/or social psychology are listed here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Cue4Lir5CAuF0Y44JkTNP6gQcIsOtxYZ/e dit#gid=340794195>
- Social psychology graduate programs are also provided in map form here: <https://www.socialpsychology.org/maps/gradprograms>

- **Sports Psychology**

Name	Program Type
Medaille College	MA
Northcentral University	MS
University of Denver	MA

Materials Required for Applying to Graduate School

- Before you get started, it may be useful to look at an existing application packet from successful applicants to graduate school. You can ask graduate TAs, mentors, and instructors if they are willing to share their materials. Be careful not to get fixated on emulating their examples, though! Your application will be different than anyone else's and it should be!
- [Here](#) is a list of FAQs with answers about materials.
- Sample materials:
 - [Here](#) are materials submitted by successful applicants to Cognitive & Social doctoral programs at NYU.
 - Clinical Sample Statements: [\[Doctoral\]](#) [\[Doctoral\]](#) [\[Doctoral and Master's\]](#)

CV or Resume

- Mississippi State's Career Center offers feedback on CVs and resumes by appointment or during drop-in hours. More information is [linked here](#).
- You can schedule an appointment with the career center using [this link](#).
- **Resume**
 - Mississippi State's Career Center provides [sample resumes linked here](#).
 - A resume is a summary of your relevant experience in applying for a job or other position. A resume is usually capped at 1 page, but 2 pages can be acceptable if you have been working for many years (10+) or if the job has a particularly high bar for qualification.
 - Resumes are used outside of academic settings. Most job applications (outside of academia) including internships will require a resume.
 - Resume formats can get creative to fit all of the information into a small space, but make sure your resume is readable and professional-looking above all else.
 - Your resume should include:
 - Contact information

- Education information (although you can exclude dates if you are concerned about age-related discrimination)
 - Related positions/jobs and short descriptions of duties
 - Technical or other skills (e.g., language proficiencies)
- CV
 - Mississippi State's Career Center provides a [sample CV linked here](#).
 - A CV is the academic version of a resume. CVs are not limited in terms of length, so they are expected to be comprehensive.
 - A CV is used in academic settings and for academic positions, including many graduate applications. A CV may also be required for applying to fellowships, grants, scholarships, post-baccs, lab manager positions, research assistantships, and even some research-focused industry positions.
 - CV formats are usually pretty plain and straightforward. Make sure everything is easy to read and professional looking.
 - Here is some information that's commonly included in a CV:
 - Always Include (if you have these)
 - Contact information (especially an email address you check often)
 - Education information
 - Research positions
 - Service positions/experience
 - Honors & awards
 - Publications
 - Conference presentations
 - Teaching experience
 - Mentorship experience
 - Memberships in professional societies
 - Optional
 - Technical skills/certifications
 - Selected coursework
 - Professional references
 - If they're relevant
 - Research interests
 - Teaching interests (for grad applications, only for teaching-focused programs)
 - Clinical Experiences
 - CVs are ordered based on how relevant information is to the position being applied for. For PhD programs, research assistantships, research fellowships, or other research funding, include research-related information first on your CV. For TAs, tutoring positions, or other teaching-related positions, put teaching related information first.

Letters of Recommendation

- Graduate programs usually require 3-4 letters of recommendation to be submitted along with your application.
- Graduate applications will have a box you can check to waive your right to later read the letters of recommendation that were submitted on your behalf. You are **strongly encouraged** to check this box—it shows confidence in your letter writers, and it assures graduate committee members that they are getting the most honest letter out of your letter writer. Some letter writers may not even agree to write you a letter if this box is not checked, so be sure to let your writer know if you are not planning on checking this box.
- [Here](#) is an article from Psi Chi about integrating letters of recommendation into your application.
- **Setting Up for Success**
 - Ideally, you will have made connections across your college career with faculty members who can write you strong letters of recommendation. To build these relationships, it's a good idea to act as a research assistant in one or more research labs, participate actively in your classes and chat with faculty members about your goals in office hours, and seek out service opportunities in which you will work with faculty members.
 - What is a “strong” letter? A strong letter will be one which goes beyond your transcript and can speak to your ability to succeed in a graduate program. “Adequate” letters won't generally be helpful and may hurt your application.
- **Whom to Ask**
 - For graduate applications, professors are the best people to ask to write you a letter of recommendation. Most committees will be made up of professors, so the opinions of other faculty are prioritized because they are coming from professional colleagues.
 - You *can* ask a graduate student who has served as your instructor or TA but try to give preference to faculty members. If you are part of a research lab and have worked closely with a graduate student, you can also ask them to co-write a letter with the faculty advisor of the lab or course instructor.
 - For positions in which you have relevant professional experience (e.g., internships in clinics or medical settings), you may also ask supervisors for those experiences.
 - If you are part of a research lab or multiple labs, you should ask the faculty advisor(s) of the lab for a letter. You can also ask professors who have served as your instructor but be thoughtful about who you ask. You will want to ask recommenders to write letters only if they know you well enough to give some kind of insight into your academic and other skills that will be relevant to your success as a graduate student.
- **Whom Not to Ask**
 - *Hesitation*: If a potential letter-writer expresses any hesitation about writing you a letter, it's best to try to find someone else.
 - *They don't really know you*: It is best to make connections with professors before asking for a letter of recommendation. It is generally not enough just to take a class and get a good grade without building more of a connection with the

