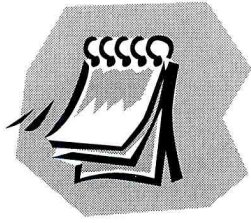


# APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Packet Includes:

- Assembling an application
- GRE information
- Finding the right program
- Graduate school timeline
- Writing a personal statement
- Information about letters of recommendation
- Writing a Curriculum Vita
- Funding for graduate school
- References



# HOW TO APPLY TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

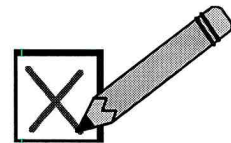
Linda J. Hayes & Steve C. Hayes

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Admission into graduate programs in psychology can be quite competitive. High quality programs are, of course, more competitive than lower quality programs in general doctoral programs are more difficult to get in than master's programs. Usually applied programs more difficult to get in than basic programs.

The primary determinant of success in applying for graduate school is the quality of your background and abilities. But these qualities are not assessed magically. They are evaluated on the basis of a limited number of kinds of information. The purpose of this article is to review those kinds of information for the purpose of understanding the process.

## ASSEMBLING A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION



### Graduate Record Exams and Other Admission Tests

Most graduate admissions committees require the GRE, and a few still require the MAT. These scores will often be interpreted as a measure of the student's likelihood of success in graduate school. Thus, it is wise to obtain the best scores you possibly can.

Some believe that it is impossible to study for these exams, but it is not true. For example, if you haven't taken a mathematics course in some time, review of this material can be quite helpful. If you are unsure how to take tests of this type, examination of one of the many books on the market about the GREs may help. Students have been known to pull up their scores greatly through careful preparation.

The GREs can be taken more than once, so it is wise to take the test earlier rather than later. That way if you do not do well due to illness or lack of preparation, you can try again.

There is another reason to take the test early: to be sure that your scores are available by the admission deadline. Incomplete applications are not usually considered, and when they are, the fact that they are incomplete reflects poorly on the candidate. If you can, take the GREs by October.

This rule on timeliness applies to all parts of the application. If the candidate couldn't manage to get their admission materials together on time, will

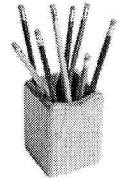
they be late with class assignment as well? Are they generally disorganized? Are they careless?

## **Grades**

Your grades reflect your standing among your peers. Obviously, grades are important and no good student needs to be reminded of that. As it applies to admission into graduate school, what students sometimes do need to be told is that it is wrong to assume that good grades are enough. There are too many students with good grades out there interested in graduate training. You will need other qualifications to distinguish yourself.

## **Letter of Intent/Statement of Interest/Autobiographical Statement**

Most applications ask for a statement of interest. This is sometimes called an "autobiographical statement." The request for an autobiographical statement is often misunderstood by student applicants. Students who take the request literally harm their application by appearing to be unsophisticated and naive. It is sadly not uncommon to see such statement begin with "I was born in a small town in the midwest...."



What is being requested is: 1) a statement of your interests in psychology and how you came to have those interests, 2) what your goals and ambitions in the field of psychology are, and 3) how the program to which you are applying can help you to achieve those goals.

With respect to your interests and how you came to have those interests, some words of advice: While it may seem to you that the reason you are interested in psychology is that you want to help people, this reason has become a terrible cliché and should be avoided. The problem is that it adds little information. Can you imagine anyone saying that they want to get into a field in order to hurt people? Particularly in applied fields, of course, helping people is an obvious motivation, but it would be better to be specific. Perhaps there is some particular kind of human problem that evokes your desire to be helpful--maybe you are particularly interested in helping emotionally disturbed children, or possibly the aged, or the disabled. In addition, this will allow you to couple your emotional motivation with the serious intellectual interests you may have.

Secondly, in describing your interests in psychology and how you came to have them, try to focus on particular educational and occupational experiences you have had that could account for your interests, rather than personal experiences. For example, it is probably unwise to say that you are interested in the neural basis of depression because you want to find out why your father became depressed and had to be admitted to a mental hospital. Such personal experiences are difficult to



put into a short written statement without either trivializing them or needlessly confining your intellectual interest to emotional motivation. Personal reasons can be included in your essay, but they should not be the only reasons that you want to go to graduate school. If you are including personal reasons, make sure that they are appropriate for other people to read.

As for your goals and ambitions, you should try to be as specific as possible. When candidates are asked: why do you want to go to graduate school or what are you interested in doing in this program? A common reply is "I just want to learn--I'm open minded--I want to study a bit of everything--and then I'll decide on my career." This can be taken to mean that you don't know why you want to go to graduate school and that you have no idea what you are interested in studying. You should try to be more specific, while at the same time showing an openness to learning new things. Too much specification suggests that you do not plan to benefit from what you may learn in graduate school about the discipline and various career choices. Position yourself between these poles. You can, for example, state your current interests in the field. You will not be held to these interests. It is assumed that your interest will be shaped in graduate school. On the other hand, keep in mind that ill defined goals suggest that you haven't thought much about the future. It can suggest that you don't care much about the future, or that you aren't very ambitious.

It is wise to apply to schools that have faculty with interests that fit with your own. Do your homework. Go to the library and look up the publications of the faculty. Decide whether this kind of work is what you want to do.

Many schools admit students into specific labs. That is, each faculty member will admit x number of students. In this case, the goodness of fit between your interests and your mentor-to-be is crucial. You should know that person's research program. If it fits what you want, say so, but do so after you have carefully researched the matter or you will inevitably appear unsophisticated or even manipulative.

Other things that may go in your statement of interests are research, applied and professional experiences and relevant skills such as computing skills.

