Applying to Graduate School in Psychology

Compiled by the Psychology Department Faculty
Our Lady of the Lake University
2007

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GETTING INTO GRADUATE SCHOOL

What are my odds for admission?

Getting into graduate school is very competitive. Prepare yourself and become an attractive applicant. Landrum (2004) culled the APA Graduate School in Psychology volume and analyzed applicant and acceptance data for the some popular areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>PsyD</th>
<th>MA/MS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/Organizational</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Several other types of programs are not represented such as Experimental, Developmental, Cognitive, Psychometrics, etc.

STRATEGIES FOR APPLYING TO GRADUATE PROGRAMS

The Big Questions

- Decide the areas of Psychology in which you are most interested. What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Do you want a Research-focused career? Do you want a Clinical/Counseling-focused career? Or do you want some combination of the two?
- Determine the type of degree you wish to pursue: Masters or Doctoral. What type of work do you want to be doing in 5-10 years? Which degree will get you there?

Finding the Right Program

It is easy to get into an “if anybody will take me, I will go” type of attitude when applying to graduate school. 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. You will dedicate years of your life to this program, and you’ll carry the credentials of that university with you forever. 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?
- Think now about what you want to be doing after graduation, and find out if this Department will prepare you for that type of work.
- What theoretical orientation do you have? Are you a behaviorist? Are you a cognitivist? A humanist? Which programs have a similar orientation?
- Research the theoretical orientation of the Department (i.e., their approach(es) to understanding human experience and treatment interventions) and ensure you agree with it.
- What is the school’s reputation in the specific field of interest?
- Research the type of research work and clinical work (if applicable) done there.
- Look up specific faculty at the university whose research you may be interested in joining.
Devote time to studying the various graduate programs out there as you would study for a course. This is a big decision, so devote study time so that you have confidence in your final decision.

If possible, talk to current students in a graduate program you’re interested in. They give insider information that you will want to have in advance.

Finding Information about Programs
- *Graduate Study in Psychology and Related Fields* (published by the American Psychological Association) lists all graduate programs in North America and can be referenced by state and subject area.
- Rankings of Ph.D. Doctoral Programs -- Princeton Review: *Gourman Report of Graduate Programs*, 8th Edition. (There is no such thing as rankings for Masters programs, so just use the PhD rankings as a rough guide.)

Some Quick FAQs
1. **How many programs should you apply to?**
   - There isn’t a rule about this. Apply to more programs if your academic credentials are less strong, fewer programs if they are more strong. Apply to a range of programs from those Good to Great to Outstanding; you want to get accepted somewhere and ideally you would like a choice of which program to attend.
   - It is not uncommon for clinical/counseling students interested in doctoral training to apply to 10-12 programs (at least 6 programs), including one or two “fall back schools”.
   - Having fall-back schools is recommended.

2. **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.
   - Find out what the average GPA and GRE scores are for the program you're applying to (APA’s *Graduate Study in Psychology and Related Fields* lists this information). Know the likely competition you’re up against in the programs you’re applying to. Talk to professors and graduate students beforehand so that you are aware of how much competition there will be when you apply.

3. **Does a single parent have any chance of surviving graduate school?**
   - It's been done before--by many, in fact. It's certainly difficult, but most single parents are well-acquainted with difficulty, I think. The effect it might have on your family is something you'll have to weigh out and decide for yourself.

Developed by John Gomez, PhD
A TIMELINE FOR APPLYING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PSYCHOLOGY

Junior Year (or 1 year before you plan to apply):

• Research programs
  o Websites
    ▪ www.psychgrad.org
    ▪ www.marquette.edu/17sag/videos.html (on applying to Counseling Programs)
    ▪ sites of individual universities
  o Books on graduate school programs at Library, Career Services, bookstores, such as APA
  o Focus on APA-accredited programs for Clinical, Counseling and School Psychology programs.