instructor. If you have to offer to get to know the recommender more so that they can write the letter, it's probably too late to be requesting a letter of rec.

- **How to Request a Letter of Recommendation**

- Inform your letter writers that you are planning to apply to graduate school about 1-3 months from your earliest deadline. You should give them **at least** 2 weeks, but the earlier the better.
- That said, **do not request letters until you have a list** (even if you may add to that list along the way) **of graduate programs you plan to apply to**. Faculty get many requests to write letters of rec, so they will not write a letter “for the future” if you do not have a concrete plan to apply to graduate school in the immediate future.
- Once a recommender has agreed to write a letter for you, you should provide them with your CV or resume, unofficial transcript, drafts of your application materials, and a spreadsheet with the names/types of programs you are applying to and the deadline for each program.
- You can just request a letter over email, there is no need to set up a meeting just to ask for a letter of recommendation in person.
- Here is a sample email requesting a letter of recommendation:

Dear [prospective recommender—if this is a faculty, use Dr. or Professor, **not** Mrs./Ms./Mr.],

I am writing to ask if you can write a strong letter of recommendation on my behalf as I prepare to apply to graduate school. This fall, I am applying to [graduate programs in a particular topic]. Ultimately, I hope to use this degree to pursue a career in [job(s) that connect well to the degree program(s) being applied to].

[If it has been a year or more since you have contacted this person, you might want to give a reminder of how they know you.]

My earliest deadline will be [date]. If you are willing to write a letter, I will send you drafts of my materials, an updated [CV/resume], and a list of schools I will be applying to with deadlines listed. If you do not have time to write a letter of recommendation or have any reservations about writing me a strong letter, please let me know and I can ask someone else. I am also happy to answer any questions or provide additional materials.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
[email signature]

- Ultimately, you want to give your letter writer an impression of why you are applying to graduate school so that it's clear this is a well-considered step that will serve your goals, so feel free to include additional relevant information.
- **Organizing Letters and Reminding Recommenders**

- One effective way to organize letter requests is in a shared spreadsheet on Google Docs or OneDrive. If you include boxes for recommenders to check when they submit, this can help everyone keep track.
- You can remind recommenders about an upcoming deadline a few days to a week in advance if you have not heard from them lately, just try not to leave these reminders until hours before an application is due.

The GRE

- Many programs have changed their requirements around the GRE in the past few years. Check the policy of each program you are applying to and see which programs require the GRE.
 - Some programs may not accept GRE scores and others may consider them optional. Some programs with optional GRE scores may advise applicants with lower GPAs to submit their GRE scores if the scores can help their application.
 - Programs that require the GRE might have guidance on scores that are acceptable to the program.
- This goes doubly for the Psychology GRE Subject Test. Many programs do not require this test, so be sure you are applying to at least one program that requires it before you decide to take it.
 - Most will advise that an introductory psychology textbook will prepare you from the subject test. You can access a free textbook provided by OpenStax using [this link](#).
- The GRE costs \$220 to take and \$27 each to send a score to a graduate program. There are options for students with financial need to reduce these costs. More information is available through [this link](#).
- Be sure to budget enough time so that you can take the GRE more than once if you decide that you need to. Start studying for the GRE the summer before you apply to graduate school or sooner.
- **Preparation**
 - Try to take as many GRE practice tests as you can budget the time for. You can access two free practice tests through ETS (who writes and administers the GRE) online [linked here](#).
 - Try to do at least a couple of tests to time. The GRE takes just under 4 hours to complete, although ETS recently announced an abbreviated version of the test which will take less than 2 hours.
 - Use the results of practice tests to determine areas of focus for improvement.
 - Retrieval practice is a particularly effective study strategy. You can use this method by using flashcards and testing yourself with sample questions.
 - GRE prep books and courses can be affordable, depending on where you look. You may be able to find used books online for under \$20.