### **Letters of Recommendation**

Letters of recommendation are extremely important. They can help you and they can hurt you. The most helpful letters come from teachers who have had considerable contact with you, especially in non-classroom setting such as research labs. A letter from a teacher who says he or she can't remember who you are exactly but you got an A so you must be quite bright is not helpful. After all, information about coursework per se is available on your transcript--the letter



adds nothing and may in fact subtract something; it suggests that you haven't had sufficient contact with your teachers to have secured a more informative recommendation. What does this mean to committees? Maybe it means that you are an extremely timid person, the kind who disappears into the background, does well on tests but says nothing in class, for example.

The best kind of letter is from someone who has been involved with you professionally - who has supervised research on your part, who has co-authored a paper with you, who has served as an adviser to you in your role as an officer in Psi Chi, and so on. However, if you want to have a really fine letter of recommendation, you have to have done some really fine things, such as conducting quality research or making presentations to professional meetings.

A letter from an employer can be useful if the job was in the field of psychology, and the letter comments on your accomplishments of specific duties, your aptitude for this type of work and so on. Otherwise, such letters are usually not helpful. Also, don't include letters from public officials or professionals with whom your contacts have not been of a professional sort. What the mayor has to say about you is of no interest to admissions committees. It may even do you a disservice. It suggests that you believe that you ought to be looked upon more favorably because you have some contact with important public officials. This will probably be offensive to most academics. Likewise, don't get your priest or rabbi or minister, your family doctor or other individuals of that kind to write a letter in your behalf. Last but not least, don't ask your personal therapist to send a letter.

### **Include a Vita**

It is a good idea to include a carefully assembled vita even if some of the material is redundant with the application itself. A vita is something you should begin now, if you haven't already done so. If you do not know how to construct one, you can write to authors of this article for a copy of an article on that topic.

### **Presenting Your Materials Appropriately**

All of your communications should be typed. Don't send anything hand written. You should be certain that your letters are grammatically correct and that they contain no misspelled words and no colloquialisms. Have someone else read your letters if necessary. If the option is given to you, submit your information online. Some schools prefer it and there is less chance of your materials getting lost in the mail or missing the deadline.

If you visit the program look presentable. Parties sometimes happen on interviews. Try to behave appropriately for the occasion.



## Finding the Right Program

Putting together a competitive application through careful preparation is one thing. Applying to the right program is something else. In the "one down" situation most undergraduate students feel they are in; it is easy to get into an "anybody take me, I will go" type of attitude. Such an attitude, if taken to the extreme, is dangerous. You have to be happy with your education. It has to fit with your values, abilities, and interests. It is wise to make sure you are applying to the right program.

Try to be clear with yourself about what you're looking for. What sort of career do you want to have? In what area of psychology? What graduate programs offer training in this area? What theoretical orientation do you have? Are you a behaviorist? Are you a cognitivist? Which programs have such an orientation? Whose work have you found most agreeable? Where does this person work?

Once you are clear, examine programs that fit in terms of sub-disciplinary area. The APA book on graduate training in psychology is a good place to start. Write for the catalogs of as many programs as seem in the ballpark. Ask your professors about possible programs. If you have come across researchers in your area of interest who interest you, get the materials from their programs. Don't write to faculty members asking for a catalog and admission materials. Write to the department.

As you narrow down the list you may find particular people who stand out. Should you contact them directly? If you have a specific interest in their work, it is fine to do so, but only after you have done your homework. It is reasonable to request reprints of articles. It is reasonable to comment on how much you enjoyed or gained from reading something this person has written, although don't overdo it. It is also reasonable to ask an intelligent question arising from something this person has said or written. This is especially good if you know what you are talking about. It is not wise to make a point of telling someone just exactly what you think is wrong with their theory, their method, etc., on the grounds that they will then be convinced of your superior intelligence. Most academics are pleased to have others interested in their work. Be respectful.

If you want to explore the possibility of working with them, say so. You might ask if they are accepting students into their lab (sometimes the answer is no due to upcoming leaves or other reasons). If you know you are very serious and your qualifications are reasonable, you might ask if it is possible to visit. Not all academics will grant such visits because they can be time consuming, but it will not offend to inquire. Some programs (especially applied programs) have a policy of inviting applicants for interviews as a part of their admission procedures. If they



wish to interview you, you will be invited. In this case, if you are not invited, you will not be welcome to visit.

As you begin to center on some programs, do not forget that other students can be a valuable source of information. Sometimes it is easier to talk informally to a student in the program you are interested in and get a clearer view of what it is like.

When you have your list, put together your application carefully. How many programs should you apply to? It is not uncommon for applied students interested in Ph.D. training to apply to 10-12, including one or two "fall backs" (e.g., MA programs). Basic students usually would apply to smaller numbers.

What do you do if after all of this, no one admits you? If you are committed to further training, it makes sense to try again. Examine the reasons why you were not competitive. Was it a bad letter? Poor GREs? Lack of experience? Did you apply to too few programs? Try to correct these problems. If you are graduating, try to see if you can get a psychology related job. You may be able to take a few graduate courses at your local University on a non-degree basis just to keep your hand in and to show your commitment and ability. It is not unusual to find well-known psychologists who did not get in their first time around.

Good luck.



## GRADUATE SCHOOL TIMELINE

### **In Your Sophomore Year**

- Get involved in research by identifying a faculty member who conducts research in an area of interest to you.
- Consider joining Psi Chi or another Psychology-related organization.
- Attend our "Applying to Graduate School" workshop in the Winter.
- Start taking courses within the major. Any courses you take after you apply to graduate school won't help you get in, so plan ahead.
- Get to know your professors.



### **In Your Junior Year**

- Continue to form professional relationships with our faculty members.
- Obtain additional research experiences.
- Get involved with volunteering opportunities if you are looking at graduate programs in clinical and counseling psychology.
  - Look into summer jobs or internships that fit your interests.
- Prepare and register for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).
- Begin gathering information on graduate programs. The APA publication *Graduate Studies in Psychology* is a great resource.
  - Over the summer, write to the programs to request application materials, but be sure to check their websites first since most information can be found there.