• Prepare for GRE: www.ets.org
  o Verbal, Quantitative, Analytical Writing Portions (offered electronically, year round)
  o Psychology subject test (November, December & April, paper tests only)

• and MAT: www.harcourttassess.com

Spring or Summer of Junior year:

• Take GRE when as prepared as possible (don’t take it as a practice)
  o Universities to which you indicated your scores are sent will consider (or average) all scores they receive

• Write Personal Statement
  o Have it reviewed by a professor
  o Revise it accordingly

At least two months before deadlines:

• Request reference letters (well in advance)
  You should be able to demonstrate to your recommenders that you meet entrance criteria for each of the programs to which you are applying.
  Provide those who accept with:
    o Revised personal statement
    o Vita/Resume
    o A copy of your transcript
    o Reference forms with the waiver statement signed (if the waiver is not signed, the programs do not take the letter as seriously)
    o Letter deadline(s)
    o Specific names of programs (e.g., “M.A. in School Psychology” or “Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology”)
    o Full names, titles and addresses of persons to whom the letters should be addressed (please send electronically so we can copy them to the letters)
    o Stamped, addressed OLLU letterhead envelopes for each program

• Send information requested by programs
  o Application
  o Application Fees
  o Personal Statement
  o Official Transcripts (sent directly from Registrar)
  o GRE scores if not sent when you took GRE

Two weeks before deadlines:

• Call graduate admissions offices of programs to see if anything is missing and follow-up if so.
• Prepare for interviews if applying to Clinical, Counseling or School masters or doctoral programs.

Developed by Kathryn Anderson, PhD

GRADUATE RECORD EXAM (GRE)
1. Common measure for comparing applicants
2. GRE is credited as predicting graduate school grades and performance
3. Scores also used to determine eligibility for merit-based grants and fellowships
4. Scores used for teaching and research assistantships
5. Used as a cut-off for some programs (particularly at large state universities)
6. Used to determine financial support/assistance given (financial aid)
7. Scores kept for 5-years for reporting basis

**VERBAL SECTION**
- Time: 30 Minutes
- Format: 30 questions (*38 Paper test)
- Topics: Reading, Analytic Reasoning, Vocabulary
- Types of Questions: Sentence completion, Analogies, Reading Comprehension, Antonyms

**QUANTITATIVE SECTION**
- Time: 45 minutes
- Format: 28 questions (*30 Paper test)
- Topics: Basic Math, Mathematical Concepts, Quantitative Reasoning, Problem Solving, Quantitative Comparisons

**WRITING ASSESSMENT**
- Time: 75 minutes
- Format: 45 minute-essay, 30 minute essay
- Topics: Analysis of an issue, Analysis of an argument

*GRE format not changed in 2007.
Detailed information & registration: [www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)

**MILLER ANALOGIES TEST (MAT)**
1. Another standardized measure to compare applicants
2. The Miller (MAT) uses primarily verbal analogies but also provide some quantitative analogies
3. MAT measures applicant’s fund of knowledge in such disciplines as English literature, history, science, mathematics, fine arts.
4. Accepted at some universities as substitute for GRE
- Time: 60 minutes
- Format: 100 questions (arranged by level of difficulty)
- Topics: Varied
- Types of Questions: Analogies (Plane: Air as Car: (a) motorcycle (b) engine (c) land)

*Information: [www.harcourttarget.com](http://www.harcourttarget.com)

Developed by Regina Cusack, PhD

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A GUIDE FOR WRITING A VITA (AN ACADEMIC RESUME)

1. Personal/Contact Information
   a. Name
   b. Address
   c. Phone number(s)
   d. Email

2. Academic Background
   Undergraduate degree(s), major and minor, certificates

3. Professional/Academic Honors and Awards
   a. McNair Scholars Program
   b. Honor Society memberships
   c. Deans List

4. Technical and Specialized Skills (not a necessary section)
   a. Fluency in a language other than English
   b. Other expertise, particularly developed in specialized work or practicum experience