Transcripts

- Graduate programs will require a transcript.
- Many programs only ask for an “unofficial” transcript, which you can obtain by looking up your transcript and printing it as a PDF. Be careful and do not edit these transcripts in any way. If you have not sent an official transcript to a program and they offer an acceptance, that acceptance is conditional on your sending an official transcript that matches the unofficial one.
- Mississippi State’s transcript fees are \$9.25 per delivery.
- If you are a transfer student, do not forget you will need to get your transcript from all institutions from which you took college-level classes.
 - Timing can be variable for transcripts to be sent and arrive, so when you know you need an official transcript, do not wait until the last minute to send it. Institutions that use electronic methods may be instantaneous, while snail mail can take weeks.
 - Cost will vary per institution as well.

English Proficiency Test Scores (for international applications)

- Some programs will require international applicants to submit English language proficiency tests, most often the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).
- Different TOEFL exams cost different amounts and the cost may vary based on local currency, but the range is \$120-\$225 USD.

Writing Sample

- Some graduate programs may ask for a writing sample, although this is not common. Some programs may also allow you the option without requiring a writing sample.
- If you have written a literature review, research proposal, or honors thesis, these are prime options for writing samples.
- If you have written a research project for a class, you could also consider this for a writing sample.
- Do not submit creative writing for your writing sample, instead focus on writing you have done related to the field of psychology.

Diversity Statement/Diversity Essay/Personal History Statement

- Programs may request a personal history statement or diversity statement. Programs will usually give specific instructions about what they are looking for in these statements, so read the instructions carefully if they are given.
- These statements may be used to apply on your behalf to relevant fellowships or funding at the university, so be sure to set aside the appropriate time and effort to write your statement thoughtfully.
- For diversity statements, you may be asked to discuss your commitment to principles like diversity, equity, and inclusion. In this case, you can use community service or other

activities as evidence of your commitment. You can also discuss how you would add diversity to the department by providing a new perspective, if you think that's the case.

Fees

- Most graduate applications include paying a fee to cover processing costs to submit your application.
- Fees can range from \$50-\$170 per application, with higher costs for international applications.
- **Waivers**
 - Some graduate programs will have a limited pool of money to offer need-based fee waivers.
 - Check the program's website for information about waivers or email the program director or your prospective advisor to let them know you are seeking a fee waiver. You may need to demonstrate financial need or provide additional information.
 - Note that fee waivers are limited. If you have corresponded with a prospective faculty advisor and demonstrated your sincere interest in the program/lab prior to requesting a waiver, it may increase the likelihood that you will get a waiver.

Avoiding “Kisses of Death” for Graduate Applications

- A survey sent to psychology graduate admissions chairs asked them to name aspects of graduate applications that could damage otherwise strong applicants' chances of acceptance. Their responses were qualitatively coded, and the following themes emerged (Appleby & Appleby, 2006).
- Full citation:
Appleby, D. C., & Appleby, K. M. (2006). Kisses of death in the graduate school application process. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(1), 19-24.
- **Damaging Personal Statements**
 - Graduate admissions chairs often mentioned applicants' discussion of their personal mental health, trauma, or family personal health issues as “kisses of death”. Generally, the focus on personal mental health indicates to admissions committees that an applicant is interested in the program for treatment or intervention for their own mental health issues, rather than as a career path. It is worth noting that these data were collected before 2006, and attitudes are changing, so if you feel that your personal experience is important to discuss and directly informs your professional goals, that is ultimately your choice.
 - That being said—remember to maintain a professional tone and professional boundaries in your statements. Avoid disclosing too much personal information that you would not disclose in a professional setting. Be sure to remain professionally appropriate, including by avoiding inappropriate humor, attempts to appear clever or cute, and excessive references to religion or politics.
 - Focusing on your own altruism or desire to help people to an excessive degree was also listed as damaging. There are many career paths in which you could help people, so being specific about the degree program you are interested in is more important