- Find out if the programs to which you are applying require the GRE Subject Test in Psychology. If so, begin your preparation. The tests are usually given in October. Apply one month ahead.
- Write a resume/C.V.
- Start to save \$\$\$! You'll have application fees, transcript costs, and interviewing expenses to cover.

### **Fall Quarter of Your Senior Year**

- Ask faculty members for letters of recommendation. Be sure that they are able to write you a **STRONG** letter. Give them any necessary forms, addresses, and other information that might be helpful. Be sure to tell them how the program would like the letters to be sent in and provide stamped envelopes when needed.
- Fill out your applications in full.
- Work on your personal statement.
- Request that your GRE scores and official transcripts be sent to all the programs to which you are applying.
- Be sure to write thank-you notes to those who wrote your letters of recommendation.
- After you have sent in your application packet, verify that all of your materials were received.

**GOOD LUCK!!!**



# Graduate Study in Psychology:

## General Advice

1. **Is graduate school really for you?** This is the most important question to ask yourself as you are thinking about applying. Graduate school is a time-consuming and expensive commitment. Make sure you talk to a lot of people and do a lot of internet research so that you know what you're getting into before you decide to apply. Graduate school can be extremely rewarding, but only if you are passionately interested in whatever it is that you are interested in studying.
2. **Are there any absolute rules that you can follow to ensure that you are admitted?** No. No matter what your qualifications are, it is impossible to predict with absolute certainty whether you will be admitted to certain programs or not. Obviously, better students will get more acceptance letters than poor students, but factors outside of your control are going to play a big part in where you are admitted. So keep in mind that the rest of the advice on this page includes general guidelines--there are no guarantees.
3. **What are the most important strengths that an applicant can have?** As you probably know, your grade point average (GPA), your Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, and your letters of recommendation are the most important pieces of information that admissions committees will use to decide on your application. Grades, scores, and letters of reference help professors make quick and easy judgments from the beginning. Often, admissions committees will make "likely", "maybe", and "unlikely" piles out of the applications right from the start. Although every application will be looked at briefly, you want to make sure that you have the sort of grades, GRE scores and letters of recommendation that get your application channeled into the "likely" pile right from the start.
4. **What are "good" grades?** Here are some **very** general guidelines about grades: all else being equal, students who have above a 3.4 can be competitive in admissions to some PsyD or PhD programs; students who have above a 3.0 can expect to be admitted to some very respectable Masters programs and even some PsyD programs; students who have a GPA above 2.8 may be admitted to some Masters programs. There are no true cut-off scores though—There are some students with 3.1 GPA's who are in PhD programs, because they had other outstanding qualifications when they applied that made them look really good. But there are also students with a 4.0 GPA who weren't admitted anywhere, because



they didn't get any research experience before applying, and didn't apply to a wide enough range of programs.

5. **Can an applicant be "too good" for some programs?** Yes, sometimes. If you have excellent qualifications and apply to a low-ranked PhD program, for example, they may reject you simply because they know that you're not serious about their program and that you'd rather go to another, far more prestigious program. This probably only happens for PhD programs, and my sense is that it occurs rarely.
6. **What if your grades are disappointing?** If you messed up your GPA and you have a good explanation for your grades, explain why your GPA is as low as it is in the essay that you submit with your application. If you started college as a biology or physics major, for example, your less-than-optimal grades during your first two years of college may be perfectly understandable. Also, admissions committees will usually look more carefully at your recent grades than the grades you received two or three years ago.
7. **Is a 3.80 GPA better than a 3.60 GPA?** Not really. Sometimes students say things like, "I wish I could just get my 3.65 up to a 3.7", not realizing that nobody cares about trivial little differences like that. Other factors like the school you graduated from, what your letters of recommendation say about you, and the kind of research experience you've had are what really make you stand out from the other applicants who have high GPA's and high GRE scores.
8. **Does the quality of your undergraduate school make a difference?** Often, yes. There are some top-notch PhD programs that consider your undergraduate school quite seriously. Also, most schools will try to interpret your GPA based on where you graduate from. After all, a 3.2 GPA at Columbia University may reflect the same amount of intelligence and effort as a 3.9 GPA from Daemen College. The other advantage that students from top-notch undergraduate schools have is that they are more likely to have letters of reference from professors who are well-known in their fields. Admissions committees tend to pay special attention to letters of reference written by hot-shot researchers.
9. **How can you get a doctorate if your grades aren't the best?** Some students with average grades who are highly motivated to get a doctorate can realize their dream by doing it the long way: by getting a Masters first, and then reapplying to PhD or PsyD programs later. Of course, this is going to take you longer and will probably cost you more money, but it's probably the best thing for you to do if your grades aren't the best.