5. Practica or other experience
   a. Describe PSYC 4391 experience, if you have it
   b. Counseling I and II, if you took them – discuss skills developed in those courses
   c. Describe pre-counseling or pre-counseling/research concentration, if relevant

6. Research Experience
   a. PSYC 4383, 4384 or 4483 brief description of course projects, include that you analyzed data using SPSS, completed research paper in APA style, presented it using Power Point software.
   b. PSYC 5380 Research practicum experience (if you took it)
   c. Describe research or pre-counseling/research concentration, if relevant

7. Presentations at Professional Conferences or Workshops (include dates and locations)

8. Publications (if any; full reference in APA style)

9. Professional Conferences or Workshops attended (if any; include dates and locations)

10. Memberships in professional organizations
    a. American Psychological Association, and/or any of its Divisions
    b. Southwestern Psychological Association
    c. Any other local, state or regional organizations, such as the Texas Council for Family Violence

11. Related/Other Experience
    a. other work experience

12. References
    a. List names and contact information (professional address, phone and e-mail) for 3 people.
       i. At least one a Psych professor
       ii. One could be practicum supervisor
       iii. One could be an employer

Developed by Kathryn Anderson, PhD

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement may be your only opportunity to “speak” directly to the selection committee, so invest some time to do it right. There is a lot of information available on the web for writing your personal statement. Most of it I’ve seen is fairly useful. A lot of the information below is pulled from resources on the web, and I’ve provided some useful sites on this handout. You can also find a couple of sample statements on the web, but I caution you to take these with a grain of salt.
Can a well written personal statement help you? Definitely! Can a poorly written one hurt an applicant? As Fretz and Stang (1980) stated:

“Take the case of the student with a competitive grade point average and good references who was not accepted to any of the 11 programs he applied for. One cannot be sure, but the biographical statement included with his application is the suspected reason. First, it was poorly typed, with many smears and crossed-out words. The spelling and grammar were both appalling. Finally, the content left much to be desired. It was far too long – about 15 pages – and stressed emotional agonies and turning points in his life. Hoping to cure the world of all its evils, this person tried to indicate how a Ph.D. in psychology was necessary to fulfill that end. In short, it was an overstated, ill-conceived essay that may have been received so badly that it overshadowed his other attributes and data.”

**How does the selection committee use a personal statement?**

A selection committee uses the personal statement in several ways:
- To learn about why you’re interested in graduate school.
- To determine how well your interests fit with their program.
- To assess your writing ability.
- To help them differentiate among applicants with similar qualifications and goals.

**What should you include in a personal statement?**

- Your reasons for pursuing a graduate degree in a particular area – why the area interests you and how your interest developed.
- Discussion of how your educational, research, work, or other experiences have motivated and prepared you for graduate work.
- Your career and personal objectives.
- Evidence that you understand what graduate work will involve and your commitment to it.
- Discussion of why you are applying to that particular program.
  - This requires that you do some research into the programs for which you’re applying. Be able to tailor each personal statement to that program. (This also helps you avoid the mistake some applicants make in declaring that they want to “do research on child psychopathology” when the program to which they’re applying does not even offer that.)

**TIPS**

- Carefully check for mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (Notice how awful the previous sentence looks!)
- Don’t use cutesy fonts or paper. (I heard of one applicant who used a different color of paper for each page of her statement to make sure it stood out – not good!)
- Make sure your statement has a professional tone.
- Strive for clarity and conciseness. Don’t use flowery, verbose language to try to impress.
- Avoid platitudes like, “I’m really interested in psychology,” or “I love working with people.”
- Unless otherwise instructed, keep the length to about 1 – 1½ single spaced pages.
- If your application includes poor grades or a low admission test score, it may be better to discuss this in a separate brief attachment to your application. If you address it in your personal statement, keep it short and to the point. Don’t make lengthy excuses, and throw a positive light on it by saying what good things came out of your situation.
- Don’t use the personal statement to explain personal or family situations at length – that is a “red flag” for a selection committee.
- Make sure your statement is well organized and cohesive – it should have a logical flow.
- Have friends read it, and ask more than one faculty member to read it and provide feedback.
• Don’t get married to your first version, and don’t take helpful comments personally. Be prepared to rewrite—always begin your statement on a word processor to make this easier. Also, set it aside at some point for a short while and then look at it again.