- than conveying your desire to help people. Focus instead on your academic and professional strengths.
- Keep the focus on yourself, your journey, and your goals. The personal statement is not the place to brag about your letter writers or the prestige of your connections.
 - **Harmful Letters of Recommendation**
 - Avoid requesting letters of recommendation from writers who have had experiences with you that would cause them to describe you negatively. Most letter writers would not agree to write a letter for you if it would be negative, so take prospective letter writers' hesitation seriously.
 - Be sure to request appropriate references. You should not request letters of recommendation from personal connections like relatives, employees, personal friends, therapists, or clergy.
 - **Lack of Information About the Program**
 - If you seem uninformed in your decision to apply to a program, you are not likely to be accepted. You should have a clear understanding of what the focus of each program you apply to is. If you are applying to a PhD program with a prospective advisor, it should also be clear how your research interests align with theirs.
 - If you're going to say that the program is a good fit for you, you should provide some evidence as to how the program aligns with your goals.
 - **Poor Writing**
 - Be sure to extensively edit anything you submit to programs. Writing should be proofread, but also revised for structure and clarity of thought.
 - Before writing any statements, make an outline with a clear narrative flow to structure your writing. Your writing should be concise. Each paragraph should have a clear idea or point you are trying to convey.
 - The Writing Center at Mississippi State can provide writing support for graduate school application materials, including by helping you edit your work and giving feedback. You can schedule online or in-person appointments and get more information about the Writing Center and the services they provide using [this link](#).
 - **Misfired Attempts to Impress**
 - Avoid speaking ill of other programs in your attempt to praise the prospective graduate program.
 - If you're going to praise the prospective graduate program, provide evidence as to why the program is a good fit, otherwise this can come off as empty flattery.

Statement of Purpose/Letter of Intent/Personal Statement

- The statement of purpose—also sometimes called an SOP, personal statement, or letter of intent—is the document likely to receive the most scrutiny by graduate admissions committees. Be sure to budget enough time to write and revise these statements.
- The goal of these statements is to explain your plans for graduate study and how graduate study fits with your goals. You should discuss how your academic interests developed, past experiences that are relevant to the program (for research focused programs, research experiences), and skills you have gained (e.g., experience with methodologies [neuroimaging, eye tracking, etc.], technical skills [experience with technical software, coding, statistics skills], leadership skills from community service, relevant employment) that will serve you in a graduate program.

- For research-focused programs, you will also want to discuss the kind of research you are interested in doing. What research questions interest you? Make sure these research topics fit with the topic of the program (e.g., for a cognitive program, make sure the focus is related to cognitive processes) and with the research being done by one or more of the prospective advisors for the program.
 - You do not need to have had experience studying these exact research questions before. You should discuss how the skills you have gained through your coursework, research experiences, internships, etc. have prepared you to research the topics that interest you.
- You can reuse some writing in multiple statements but be sure to tailor each statement to the graduate program you are applying to. What made you choose that program in particular to apply to and how does it fit into your planned professional development path?
- Most statements of purpose are 1-2 pages long (single spaced) or 500-1,000 words. Some programs have word count requirements though and they can vary widely, so be sure to check these recommendations. If anything, a program will have a cap on word count.
- If you want to address issues like lower initial grades because you switched majors, be direct and don't focus too much on the negative. Instead, focus on how you can compensate for any admission criteria you may not meet. You can also ask letter writers to address these issues if they can speak to them.
- **Do's**
 - Be passionate about psychology. If it's a PhD application, be passionate about research in particular.
 - If you are speaking about research experiences, talk about them in terms of the research questions you were examining, not in terms of the specifics of how participants were run. For example, you might say: "I assisted in a project which tests the context account of retrieval-induced forgetting." instead of "I helped in a project in which I ran participants through a protocol that involved learning a list of words."
 - Discuss the skills you have gained through your experiences, including how they will serve your goals and help you succeed in graduate school.
 - Show your statements to others for feedback! (the next section will include a guide for you to self-review and have others review and give feedback to help you revise your statement)
- **Don'ts**
 - Mention intimate details from your own life or the lives of people close to you.
 - Focus on the negatives. The point of an SOP is not to explain shortcomings, it's to explain why you are a good fit for the program. Also avoid being excessively negative about flaws in past research, other programs, or former collaborators, peers, or colleagues.
 - Use cliches. This includes saying you want to save the world, that God let you to your path, using quotes from the Greek philosophers, or talking about movies or TV shows that influenced your development.
 - If applying to a program where you will need to be paired with an advisor, do not list off more than 2 or maybe 3 prospective mentors. An exception can be made if there

- are several people in the department with very similar research interests. Be sure it's clear how you would work with each prospective advisor if you list multiple people.
- Fall into any of the “Kisses of Death” explained above.