10. **How important is research experience?** It is crucial! Working in one of your professors' labs is a good way for you to learn what graduate school will be like. Working on a professor's research is also a good way to get high-quality letters of recommendation, because professors will get to know you better if you work in their labs.
11. **What if your research experience is in a different area from the area that you are interested in?** That doesn't matter all that much. Any research experience is better than none. In fact, if you have trouble finding a psychologist to work with, try looking for research opportunities in the sociology, education, business, or medical schools in your area. However, there are some advantages to getting into a lab that researches something similar to what you're interested in. If you are applying to, say, a social psychology program, a letter of recommendation from a famous social psychologist will definitely help you more than a letter from a famous clinical psychologist. But once again, any kind of research experience is better than none at all.
12. **How important is it to do your own research project?** It's not crucial, but it definitely makes you look good. Many schools have honors programs that require undergraduates to do a project of their own, and usually these are the only undergraduates who become co-authors on their professors' papers. (And of course, being an author on a published paper looks really, really good when you apply.) If you have experience running your own study, collecting your own data, and writing up a report, you'll be well-prepared for graduate school.
13. **What is the "shotgun method" of applying?** One of the best ways to ensure that you are able to go to graduate school the first time you apply is to apply to as many graduate programs as you can, and to apply to a wide range of them. Most applicants who want a doctorate and know what they are doing will apply to at least 6 doctoral programs and 2 or 3 masters programs. But of course, you'll want to adjust this according to the strength of your application. For example, if you have a 3.8 GPA and your GRE scores are in the 600's, you can probably just apply to 7 doctoral programs and 1 masters program, because you have a very strong chance of getting into doctoral programs with those qualifications (assuming that everything else about your application is good). On the other hand, if you have a 3.2 GPA and your GRE scores are all in the 500's, and you decide that you're only going to apply to the doctoral programs at Stanford, Princeton, and Berkeley, well, you're taking a huge risk and probably wasting your time and application money (but who knows?). The point is, you want to apply to a broad range of schools so that when all of the decisions are made, you know that you'll at least be going to some program somewhere. If you apply to 6 PhD programs, for



example, you may want to apply to two schools in the top twenty, two schools ranked between 30 and 50, and two schools ranked below 50. Rankings should be used only as a rough index of how hard it is to get into the school.

14. **How valid are program rankings like those on the U.S. News web site?** Not all that valid. The first problem with them is that they represent departments as a whole, not specific areas of the department. A school may have an excellent cognitive psychology program and a terrible clinical psychology program, for example. The second problem with rankings is that they really don't mean anything at close range. For example, while the 10th-ranked school may be quite a bit better than the 70th-ranked school, the 10th-ranked school may really be just as good as the 25th-ranked school. At close ranges, the rankings are arbitrary, so don't make the mistake of telling yourself, for example, that it's easier to get into the 10th-ranked school than it is to get into the 5th-ranked school.
15. **How important is it to select a good advisor/mentor?** Exceedingly important! If you are seeking a PhD, your faculty advisor is going to make all the difference in the world. If your advisor is well-known and thinks that it is important for students to publish and conduct independent research, then you will find your chances of pursuing a strong research career much improved. But if your advisor doesn't help you a lot (and most advisors are in this latter category), you will have a pretty miserable time trying to build your career all by yourself. (And even if you are only pursuing a Masters degree, you will want a helpful advisor who is going to support you in your career goals and perhaps help you get into a doctoral program later.) So choose your advisor wisely! Email students who are in the program already to find out what the faculty are really like.
16. **How important is it to have a well-established advisor?** It is important to have a well-established advisor for a variety of reasons. First, there has long been a trend in psychology for the students of famous psychologists to fill the most coveted jobs at prestigious universities. Students of famous advisors, in other words, often get more job offers than other equally-qualified applicants. Second, well-established advisors will often have lots of grant money, which can benefit students in the form of extra pay and perhaps coverage of students' research expenses. Third, well-established advisors are often invited to write chapters and commentaries for journals, and in cases where the advisor likes to collaborate with students, this means that students will have lots of publication opportunities. Fourth, well-established advisors tend to be older and tend to have more experience advising students. Sometimes this means that they will make fewer mistakes in the ways that they treat and collaborate with their students (but not



always). So regardless of whether you are pursuing a masters or a doctorate, your graduate school experience will often be better if your advisor is well-established.

**17. How do you find out whether a faculty advisor is well-established?** Find out the answers to the following questions:

- Does the faculty member regularly publish in the top journals in his/her field?
- Does the faculty member have grants that cover the expenses of his/her research?
- Have former students of the faculty member gone on to obtain desirable jobs?
- Does the faculty member frequently get awards or get invited by other scholars to lecture at scientific meetings or write chapters for books?
- If the faculty member is more of a practitioner (i.e., clinician or consultant) than a researcher, does he or she have lots of connections with other practitioners in the field?

**18. Is it appropriate to email a professor you are thinking about working with?** It is not only appropriate, it is important for you to do so. If you're interested in working with a particular faculty member in graduate school, look up that professor's articles and familiarize yourself with what that professor does. Then send him or her an email saying that you've read a few of their articles, that you think their work is interesting, and that you are curious about whether they will be taking on any new students next year. From that point forward, play it by ear. Sometimes professors write back and ask you to stay in touch and tell them a little bit more about yourself. Other times, they just politely answer your question and leave it at that. Above all, respect professors' limited time, and only write them repeated emails if they have encouraged you to do so.

**19. How concerned should you be about money?** Very concerned. Look very carefully into the financial aid situation at the programs you're applying to. Graduate school is **very** expensive, and good graduate schools should provide you with some kind of financial assistance. PhD students usually get tuition waivers and part-time jobs as research assistants. They also often have opportunities to teach undergraduate courses in the summer or during the school year. Masters students are sometimes also allowed to teach for pay, and sometimes they are able to fulfill other office or research work for the department, but in general, masters

students usually don't get much financial assistance. PsyD students don't usually get much assistance either. Furthermore, when you're thinking about your financial situation in graduate school, keep in mind that the cost of living in the area your program is in makes a huge difference. For example, if the University of Georgia offers you \$12,000 a year to be a research assistant, that's going to go a whole lot farther in Athens, Georgia than if New York University (located in New York City) offers you the same amount!

**20. Are programs in some areas of psychology more competitive than others? Yes.**

As you think about applying, realize that the difficulty of getting into a program depends on the area of psychology you are applying for. Clinical psychology PhD programs, for example, are notoriously hard to get into. Talk to professors and graduate students beforehand so that you are aware of how much competition there will be when you apply.

