

Tips for Applying to Graduate School in Psychology
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- **Type** application forms if possible, but neat handwriting is probably okay, too.
- Don't forget to **sign** your application forms!
- Unless you strongly object, **waive your right** to see your letters of recommendation.
- If the application asks for **3 letters** of recommendation (a fairly standard number), don't send more unless you have a compelling reason to do so, such as if that fourth letter speaks to a unique experience of relevance to your application profile that is not mentioned in any of your other letters. Graduate programs typically receive many applications and don't want to do too much extra reading.
- Always include a **cv** as part of your application. If you do not currently have one, create one. There are resources at the CEL to help you do this.
- **Supplemental materials** (besides the cv). Again, be careful about sending too many extra items that are not specifically requested. Examples of commonly included items are as follows: papers, posters, or publications (if any); literature from internships and/or other fieldwork experiences. Consult with lots of people about this, though—some people will tell you not to send any extraneous material.
- Try to **tailor your personal statement** for each program. It is fine to use the same personal statement for all your applications, but have at least a paragraph in there (the final paragraph, for instance) that discusses why you'd like to go to each particular program. Many graduate programs are based on a mentor model, where you have one primary advisor right from the beginning. If you already know of particular faculty members you'd like to work with at a given school, this paragraph would be a good place to mention them. If you do this, it's a good idea to mention more than one faculty person. Otherwise, it may make you appear inflexible—or, if the faculty person you mention happens not to be taking graduate students that year (a fact that is generally not publicized upfront), this may negatively impact your application.
- Before you apply, try to find out whether the faculty you are interested in working with are **accepting students** into their labs/groups that year. Some graduate programs will be very forthcoming with this information; others will not. Many graduate programs are based on a mentor model where each incoming student is paired with one (or more) faculty member(s). If you are a good fit for Professor X's research program but s/he happens not to be accepting students that year, then your chances of being admitted into the program might be that much lower. You'd probably want to know this before you apply, if at all possible.

- If you use a template for your personal statement(s), don't forget to **change the name** of the university for each application. I do know of people who forgot to do this who were still admitted to graduate school, but it's an embarrassing mistake that you'd really rather avoid.
- If you are applying to **more than one kind of program** (e.g., neuroscience and experimental, social and clinical, Ph.D. and Psy.D.), be prepared to write different personal statements for each type. As you probably know, different types of programs look for different types of experiences, so you may need to highlight certain aspects of your background/training for some applications and not others.
- Have **many people read** over your application materials, but don't go overboard. Everyone will likely have different feedback, and you may reach a point of diminishing returns where it may become time-consuming and/or unnecessary to incorporate all the comments you receive.
- Some graduate programs will request an **on-campus interview** as part of the application process. Even if graduate programs say the interview is optional, strongly consider going. Not only is this an additional opportunity for them to evaluate you and see how wonderful you are, but it is also a chance for *you* to check *them* out and decide whether this is a place you can see yourself spending the next 4-5 years. However, if expense is an issue, don't break the bank to attend an optional interview. You can always arrange for a phone interview instead.
- If you do attend an interview, make sure you **talk to current graduate students** in the program. They are your best resource for information about what your life will be like once you have matriculated. Definitely ask for specific information about the graduate training, but also remember to ask additional questions such as the following: Can you really live on the stipend in this part of the country? Do graduate students in your program socialize much? Is the atmosphere very competitive? And so on.
- If you have the fortune of receiving **more than one offer** of acceptance, do not hold more than two offers at a time. I'm not sure if the APA has a rule/guideline about this specifically, but it is at the very least professionally discourteous to hold more than two offers at any time. Try to make your decision as quickly as possible and certainly turn down programs right away if you have no intention of accepting their offer. The quicker you decide, the more likely it is that someone else will happily accept your slot.
- Most graduate programs do not allow you to **defer matriculation**. So, if you are not sure whether you want to go to grad school next year, don't apply this year.