- **Getting Started**

- Brainstorming ideas for concepts or themes you want to emphasize, examples you might want to use, and skills or experience you want to highlight is a good place to start.
- It's a good idea to write out an outline to determine the flow of your statement before you start writing. Think about how you might transition from idea to idea.
- Use your outline to write a first draft. Don't be overly critical or picky, just try to get something on the page. With respect to your outline, try to write paragraphs that cover one idea each with a clear topic sentence setting up the idea for each paragraph.
- See the section below for information on how to revise your personal statement.
- [Here](#) is a guide from the Application Statement Feedback Program which includes a proposed structure for personal statements for PhD programs.
- [Here](#) is a guide from Psi Chi on writing a personal statement.

Revising your Personal Statement

- Once you draft your personal statement, you can start revising. It's best not to write this all at once. Taking a break from your draft and returning with fresh eyes can help you start to see areas that could be clarified or improved.
- Don't be precious about your writing on previous drafts. Don't be afraid to move sections around and fully re-write sections as needed to improve your statement. If you worry about removing something you might want to recover later, you can save multiple versions as you revise your statement or keep a document of extra writing that you have cut from versions of previous drafts.

Getting Feedback

- **Timing**

- Be mindful that it takes time to review your materials and it will take you time to revise. Be sure to give a reviewer at least 1-2 weeks to review your materials and get back to you with feedback. You can discuss an appropriate timeline based on their availability.
- You will also want to be sure to give yourself at least 1-2 weeks to revise your statement before your application deadline(s). Be mindful that the feedback you receive will go beyond checking for spelling and grammar issues. Rather, feedback may include guidance about how to restructure parts of your statement, other experiences to discuss, etc.

- **Resources**

- The [Application Statement Feedback Program](#) provides feedback and editing support for applicants to PhD programs in social, cognitive, developmental, or clinical psychology.
 - Editors are PhD students, post-doctoral researchers, and professors.

- Statement submission occurs in late October (2023 cycle—Deadline to submit is 10/26) and feedback is provided in early November.
- [Project SHORT](#) also offers mentoring, practice interviews, and statement review from mentors for students applying to PhD and Master’s programs, as well as medical school.
 - Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis.
- For writing support, you can visit Mississippi State’s Writing Center. This resource will be particularly useful if you are looking for help editing your work. You can schedule online or in-person appointments and get more information about the Writing Center and the services they provide using [this link](#).
- **Whom to Ask**
 - If you are part of a research lab, the professor leading the lab is an excellent person to ask for feedback.
 - You can also ask graduate students currently enrolled in the doctoral programs here at Mississippi State if you know them through working in a research lab. You could ask graduate TAs or instructors as well but be aware that students are often short on time so they may not be able to grant these requests.
 - You can also ask friends, family, or peers who are also applying to graduate school for feedback. People who are not in academic careers may have less domain-specific feedback to give, but they can give guidance on the clarity, organization, and quality of your writing.

Rubric

- The following rubric is designed to help you evaluate the quality of your own personal statement. You could also use this rubric with peers, friends, or family to help guide their feedback on your personal statement. This rubric is linked as a separate document [here](#) to make it easier to print and share.

Rate each of the following on a 1-4 scale. 1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Good, 4 = Excellent

Discussing Experience

- ___/4 Research/clinical experiences are discussed in a way that shows the student's knowledge of the topic, what they learned from the experience, not just what they did.
- ___/4 Student provides concrete examples of skills they have gained that prepare them for graduate school.
- ___/4 Student does not undersell prior experiences.
- ___/4 Student's research/clinical interests are clearly expressed (as appropriate).