**21. What else should you know about applying to psychology graduate programs?**

The most important things for you to know about getting into grad school are the following:

- Get the best grades you can.
- Do as well on the GRE as you can.
- Get as much research experience as you can.
- Get to know your professors as well as you can so that they can write favorable letters of recommendation for you.
- Talk to graduate students, professors and practitioners about your intended career and about graduate school and make sure that the field you are interested in is really for you.

**22. What happens after you've been admitted?** You need to know that after you have been accepted by graduate programs, things are going to be very different, because the programs will now compete with each other to get you. They will probably call you and give you an interview either right before or right after accepting you, so be prepared. (Clinical programs tend to ask people to come out for a face-to-face interview before they accept you, so the pattern varies.) Be prepared for these surprise interviews by making a list of intelligent questions that you can ask when they call.

Just remember that getting into graduate school is largely a matter of luck. But if you've done background research to find out what it takes to get in, you will have a huge advantage over all of the applicants who have not. Most applicants,

for example, won't have the patience to read all of the advice on this site or to look up all of the information that they should on the programs that they will apply to. I hope you're not among those applicants. Good luck!

## **Questions You Should Ask Before Enrolling in a Graduate Program**

Once you are accepted into a few programs, the programs will often go to some effort to get you there. For PhD programs, for instance, you are very likely to get a few phone calls, and you will probably be invited to come out for a visit. The process of trying to choose a graduate program after you've been accepted to several of them can be very stressful. To help you decide, there are several questions that you should ask. You may want to ask the faculty some of these questions, but it is even more important that you ask the graduate students, because they'll be able to answer from the students' perspective. Here are a few questions that I strongly recommend you ask:

1. How would you describe student-faculty relations in your graduate program?
2. Is your potential advisor friendly? What's he or she like?
3. Where have recent graduates of the program recently been employed?
4. Are students in the program publishing? Where have they published?
5. Are students expected to buy their own computers, or are there enough computers available in the campus laboratories to get work done there?
6. What do students do for fun?
7. How many students in the program are married? How many are single?
8. How expensive is it to live in the area?
9. These are just a few important questions--think carefully about what else you'd like to ask before you make a decision about which program to enroll in.



# GRE General Test

## Computer-Based General Test

The General Test measures analytical writing, verbal, and quantitative skills that have been acquired over a long period of time and that are not related to any specific field of study.

The **analytical writing** section tests your critical thinking and analytical writing skills. It assesses your ability to articulate and support complex ideas, analyze an argument, and sustain a focused and coherent discussion. It does not assess specific content knowledge.

The **verbal** section measures your ability to analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information obtained from it, to analyze relationships among component parts of sentences, to recognize relationships between words and concepts, and to reason with words in solving problems. There is a balance of passages across different subject matter areas: humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

The **quantitative** section measures your basic mathematical skills, your understanding of elementary mathematical concepts, and your ability to reason quantitatively and solve problems in a quantitative setting. There is a balance of questions requiring arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis. These are content areas usually studied in high school.

## Structure of the Computer-Based General Test

The computer-based General Test contains four sections, one of which is an unidentified pretest section that can appear in any position in the test after the analytical writing section. Questions in the pretest section are being tested for possible use in future tests and answers will not count toward your scores. An identified research section that is not scored may also be included and this section would always appear in the final section of the test. Questions in the research section are included for the purpose of ETS research and answers will not count toward your scores.

Total testing time is up to 3 1/4 hours, not including the research section. The directions at the beginning of each section specify the total number of questions in the section and the time allowed for the section. The analytical writing section will always be first. For the Issue task, two topics will be presented and you will choose one. The Argument task does not present a choice of topics; instead, one topic will be presented. The verbal and quantitative sections may appear in any order, including an unidentified

verbal or quantitative pretest section. Treat each section presented during your test as if it counts.

## Typical Computer-Based GRE General Test

Section	Number of Questions	Time
Analytical Writing	1 Issue task*	45 min.
	1 Argument task*	30 min.
Verbal	30	30 min.
Quantitative	28	45 min.
Pretest**	Varies	Varies
Research***	Varies	Varies

\* For the Issue task, two essay topics will be presented and you will choose one. The Argument task does not present a choice of topics; instead one topic will be presented.

\*\* An unidentified verbal or quantitative pretest section may be included and may appear in any order after the analytical writing section. It is not counted as part of your score.

\*\*\* An identified research section that is not scored may be included and it will always be at the end of the test.

## Modified Versions of Verbal and Quantitative Questions

The test you take may include questions that are modified versions of published questions or of questions you have already seen on an earlier section of the test. Some modifications are substantial; others are less apparent. Thus, even if a question appears to be similar to a question you have already seen, it may in fact be a different question and may also have a different correct answer. You can be assured of doing your best on the test you take by paying careful attention to the wording of each question as it appears in your test.

The GRE Program is currently investigating the feasibility of reusing questions that have been published in GRE practice materials. As part of that investigation, you may see questions from these materials on a test you take.

## How Does the Computer-Based General Test Work?

### Verbal and Quantitative Sections

The verbal and quantitative sections of the General Test are adaptive tests; that is, they are tailored to your performance level and provide precise information about



your abilities using fewer test questions than traditional paper-based tests. At the start of each section, you are presented with test questions of middle difficulty. As you answer each question, the computer scores that question and uses that information, as well as your responses to any preceding questions and information about the test design, to determine which question is presented next. As long as you respond correctly to each question, questions of increased difficulty typically will be presented. When you respond incorrectly, the computer typically will present you with questions of lesser difficulty. Your next question will be the one that best reflects both your previous performance and the requirements of the test design. This means that different test takers will be given different questions.

Because the computer scores each question before selecting the next one, you must answer each question when it is presented. For this reason, once you answer a question and move on to another, you cannot go back and change your answer. The computer has already incorporated both your answer and requirements of the test design into its selection of the next question for you.