• If applicable, mention that you are Hispanic or Mexican-American at least once in your personal statement. Speak of how this strengthens you personally and professionally.

• Sign your statement.

**Useful Sites**

(Credit goes to some of these sites for supplying a portion of the information in this handout.)

http://www.psychgrad.org/ A great site with lots of links for grad school applicants, how to succeed in grad school, etc.

http://www.rpi.edu/dept/lle/writecenter/web/gradapp.html I think this one provides very good advice on writing a personal statement.


http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html Advice on writing a personal statement— I particularly like this one for its list of questions to ask yourself before you start writing.

http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/PersonalStatement.html Advice on writing a personal statement—I also like this one for its suggested questions to ask yourself.

http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/verstate.html Also very good tips on writing a personal statement.

http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/advice/writing_personal_statements.htm Another good site.

**Helpful Books:**


Developed by Loranel Graham, PhD

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**APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL: WRITING A COMPELLING PERSONAL STATEMENT**

by Bette L. Bottoms and Kari L. Nyssse - University of Pennsylvania  (This article was published in Eye on Psi Chi, Vol. 4 Iss.1 and is available at http://www.psich.org/pubs/articles/article_98.asp)

Your first step toward a graduate degree in psychology is to apply to graduate programs that are right for you. Your goal is to do everything possible to ensure admission to at least one, and hopefully more, programs. The typical psychology graduate school application package includes four crucial elements: Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, official undergraduate transcripts, letters of recommendation, and a personal statement from the applicant. Different schools, programs, and faculty members attach different relative value to each element, but all are important. In general, most programs expect applicants to score highly on each subtest of the GRE, maintain a strong GPA during college course work, submit excellent letters of recommendation, and write an impressive personal statement. Of these four elements, students typically agonize a great deal over the personal statement, perhaps because they have never written one before, because it seems awkward to write about oneself, or because the task is not well defined by graduate programs. In this brief article, we outline basic guidelines for writing a persuasive personal statement. Note that our own expertise is in research-oriented graduate programs; consequently, our advice is largely specific to applications to such programs. Even so, students interested in purely applied programs should also benefit from many of our tips. Finally, keep in mind that there is no one perfect formula for a personal statement. By the very nature of the task, everyone's personal statement will be unique, yet the basic suggestions we provide can be incorporated into any personal statement.
The Basics

Keep four basics in mind as you write your personal statement: length, writing style, tone, and the need for feedback and revision.

Length. In general, a good personal statement will be around two single-spaced pages. In our experience, shorter statements provide too little information; longer statements are redundant and wordy. Longer statements might be fine if you have substantive issues to discuss. For example, if you have a lot of research experience, you may need to exceed two pages to describe your work in sufficient detail. Above all, aim for quality rather than quantity. No reader will appreciate your stretching two pages worth of information into six or seven pages. Remember, readers will be assessing the content of your personal statement as well as your ability to communicate effectively and concisely.

Writing style. Your personal statement is your opportunity to create a good first impression. This means your writing must be clear and correct. No one is impressed by careless grammatical and typographical errors. Failure to attend to such details raises concerns about conscientiousness and reliability. Remember, paying attention to detail and writing well are extremely important research skills. You also should attend carefully to your use of vocabulary. Large doses of unusual or obscure vocabulary will only distract readers and cause them to doubt your writing ability. To learn more about this and other writing errors, buy yourself a copy of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* and read every word. This little book is a classic for a very good reason.