Statement Effectiveness

- ___/4 Student's goals are clearly expressed.
- ___/4 Statement makes clear how student's goals will be served by the program.
- ___/4 Statement leaves the reader with an impression of the student that is specific to them.
- ___/4 Student seems passionate about their selected field (and research/clinical work, as appropriate), based on their statement.
- ___/4 If the student will be working with an advisor in their program, student names that advisor and makes clear their areas of shared interest, topics/research questions they might collaborate on, etc.

Writing Quality

- ___/4 Organization is clear: topics flow logically and clear transitions are made between topics.
- ___/4 Writing is free from grammar, spelling, and syntax errors
- ___/4 Writing communicates clearly.
- ___/4 Writing is concise, gets to each point without much "fluff."

Professionalism

- ___/4 Writing maintains professional/formal register while avoiding using "thesaurus words" or pompous language.
- ___/4 Statement maintains professional boundaries (e.g., avoids disclosing intimate personal information about the student or those close to them).
- ___/4 Student comes off as mature; gives the impression that the student understands what they want and how graduate school will fit into their plans/goals.

Interviews

- Most doctoral programs and some master's programs will require candidates to complete an interview. Some programs have visit days for students who have already been accepted into the program.
- Interviews and visit days are an important opportunity for you to learn more about a prospective graduate program. You may be being interviewed, but you are also interviewing the program and prospective advisors to decide which option would be the best fit for your goals and interests.

Phone Calls

- Some advisors or program directors may ask to speak with you over the phone or to do a video call before your application deadline.
- These preliminary phone calls might be used to help make admissions decisions by gauging your readiness for grad school or level of interest in a particular program.
- To prepare for such a phone call, see the section below titled "Things You Might Be Asked".

What To Learn in Advance

- Who you will be meeting with—learn which faculty you will meet with and whether you will meet with current students in the prospective graduate program.
- Once you know who you will meet with, look into the research being conducted and the roles filled by each person you are meeting with.
- For a prospective advisor, look closely into recent research conducted by their lab.
- Look up the program structure or other information available online.
- Check out the department website and see what information is available. The more you show you've done your homework, the more you will project your interest in the program and your ability to prepare.
- If traveling:
 - What costs will be covered.
 - If costs will be covered, what kind of documentation will you need for reimbursement.
 - Who should book your travel (if flying).
 - What kind of attire is recommended.
 - Information you might want to notify your hosts about in advance:
 - Disability accommodations (for spaces you will need to enter, spaces you may be staying, or planned activities)
 - Food or pet allergies (you may stay with a current graduate student during your visit)

Things You Might Be Asked

- **All Programs**
 - Why are you interested in graduate school?
 - Why this program?
 - What are your career goals?

- What kind of skills do you hope to gain in the program?
- What skills or experiences have you gained that will help you succeed in the program?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- How do you work under stress or pressure?
- What is your working style?
- How do you prefer to be supervised/mentored?
- If applicable—How will you finance your graduate education?
- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your hobbies or other interests outside of school.
- What questions do you have for me?
- **Doctoral Programs**
 - What is a project you would be interested in running during your first year?
 - Tell me about a research project you were involved with.
 - What are your research interests?
 - Tell me about a paper you read recently—what do you think were some strengths or limitations? How would you follow up on their study?
- **Advice for Answering Questions**
 - You can always take a pause before answering a question if you need to think. You don't have to dive directly into answering a question. You can also ask someone to explain a question you don't understand or elaborate on what they mean.
 - Explain research and research experience in terms of the research questions and concepts being examined, not the practical details of what you did. Show that you understand what the contribution of the research will be to broader discussions within your area of research.
 - Make sure that your answers to questions align with the program/advisor. Saying that you are interested in neuroscience research to a prospective advisor who does not do neuroscience work, for example, could indicate that your research interests will not fit theirs.

What to Ask

- Asking questions shows your interest in a program. Below are a list of questions to consider asking. You will be asked by almost everyone you meet if you have questions. For important questions, you can ask multiple people to see the range of answers that you get.
- **Program Head**
 - How long does it take most students to finish the program?
 - What are the program requirements?
 - What do graduates of the program typically go on to do?
 - For funded programs (most PhD programs):
 - How are students typically funded?