Each computer-based test section meets preestablished specifications, including the types of questions asked and the subject matter presented. The statistical characteristics of the questions answered correctly and incorrectly, including the difficulty levels, are taken into account in the calculation of the score. Therefore, it is appropriate to compare scores of different test takers even though they received different questions.

ETS has conducted research studies indicating that verbal and quantitative scores on the computer-based General Test are comparable to verbal and quantitative scores earned on the paper-based General Test.

## Analytical Writing Section

The 2 writing tasks are delivered on the computer, and you must word process your responses.

For the **Issue task**, you will be able to choose 1 of 2 essay topics selected by the computer from the pool of topics.

The **Argument task** does not offer a choice of topics; the computer will present you with a single topic selected from the topic pool.

The testing software uses an elementary word processor developed by ETS so that individuals familiar with a specific commercial word processing software do not have an advantage or disadvantage. The software contains the following functionalities: inserting text, deleting text, cut and paste, undoing the previous action, and scrolling. Tools such



as a spelling checker and grammar checker are not available in the software, in large part to maintain fairness with those examinees who handwrite essays at paper-based administrations.

## **Scoring Process for the Computer-Based General Test**

Scores will be based on one section each of verbal and quantitative, and two analytical writing tasks.

### **Verbal and Quantitative Sections**

You will receive a test score on every section (except unidentified pretest sections and/or research sections), regardless of the number of questions answered, even if time expires before you answer all the questions. However, if you answer no questions at all in a section, that section will be reported as a No Score (NS).

Your score on each section of the test will depend on the number of questions answered in the time allotted, as well as on your performance on the questions given. Because both of these sections are computer adaptive, the questions given are selected to reflect both your performance on preceding questions and the requirements of the test design. Test design factors that influence which questions are presented include:

- the statistical characteristics (including the difficulty level) of those questions already answered
- the required variety of question types
- the appropriate coverage of content

### **Analytical Writing Section**

A single score is reported for the analytical writing section. Each essay receives a score from 2 trained readers using 6-point holistic scale. In holistic scoring, readers are trained to assign scores on the basis of the overall quality of a response to the assigned task. If the 2 assigned scores differ by more than 1 point on the scale, the discrepancy is adjudicated by a third, very experienced, reader. Otherwise, the scores from the 2 readings of an essay are averaged. The final scores on the 2 essays are then averaged and rounded up to the nearest half-point interval (e.g., 3.0, 3.5).

The primary emphasis in scoring the analytical writing section is on your critical thinking and analytical writing skills rather than on grammar and mechanics. Additional scoring information is provided in the POWERPREP software and in the interpretive leaflet enclosed with your score report.

During the scoring process, your essay responses on the analytical writing section will be reviewed by ETS essay-similarity-detection software and by experienced essay readers. See Independent Intellectual Activity.

## Scores Reported on the New General Test

Three scores will be reported:

- a verbal score reported on a 200-800 score scale, in 10-point increments,
- a quantitative score reported on a 200-800 score scale, in 10-point increments, and
- an analytical writing score reported on 0-6 score scale, in half-point increments.

If you answer no questions at all in a section (verbal, quantitative, or analytical writing), that section will be reported as a No Score (NS).

**Note:** Beginning in Fall 2003, essay responses on the analytical writing section of the General Test will be sent to designated score recipients. If you test on or after July, 1, 2003, your essay responses from your current and previous General Test administrations will be sent as part of your cumulative score record.

## Reporting Your Scores

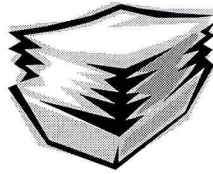
You can view unofficial verbal and quantitative scores at the test center; however, because of the essay scoring process, you will not receive your analytical writing score at that time. Official verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing scores will be sent to you and score recipients within 10 to 15 days after you take the test. Printed score reports are not available at the test center.

At the end of the test, if you choose to report your scores, you may request that they be sent to as many as 4 graduate institutions or fellowship sponsors at no additional charge. If an institution is not listed, ask the test center administrator for the appropriate form to indicate unlisted institutions. Complete the form and turn it in **before** you leave the test center. The form will not be accepted after you leave the test center. If you do not select institutions on the test day, you will be required to pay US\$15 per recipient to have the scores sent at a later date.

Test centers cannot provide printed copies of score reports.

## Retaking the Test

You may take the General Test (computer-based or paper-based) once per calendar month up to 5 times in any 12-month period. This applies even if you cancelled your scores on a test taken previously.



## APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL: HOW TO WRITE THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

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➤ What is the personal statement for?

It gives the Admissions committee a chance to get to know you and determine if you will be a good "fit" with their program.

It is a summary of:

- your interests
- your goals for graduate school and beyond
- your personal background and how it relates to your interest in this field

It also allows you to share your enthusiasm for Psychology.

➤ Format

- The personal statement should be between 1-2 typed pages.
- Some programs look for general essays, which give you a lot of flexibility in terms of what information you include in your statement.
- Other programs have more specific questions. Make sure you read each program's application CAREFULLY and be certain that you are answering the question being asked. Don't cut & paste your essays from one application onto another because your responses are "close enough" to what's being asked. Take the time to tailor your responses to each program to which you apply.
- Capture the reader's attention in your opening paragraph. Pick an "angle" or "hook" that will help you market yourself and make your essay stand out amongst all the others.
- The middle portion of your essay can focus on your interests and experiences. Remember, the personal statement is not an autobiography. Don't feel like you have to give your entire life story. Strike a balance between academic, work-related, and personal information.
- Conclude your essay by addressing what sets a particular program apart from all the others to which you could have applied.



- Finally, most Admissions committee members have 1 question in mind while reading your essay: **"Why should we let you into our school?"** If you address this question throughout your essay, you'll be set!
  