Tone. Do not misinterpret the meaning of personal in the phrase personal statement! This statement is not a place for you to espouse your personal philosophy of life, to describe in detail your first romance, or to tell the story of the time you were bitten by the neighbor's dog and subsequently developed an anxiety disorder. Instead, think of the statement as a professional statement. Write about the activities and experiences that led you to apply to graduate school and that have prepared you for its rigors. Provide concrete, detailed examples of your experiences and abilities when possible (see below for more information about content). Above all, write in a professional tone that conveys your self-confidence: You need to showcase your abilities and convince the reader that you are smart and driven to succeed. The personal statement is a chance to sell yourself--now is not the time to be overly humble, hiding your assets. Of course, you should not misrepresent yourself, and you should avoid sounding pompous.

Feedback and revision. After you have drafted your statement, solicit detailed feedback from one or more professors and incorporate their suggestions into subsequent drafts. It is especially useful to obtain feedback from psychology faculty, particularly those who make graduate admissions decisions themselves. Few professors will consider this an imposition--as long as you give them enough time. Start writing early and give your professors at least two weeks to read your statement. Never wait until the eleventh hour to begin writing and then expect your professors to drop everything and read your statement only days before the application deadline! (Follow that advice in approaching faculty for recommendation letters, too.)

Content: The Key Components of a Statement

Now that we have covered the basics of how to write a personal statement, let's focus on what to write. At least four key components should be included: your previous research experience, current research interests, other relevant experience, and career goals. (As you consider our advice, you might find it helpful to keep in mind the characteristics valued by graduate programs as described in an article by Appleby, Keenan, and Mauer in the Spring 1999 issue of *Eye on Psi Chi*.)

Previous research experience. The faculty evaluating your application (often your potential advisors) are particularly interested in your research experience, so describe each project you've worked on in detail. Aim to convince the reader that you understood all aspects of the work, not just your specific duties. For example, do not
write "I entered some data for Dr. Raney's political opinion survey." Instead, describe the details of your involvement. Who supervised your work? Did you do the research to fulfill a laboratory class requirement, for other class credit, or as an independent study? Most importantly, explain the theory, methods, and results of the research. Show that you made the effort to understand the scientific goals of the research (e.g., by reading articles related to the research and discussing the work with your research supervisors). Also, note any tangible products that resulted from the project, such as class papers, conference presentations, or publications. If you were an author on a conference presentation or publication, mention that in your statement and include a copy of the publication in your application packet.

By working on research projects, you acquired valuable research skills such as computer programming, data entry, literature review, etc. Discuss all such skills in a manner that conveys the importance of the skill, no matter how simple it may be. For example, notice the different impression created when you say that you "organized mass mailings, prepared subject materials, and conducted literature searches" rather than "stuffed envelopes, stapled subject packets, and ran library errands." Not only does it sound more impressive, but it implies that you understood the importance of the skill within the overall research enterprise.

Finally, state how your research experiences shaped your attitude toward research in general and toward research in a given domain. Explain why your experience did or did not make you want to continue working in that area of psychology (or other discipline).

Current research interests. Describe the topics within psychology that most interest you now. You should have a good idea of this before you apply, because you should pick potential graduate programs based on the fit between your and the faculty's research interests. This doesn't mean you have to know exactly what you want to study. For example, you might be interested in two or three areas of research such as stereotyping, small group dynamics, and self-esteem. That's fine, because all of those topics can be studied within a program of social psychology, and you will find many social psychology programs with faculty who have one, if not two or three, of those interests. In general, it's best to be neither too broad ("all research in social psychology") nor too narrow ("research on the effects of sleep deprivation on 5- to 6-year-olds' math skills") in defining your interests.

Once you have clarified your research interests and identified schools with faculty whose research programs could accommodate those interests, tailor your personal statement so that it will stand out to faculty whose research interests you. To do this intelligently, you need to do your homework. Familiarize yourself with the research conducted by faculty members at the programs you are considering by reading their Web pages (if available), by locating articles they have published, and/or by contacting them and requesting reprints and preprints of their papers. (Such preapplication contact sends a positive message to the faculty member about your interest in his or her work.) Then, in your statement, mention what interested you about various professors' work. State your preferred research interests, but express your openness to studying related topics—such as stereotyping, small group dynamics, and self-esteem. That's fine, because all of those topics can be studied within a program of social psychology, and you will find many social psychology programs with faculty who have one, if not two or three, of those interests. In general, it's best to be neither too broad ("all research in social psychology") nor too narrow ("research on the effects of sleep deprivation on 5- to 6-year-olds' math skills") in defining your interests.