- Is summer funding available?
 - What kind of guarantees are students given about funding?
 - Are there any fees or costs not included in tuition remission?
 - How many years of funding are guaranteed?
- **Prospective Advisor**
 - What is your approach to mentoring graduate students?
 - What are some projects currently being conducted in the lab?
 - Where do you see your research line developing in the next 5 years?
 - How much control do students have over research projects?
 - What determines author order for students working with you on projects in the lab?
 - What kind of jobs do you hope to prepare students for?
 - (If faculty has graduated students)
 - What kind of jobs do students who graduate from your lab go on to take?
 - How long do students in your lab usually take to finish the program?
- **Other Faculty**
 - Questions about their research, lab, or graduate students.
 - Questions about classes they teach that you might take.
- **Current Graduate Students**
 - Does the program support your goals?
 - Why did you choose this program?
 - What kind of jobs do you feel the program is preparing you for?
 - Do you feel the program is meeting your needs?
 - What's it like living in the area?
 - How difficult is it to find housing?
 - If applicable—Is the stipend enough to live on in this area? Do you have to take loans to supplement? How are you funded (e.g., teaching assistantships, instructor positions, research assistantships)?
- **Current Graduate Students in a Prospective Advisor's Lab**
 - What's it like working with *advisor*?
 - What is *advisor*'s mentorship style?
 - What's *advisor*'s availability like?
 - How often do you meet with *advisor*?
- **For Clinical Programs, or a Clinic Supervisor**
 - Who supervises students during clinic hours?
 - When do students begin clinical work?
 - What kinds of patient populations would I work with?
 - How many faculty are licensed?
 - What kinds of internships do students usually complete?
 - How are students supervised?

What to Wear

- You can't go wrong with business-style attire. Visit days for accepted students may be a bit more casual, while people will dress up a bit more for interviews.
- If in doubt, you can ask your hosts for recommendations about attire, including whether you will be walking around or outside a lot so you can take that into account.

Virtual Interviews

- Take advantage of the opportunity to use notes during virtual interviews. Write down some brief information about each person you will meet with to review before you start each of your meetings.
- Try to choose a location with a strong internet connection where you will not be disturbed. If you don't have access to this kind of space, booking a study room in the library could be a good option.
- Try to choose an area in which your background will not be distracting. A wall or bookshelf is great. Your desk or office are probably fine but try to make sure everything in frame looks neat.

Things to Keep in Mind

- Everyone you talk to could influence an admission decision. Be respectful and polite to everyone you meet.
- Remember—you are interviewing the program as much as they are interviewing you! Make sure you are getting the information you need to know whether or not the program will be a good fit for you.
- Your fellow applicants can feel like “the competition” but try not to think of them this way. If you attend a program, those fellow prospective students could be your classmates, labmates, collaborators, and even lifelong friends. Even if you decide to go to different programs, you can meet people with shared interests you may go on to see at conferences or other events. These are your future colleagues, so be supportive!

Selecting a Program

- Once you have an offer from a graduate program, you will have until April 15th to reply with your decision.
- Programs will not all make their offers at the same time. Programs have different deadlines and timelines for admission. If you haven't heard back from a program and need an update while making your admissions decisions, you can email the program head to ask for an update on the timeline.
- You can wait until April 15th to respond to offers, but it's best to reply as soon as you know whether or not you are going to take an offer. Most programs will have a waitlist of students who could receive offers if someone turns an offer down. Holding onto an offer you're not going to take prevents these programs from making an offer to another student who might want to take it!

- Remember that you have the power to decide what's best for you! If, for example, a program is not a good fit for you after all or you have major concerns after an interview, you may be better off applying elsewhere during the next cycle.

Things to Consider

- **Program Fit**
 - The program should fit with your long-term goals. If you have a specific career in mind, you should be able to see how the program will help you develop the skills to start that career.
 - For a doctoral program, fit with your prospective advisor should be a major factor in your decision. Make sure you get enough information to know whether your prospective advisor will support your goals and development in the program and work with you effectively. Your advisor will be a major factor in your success in graduate school, so be sure you choose to work with someone who shares your interests and could work with you effectively.
- **Department Culture**
 - Think about how the environment of the department could help or hinder your success while making a decision. Are the faculty and graduate students supportive? Does it seem competitive, high-pressure, collaborative, etc. and how well does the environment match your ideal working conditions?
- **Finances**
 - If you are offered a scholarship, fellowship, or other financial incentive, this is worth factoring into your decision based on your financial needs.
 - Be mindful that programs with stipends may offer you different amounts. Consider these amounts in the context of the area you would be living to complete the program. More money in a major city might not go as far as less money in a smaller town. You can consult with the current graduate students or online resources to get an idea about cost of living relative to the stipend you are offered.
- **Location**
 - Many students hesitate to apply to graduate programs because of their location—wanting to stay close to home or targeting a particular area for other reasons. If this is non-negotiable to you, you may choose to limit your search by location. That being said, you may benefit from choosing a program that fits your needs over a program that is in an ideal location.
 - Keep in mind the timeline for the program when deciding based on location. Can you commit to that location for 1-2 years? 5-6 years?
 - You may also consider what kind of jobs are available in the area near a prospective graduate program. Universities might have connections with companies or alumni in the area to help with your job placement. If you are interested in tenure-track academic jobs, however, this is less the case, as tenure-track academic jobs will usually run a national search.