- Some things to include in your personal statement:
  - Why are you pursuing a graduate degree in this particular field?  
Avoid clichés like "I want to help people." Find new ways of expressing the same idea.
  - What experiences have shaped your interest in this area of study?  
Provide illustrative examples.
  - Why do you want to enter this particular program?  
Do your homework!! Visit websites for information. This will help you tailor your essay for every program.
  - What does the program have to offer- what sets them apart?
  - What kind of research is being done there that interests you?
  - Are there faculty members who share your interests?
  - How will this program help you accomplish your goals?
  - What are your professional and research interests?
  - What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
  - What do you have to offer this program? What sets you apart from other applicants? What perspective will you bring to the program?
  
- General tips
  - Be clear & concise in your writing.
  - Provide concrete examples to illustrate what you're writing about.
  - CAREFULLY** read the question being asked and answer it.
  - Stay positive.
    - To address any discrepancies in your academic record, attach an "Addendum" to your personal statement but be sure not to make excuses- explain it without overdoing it.
  - Revise, Revise, Revise!!!
    - Be sure to eliminate any errors.
    - Set aside the rough draft for 1 week; re-read it & make any necessary changes.
    - Have others (professors, advisors, friends, etc.) read your essay and provide constructive feedback.

Another good resource to check out: How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School (Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides, 1989)

- Publications related to your field of interest
- Presentations (these are professional presentations, not speeches you had to do in class)
- Recent research
  - Describe the project, what you did, etc.
- Any service activities (student government, committees)
- Courses you've taught
- Community involvement
- Educational travel (such as study abroad)
  - Include where, when, and why
  - Don't list family vacations; only include things that relate to the position you're applying for ☺
- References
  - You can leave it open by saying "Available upon request."
  - Or, you can list references on an Addendum (a separate sheet you'll attach at the end of the CV)
    - This should list names, titles, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses
- Qualifications/skills
  - List any special skills you'd like to highlight, such as computer skills, language ability, etc.

Another great place to look for information is the internet. There are many sites devoted to writing CVs and many provide samples. This handout was adapted from [www.unf.edu/dept/cdc/publications/curriculum/welcome.htm](http://www.unf.edu/dept/cdc/publications/curriculum/welcome.htm)

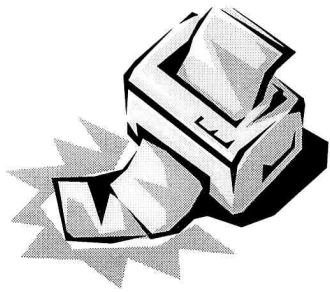
Other resources that might be helpful:

The Curriculum Vitae Handbook: How to Present and Promote Your Academic Career by Rebecca Anthony and Gerald Roe (Rudi Publishing)

Developing a Professional Vita or Resume by Carl McDaniels and Mary Anne Knobloch (Ferguson Publishing)

How to Prepare your Curriculum Vitae by Acy L. Jackson (VGM)





# HOW TO WRITE THE CURRICULUM VITAE

A curriculum vitae (CV) allows you to draw attention to your professional activities and qualifications. It should be *concise, precise, current, and comprehensive*. Overall, *it should present you in the best light possible*.

Things to include in a CV:

(NOTE: No one expects that you will have accomplishments in each of these areas. This is just a sampling of what you can include in your CV.)

- Heading, including **name, address(es), phone numbers (s), "professional-sounding" email address**
- Education, starting with the most recent degree
  - Include the name of the institution you attend (and only those from which you received a degree)
  - City and state where your school is located
  - Degree type (Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science)
  - Major and minor areas
  - GPA (generally, include this only if above 3.0)
- Relevant certifications, including type & year received
- Honors/Awards
- Relevant experiences
  - Include the name of the organization
  - City/state
  - Job title
  - Dates you held the position
  - Brief description of your duties (focus on action verbs!)
- Other experiences
  - If you have a lot to list here, you can break it down into separate categories (i.e., Volunteering, Internship)
- Grants
- Professional Associations (like APA)
  - List your memberships with dates
  - If you've held any positions within these associations, list them too

## FOR ALL STUDENTS WHO WISH A RECOMMENDATION

***IMPORTANT! You should have permission of the faculty member involved prior to using his/her name as a reference and you should plan to discuss the information you provide on this form with the faculty member.***

In order to aid the faculty in the writing of recommendations, please provide the outlined information. This outline should be used as a guide for writing your request.

To: Professor \_\_\_\_\_

Re: \_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- Permanent Address
- Note length of time you have known the faculty member and note capacity of relationship (teacher, advisor, supervisor, etc.)
- Expected Graduation Date, Major(s), Minor(s)
- Overall GPA (grade point average)
- Major GPA
- Minor GPA (if applicable)
- GRE (Graduate Record Examination) Scores
  - Verbal \_\_\_\_\_
  - Quantitative \_\_\_\_\_
  - Analytic \_\_\_\_\_
  - Subject (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

(If you have not taken the GRE, note when you are planning to take it.)
- Any other test score such as MAT
- Courses taken from faculty member (give course number, quarter, year, and grade)
- Discuss extra-curricular activities in which you have engaged while being a student.
- Discuss jobs you have held and positions of responsibility. (Highlight any supervisory and/or professional aspects of these jobs.)
- Discuss special interests you have developed that are related to psychology and/or probable future employment.
- Discuss graduate school and/or career plans that you are considering.
- Discuss academic and personal strengths.
- Address growth areas.
- Point out other things you would like the faculty member to know about you.