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Other relevant experience. Potential future advisors will also want to know about other experiences that make you particularly qualified for graduate work or that explain your decision to pursue a career in psychology. For example, you might want to highlight particular psychology classes you've taken, such as laboratory courses in which you studied scientific writing style, or special topics courses that piqued your interest in certain psychological issues. You may also want to describe work, internship, or volunteer experiences that pulled you
toward a particular subfield of psychology (or pushed you away from another subfield or field). For example, you might describe how you struggled to decide whether to pursue clinical or social psychology, and how your experience as an emergency mental health intern helped you decide.

As we mentioned earlier, very personal, emotional self-disclosures are nearly always best avoided. There may be exceptions; for example, revelations about friends' or relatives' personal experiences with mental illness might be illustrative concerning your reasons for pursuing a particular interest in clinical psychology, but even then, such topics should be discussed professionally and concisely.

Career goals. The final component is one that is often overlooked—a statement of what you would like to do as a psychologist after graduating from the program. If you have chosen to pursue graduate training, you must have at least a general idea of the type of career you would like to have once you receive your degree. Convince your reader that you understand your options, and explain why you favor a particular career goal. What are your options? If you envision yourself in a research-oriented job, you could work in an academic setting as a professor who conducts research and teaches. Research positions are also available in nonacademic business or government settings. If you are considering more applied work, you might want to work as a consultant in a business organization or you may want to go into private practice as a therapist. (Consult the American Psychological Association for more information on career options in psychology: www.apa.org/students/career.html.) It is fine to discuss a couple options and to be uncertain about which option you will likely pursue, but in any case, make sure you are up-front about your intentions and that the options you are considering match the goals of the program. For example, you should not apply to research-oriented programs if you do not intend to conduct research after you graduate.

Conclusion

We hope we have dispelled some of the mystery surrounding the personal statement, and that some of our advice will be helpful to you. Just remember: The clearer you are with yourself about your goals and interests, the clearer you will be in writing about them in your personal statement. Be honest, professional, and self-confident. Then rest assured that you represented yourself accurately and fairly, and that, in turn, you have maximized the chances that admissions outcomes will be driven by accurate assessments of your potential fit with the programs to which you apply.

REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

If you want a faculty member to write you a letter of recommendation for graduate school, YOU SHOULD:

1. Discuss it with the faculty member face-to-face. Do not just leave off forms to be filled out.
2. Have taken at least two courses with the faculty member, and performed at a high level in those courses (“A” grades or a combination of “A” and “B” grades). It is also preferable that we have had other academic interactions outside of class.
3. Be able to demonstrate that you meet entrance criteria for each of the programs to which you are applying.
4. Provide all of the materials well in advance (at least 3 weeks!) of the deadline date (be watchful of school breaks when we might not receive the materials).
5. Send to the faculty member on e-mail a typed table listing the name of each school, to whom the letter should be addressed, the name of the program to which you are applying and the deadline date for the letter. Add
clear instructions regarding whether: (a) I mail the letter myself or (b) you will pick it up from me and deliver it yourself. Some faculty prefer for the letter to be mailed.

6. Provide an unofficial transcript with the courses you have taken from the faculty member highlighted. Add a typed description of any other academic interactions we may have had (e.g., independent study, club activities, work study, etc.).

7. Provide a resume or vita. Include calculations for overall course GPA and Psychology courses GPA.

8. Provide a copy of the personal statement that you have written for graduate schools.

9. Provide all of the reference forms from the graduate schools (together at the same time, if possible), with typed, addressed and stamped #10 business-sized Envelopes. Do not put your name as the return address. Make sure you fill in your name on the forms and sign the waiver statement (check “yes”, that you will waive the right). Graduate schools do not consider recommendation forms on which the waiver is not signed as heavily as those on which the waiver is signed.

