

Tips for Applying to Graduate Programs

Recommended Steps for Applicants to Psychology Graduate Programs

Timelines for Applying

If applying in the senior year, milestones include:

- Summer - narrow list of programs and due dates, prepare for GRE, draft statements of purpose
- Early Fall - finalize list of programs, contact faculty of interest, solicit feedback on essays, register and take GRE, order and send transcripts
- Late Fall - request letters of recommendation, complete application forms, and finalize essays
- Nov/Dec - submit applications; verify that all letters, transcripts, etc. have been received

Statements of Purpose

You will typically need to write a *statement of purpose* or other essays. To do so, we suggest:

- Brainstorming/clustering, outlining, creating an rough draft, revising, obtaining feedback, and then finalizing your statement or essay

For effective essays, we suggest the following:

- Tailor each essay to the program of interest, emphasizing your strengths, providing specific examples, writing clearly and transparently
- Avoiding negativity, vagueness, humor, and cliched writing and phrasing

Searching for Programs

The programs that you choose to apply to depend on your priorities. To find programs we suggest:

- Online databases (e.g., APA) and listings
- Published directories and graduate school guides
- Professional societies and APA divisions
- GRE Search Service, asking your mentors

Your choices may ultimately depend on:

- Program type (e.g., training model)
- Faculty/mentor match (e.g., accepting students?)
- Financial considerations (e.g., funding)
- Program life, other metrics (e.g., admit rate)

Recommendation Letters

We suggest requesting letters of recommendation six weeks before they are due; when requesting:

- Choose recommenders that know you very well.
- Ask whether they can write a “good” letter
- If they agree, provide all necessary background materials, such as transcripts, essays, and CVs
- Provide a clear summary of all programs you are applying and the letter due dates for each
- Request all of your letters at the same time
- Follow-up with your letter writers as due dates approach, and do so in a courteous manner

Admissions Criteria

Most programs are highly competitive and base their selection decisions on such factors as:

- Coursework, GPA, GRE, research experience, recommendation letters, other relevant work

Applications go through multiple rounds of review. After interviews, the most decisive criteria for acceptance decisions typically include:

- Publications or presentations, match in applicant's skills and interests with the program and faculty of interest, statement of purpose, and the applicant's prior research experience

Admissions Interviews

Interviews are the final hurdle before admission decisions are made. To succeed at interviews:

1. Review - reexamine your application materials, your own goals, and your knowledge of the program that you are interviewing at
2. Research - the program and faculty of interest in greater detail, think of questions you wish to ask during interviews, find out the interview format
3. Practice - conduct mock interviews, rehearse answers to potential questions, develop skill at answering questions fluently and naturally