

Typical Application Materials (and How to Prepare Them)

Although every graduate program is different, there are some basic components that many of them will require. This document will walk you through common application materials, and provide advice for how best to prepare these materials.

Grades

Your GPA is going to be one key piece of information most graduate programs will require. Some programs might have a minimum GPA – if you do not meet the minimum, you should not apply to that school because you will not be considered. Some schools may also request information about your major GPA, or the GPA for your last two years – you can obtain this information by getting a subject or chronological transcript (respectively). Most schools will require an official transcript, which you can order from the National Student Clearinghouse website: <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/ficecode/00236000>

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

The GRE is a standardized test similar to the SAT or ACT, which is required for application to some graduate programs. Be sure to check first if the program that you are applying to requires you to submit GRE scores, as this can vary program to program. There are several types of GRE tests, including the general test (which is the one most commonly required), as well as a subject test (specifically for psychology; generally only required if you are applying to PhD programs). Information about how to take the GRE can be found here: <https://www.ets.org/gre/test-takers.html> . There are many books that can help you prepare for the GRE, which can be found here: <https://www.thoughtco.com/best-gre-prep-books-4158990>

Research Experience

Most graduate programs expect that you have some research experience. Consider how your courses have developed your research skills. We also highly recommend working with a faculty member on their research team to gain additional experience. If you have questions about how to get involved on a research team, talk to your faculty advisor.

Other Extracurricular Experiences

Some graduate programs prefer applicants with more applied experiences. These experiences might include internships, work experience, service work, extracurricular clubs or honor societies. Think about what skills might relate to work you'll do in your future graduate program or career, and try to find experiences that would help you grow those skills. For example:

- A student interested in a clinical program specializing in Alzheimer's can get experience with their population of interest by working or volunteering in a memory care facility.
- A student interested in I-O psychology can learn relevant tasks by taking an HR internship.
- A student interested in counseling or social work can develop their skills serving different populations through volunteering or working with local clinics or group homes.

You can share these experiences on a resume, in your personal statement, or both.

Resume/Curriculum Vitae

Some schools will ask for a resume or curriculum vitae (CV), where you can share information about your previous jobs, professional experiences, research experiences, publications, presentations, and volunteer experiences. You can find an overview of writing a resume or CV for graduate school here: <https://www.visualcv.com/blog/how-to-write-a-cv-for-grad-school/>

Personal Statement

A personal statement is typically a two-page document highlighting your past achievements and how you are a good fit for the program you are applying to. These statements can be tricky to write (especially if you are uncomfortable highlighting your accomplishments) so we recommend that you get feedback from the Career Development Center and a faculty member you know well. Psi Chi has put together a guide for how much to write about various topics here: <https://www.psichi.org/page/134EyeSum09bSleigh#.Y871oXbMKUk> They have also put together a guide for how much personal information to disclose here: <https://www.psichi.org/page/011EyeFall196aOsborne#.Y871pHbMKUk> We have also provided some examples of effective and ineffective personal statements here on the Careers page of the Psychology Department website: <https://hss.mnsu.edu/academic-programs/psychology/careers/>

Letters of Reference

Many schools also request Letters of Reference or Recommendation Letters. These are letters someone writes on your behalf to indicate that you are up to the challenge of graduate school. We have the following advice for obtaining these letters.

- **Choose your writers carefully.** Ideally, your letter writer will have a good sense of your academic and/or research capabilities. Your best choice will be a faculty member in your area of study who you've worked with (in classes or on research). Your second best option is faculty in other programs who can attest to your quality as a student and scholar. Employers can also be an option, especially if you have been out of school for a while. You will want to avoid using friends, family, clergy, or other writers who cannot speak to your academic abilities.

- **Be courteous when you make your requests.** Letters take time to write, so when you request them, be courteous and as helpful to your letter writers as possible. You should ask (not demand!) a letter, and if a writer is hesitant because they don't feel they know you well, you may want to consider a different writer instead. You also want to give your letter writers adequate time to craft the letter (we recommend 4 weeks minimum). We also suggest offering them the following materials in case these would be helpful to them as they write the letter:
 - A list of all the schools you plan to apply to, along with their letter due dates, and information on how to submit the letter.
 - An explanation for why you would like them to be a reference. This might include specific classes you've taken with them or projects you've worked on together.
 - Application materials that you have available (e.g., CV, personal statement, unofficial transcripts).
 - A list of accomplishments and qualifications you'd like the letter writer to highlight.

- **Waive your right to view your recommendation letters.** People will generally let you know if they can't write you a good letter. However, many graduate application committees will not seriously consider letters of recommendation if you don't waive your right to view the letters.
- **Monitor your letters.** Faculty often have many letters to write, so it is easy to lose track of them. It is your responsibility to check in and make sure letters are being received. It is fine to send faculty a gentle reminder about a letter if a deadline is getting close (less than a week away).
- **Thank your letter writers.** Always thank your letter writers by sending them a thank you note (a gift is not necessary or expected). This ensures that you'll maintain a good relationship with them (you might meet them again—some fields are very small!). Keep them updated as you hear back about your applications – faculty are excited to hear these updates. This can also let them know to save their letters in case you do not get in, but plan to apply next year or next semester.