10. Keep in touch. Whether or not you are accepted, we are interested in what you are doing. Drop one of us a postcard or an e-mail message (we will share it). Tell us your plans and your new address.

Developed by John Gomez, PhD

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**INTERVIEWS**  [particularly relevant for practitioner programs]

**Preparation**
- Know the Department well, so that you can ask informed questions and participate in discussions.
- Know the research conducted in the Department, theoretical orientations, and the unique strengths; you should be able to mention a specific researcher or two (e.g., Peterson, Chang) who you would like to work with at the university.
- Be prepared to describe why this particular graduate program is where you want to be. What do you like about it specifically? Why is this place a good fit for you and your goals?
- Be prepared to state a career goal concisely. Describe where you plan to be in 10 years in one short statement. Be brief, because wordiness suggests that you are just making this up because you have to come up with an answer rather than having long pondered this issue (such that you can now be direct and confident in stating this).
- Be prepared to state a guiding belief(s), the core beliefs that guide you through life and dictate how you conduct yourself in professional situations. Beliefs here should be secular, not spiritual. For example, state you are entering this profession because you’ve believed your whole life in service and helping others. Here you’re showing insight and self-awareness; in short, maturity.
- Have your own questions for the interviewer, things about the Department you’re curious about or want to explore further. You will likely be given the opportunity to ask questions, and this can surprise students who feel that they are solely the ones to be asked questions.

**During the Interview**
- Be articulate.
- Show them a person with depth, self-awareness, and maturity. Show them a complete Person, not just an Applicant.
- Make clear how you will add something to the community and to the world, not just that you want to have this or that future job.
• Talk briefly about the Person you want to become, not just the professional you hope to be. This is a sign of your maturity and preparedness for a career where you’ll make judgments about other people’s lives and other people’s futures. Clinical and counseling programs require a scholar who is also somewhat extroverted, an outwardly warm, caring, thoughtful and mature person.

• Describe any discrete experiences that helped you know that this field is the right one for you (e.g., the experience inspired you). Focus on how the experience opened your eyes to the power and potential of human beings when they have good mental health.

• Note: Only describe experiences that you would feel free discussing with a stranger during an interview. DO NOT talk about any personal problems you had or psychotherapy you needed or mental health diagnosis you have, even if they do exist (do NOT believe in the empathy of the admissions committee, like “if anyone would understand personal problems, these people would”). Ultimately, only describe experiences that strengthened you intellectually and personally.

• With Ph.D. programs, you are studying the “science of psychology”. With clinical Ph.D. programs, you are applying “psychological science” (use these phrases, in interviews and in your personal statement).

• Sound fascinated and slightly in awe of human strengths, but inquisitive with a scientific tone (like “mechanisms for coping” is a good sample phrase).

• Thank the interviewer at the end with a handshake and good eye contact.

Special Topic -- Regarding discussion of your Hispanic ethnicity [if applicable]:

• This topic could arise in graduate programs around the nation where there are very few ethnic minorities. Even if you never even think about this issue, be prepared for the topic so you don’t look shocked during the interview. If an interviewer asks or appears to broach the topic, remember that the question is usually asked to explore unique perspectives and strengths that you may bring to the graduate program if admitted.

• Mention that you are “Mexican American” or “Hispanic” (not “Chicano”) in the interview (and at least once in your personal statement). Speak of how this strengthens you personally and professional, for example, you’re interested in serving ethnic minority communities or how it adds diversity to your observations about traditional psychology.

• Programs care about your ethnicity only as it is a “value-added” characteristic in your application. So describe how it gives you a vantage point that complements traditional views of psychological science, or how it inspires you, or how it makes you want to serve or conduct special types of research.

• If you’re bilingual (e.g., English and Spanish), discreetly mention it somewhere in your application packet.

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