How to turn down an offer

- Turning down an offer can be daunting for an applicant, but it's a good problem to have!

- It's polite to email the prospective advisor before or shortly after turning down an offer from the program. You can thank them for the opportunity but let them know you decided to go with another option.
- Don't worry that your decision will burn a bridge, the vast majority of prospective advisors want a student to do what is right for them and will not be upset by an offer being declined.

What if I don't get in or I'm not ready?

- If you don't get into graduate school the first time you apply, or you decide you should take some time off before applying to graduate school, don't be disheartened. Getting some additional experience can improve your chances when applying to graduate school and improve your readiness. Getting more training and experience can ultimately help you be more successful in graduate school and beyond. Below are a couple of different options, but be aware that people take many paths to their ideal careers!
- **Research Positions**
 - Paid Positions
 - Lab manager and paid research positions are an ideal opportunity if you are interested in getting more experience before a PhD program.
 - Some of these positions offer opportunities to get involved with research projects to the extent that you might have opportunities to be involved with conference presentations or even co-author publications. Both presentations and publications look excellent for applications to doctoral programs.
 - Postings for such positions are collected [here](#).
 - Volunteer Positions
 - You may also decide to volunteer some of your time as a volunteer research assistant in a lab.
 - This is usually a good option if you plan to stay in your undergrad university's town for some time after graduation or if you can go live with family or friends near a university with a faculty running a research lab you are interested in.
 - Such an opportunity would probably be a part-time position, so you could have a paying job alongside this type of position.
- **Post-Baccs**
 - Post-baccalaureate or post-bacc programs are designed for students who have a bachelor's degree and are seeking additional training or preparation before going on to graduate school.
 - Post-baccs consist of additional coursework at an undergraduate level. So, if you feel you are not ready for graduate classes, this could be a good option for you. Post-baccs do not typically include a research component.
 - Post-baccs may be particularly suitable if you did not get an undergraduate degree in psychology (or if you're planning to apply to med school and did not take pre-med classes).

- You can also use a post-bacc to address an area of weakness in an application you might make before the program. Post-baccs courses are meant to count toward your undergraduate GPA, so you could use a post-bacc to improve your GPA.
- Keep in mind that these programs will cost you tuition. You do not get an additional degree for completing a post-bacc.
- The APA includes a list of post-bacc programs [here](#).
- **Master's Programs for PhD-Seekers**
 - Some students looking to ultimately complete a PhD might consider a master's program if they feel they are not ready or competitive for a PhD program. Depending on the area of psychology you are interested in, this option may be more or less necessary. There are more candidates with master's degrees applying to clinical PhD programs, for example, than there are for cognitive, social, or developmental programs.
 - A master's program will involve graduate coursework and may include a research component or requirement like a thesis.
 - Master's programs will cost tuition. You will be conferred an additional degree (an MA or MS) on completing a master's program.
 - If you are interested in clinical work, you could also consider master's programs that include the option for you to gain a license. You might even decide that you don't need a PhD after all and are happy practicing with that license!
- **Job Experience**
 - Getting some job experience, especially experience that will hone your research and/or clinical skills, could be a good option, especially if you are looking for a paid position.
 - Keep in mind that the transition back to being a student could become more difficult as you spend more time out in the workforce. If you really intend to go on to graduate school, decide on a timeline and hold yourself accountable to build up your application and keep that timeline.
- **What about the gap?**
 - Students often worry that graduate programs will have high expectations for what they will accomplish during a gap year. In reality, if you are graduating in spring semester, your application for most graduate programs would be due at the end of fall semester of the next year. This is not much time at all to account for!