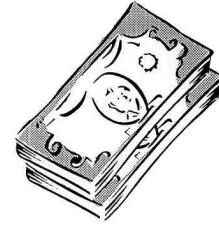


## Questions Frequently Asked by Graduate Schools

1. Why did you apply to this graduate program?
2. What are some of the reasons that you have chosen this profession?
3. Tell me about your experiences in the field.
4. What qualifications do you have that will make you a successful psychologist?
5. Will you tell me a little about yourself as a person?
6. What are your future plans and goals as a psychologist?
7. What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses?
8. What do you bring to the program? What are your special attributes?
9. What are your research interests?
10. Which faculty member do you think you would want to work with?
11. What are your hobbies and interests outside of psychology?
12. How do you work under pressure?
13. How do you deal with problems?
14. What was your most rewarding college experience?
15. What is important to you?
16. What college courses did you like most? Why?
17. What college courses did you like least? Why?
18. If you were not accepted into graduate school, what would you do?
19. How would your best friend describe you?
20. What extra-curricular activities have you participated in? Which did you enjoy the most?
21. Do you have any questions?



# Funding for Graduate School



There are several sources for funding your postgraduate education. Here is a brief overview of the major sources of financial assistance:

## Departmental Funding

Each department at a university is allotted a budget for financial assistance. Most of the department's money comes straight from the university's coffers, but some departments also have endowments of their own, set up by wealthy benefactors and patron organizations. The department uses this budget to support its graduate students. It bestows this funding on graduate students in three principal forms:

- Fellowships are funding packages with no strings attached, which generally include a waiver of tuition and associated fees and a stipend to cover some or all living expenses.
- Research assistantships are like fellowships except that they require the recipient to help a professor with his or her research and other work.
- Teaching assistantships are like fellowships except that they require the recipient to teach a section of a course or to help a professor teach a course.

The dollar amounts of fellowships and assistantships vary widely, from lavish deals to modest financial boosts. Assistantships are generally not available to graduate students until they've completed a year or more of their programs. In many programs, teaching is the greatest source of support for graduate students.

This merit-based departmental funding is the mainstay of financial assistance for graduate students. It's the target you'll be shooting for when you apply to graduate school. The lucky graduate students who get full funding get it here; specifically, they receive fellowships from their departments that include waivers of tuition and all fees, in addition to stipends generous enough to live on (albeit frugally). Most departments are cagey about how much money the department actually has to spend on grad students and exactly how that money is apportioned. The basic mechanisms at work are pretty obvious, though. A department wants a well-rounded department full of the best grad students it can get. It will generally prefer doctoral students over master's-only students, because doctoral students stay around longer, do years of vital work as graduate assistants, and often end up as professors to the greater glory of the department. In many programs, master's students get little or



no departmental aid. The department head has the loudest voice in the apportioning of funds, but every professor can have meaningful input, and even the department secretary or administrator can have a substantial influence on the process.

### **University Funding**

Universities have their own grants and fellowships that can be awarded to graduate students in any program. These often have built-in rules: They're intended for needy students, students who have demonstrated academic excellence, or students in a certain minority group, for example. Generally, students must be recommended by their departments to receive these awards. Recommending grad students for university funding is generally part of the process a department goes through in apportioning its own funds among grad students. This is one of the places where it really pays off to have a strong relationship with one or more professors in your department.

### **Government Funding**

The federal government and many state governments administer various grant, fellowship, and scholarship programs. As a grad student or prospective grad student, you can be considered for funding by these programs in one of two ways. Some government programs require you to submit an application, just as though you were applying for a grant or fellowship from a private foundation. Other programs consider only grad students who are recommended to them by university faculty. You'll end up in the running for the latter sort of grant only if your department (or prospective department) recommends you; there's no point in thinking about those grants too much, since they're out of your hands. When it comes to grants you have to apply for, however, the ball's in your court. Universities usually provide listings of available state fellowship programs, but applying is up to you.

### **Other Funding**

In addition to the major funding available from your university and government, there are many thousands of grants, fellowships, and other funding programs out there, ranging from full-tuition-and-stipend bonanzas to little grants that might pay your rent for a month. These programs are administered by private foundations, for-profit and non-profit companies, obscure governments agencies, and other organizations.

The important thing to note with these kinds of funding is that no department will recommend you for them. You've got to find out about each program yourself, request an application form from the sponsoring organization, and return the completed form.

## Resources

American Psychological Association. (1994). Getting in: A step-by-step plan for gaining admission to graduate school in psychology. Washington, DC: APA.

American Psychological Association: (2003). Graduate study in psychology. Washington, DC: APA.

Barron's how to prepare for the GRE Test, 14<sup>th</sup> edition. (2000). Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series.

Barron's how to prepare for the GRE Psychology. (2001). Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series.

Barron's how to prepare for the MAT: Miller Analogies Test. (2001). Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series.

Buskitch, W. & Sherburne, T. (1996). Preparing for Graduate Study in Psychology: 101 Questions and Answers. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Fretz, B.R. & Stang, D.J. (1980). Preparing for graduate study: NOT for seniors only! Washington, DC: APA.

Jay, M. (1999). Cracking the GRE Psychology, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Princeton Review.

Keith-Spiegel, P. & Wiederman, M. (2000). Complete guide to graduate school admission: Psychology, counseling, and related professions. Hillsdale, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Norcross, J., Sayette, M., & Mayne, T. (2002). Insider's guide to graduate programs in clinical psychology. New York: Guilford Press.

Peterson's annual guides to graduate study: Graduate programs in the humanities and social sciences. Princeton, NY: Peterson's Guides.

Sternberg, R.J. (1997). Career paths in psychology: Where your degree can take you. Washington, DC: APA.

### **Psychology Undergraduate Advising Office (136 Townshend):**

- Information & catalogs on graduate programs
- One-on-one advising
- Applying to graduate school handouts

### **Career Services (05 Brown Hall)**

- Mock interviews; Workshops; Resume/CV drafting &/or review
- Resource library
- Career counseling & peer mentoring