The Queens College Undergraduate Psychology Committee Brief Graduate School Preparation Guide

Fall 2022

This guide is designed to serve students interested in applying to and preparing for graduate programs (master's and doctoral) in Psychology, Neuroscience, and related fields.

As this is a brief guide, we wanted to capture the most important elements of applying to and preparing for graduate programs. On this guide, we will be illustrating important considerations and sharing necessary information students need to be aware of before and during their graduate school application journey.

We will also provide links to our <u>Community Resource Database</u>, which has more in-depth information, as well as additional graduate school guides created by other students, colleges, and organizations that are longer and more detailed. For our purposes, we wanted students to be aware of elements *mostly left unsaid* when preparing for graduate programs.

We hope you all find this guide useful, and it serves you as an introductory tool to graduate education and professional development. If you have any questions about this guide or graduate school and careers in Psychology and related fields in general, please email us at qcpsychcouncil@gmail.com.

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Before Applying to Graduate School

What is graduate school and what is a graduate degree?

Graduate school or graduate programs are the next step after completing your undergraduate journey. Graduate degrees are those that signify completion of a graduate program. Like a Bachelor's degree signifies the completion of an undergraduate education, graduate degrees signifies the completion of a Master's or Doctoral degree.

Graduate Degrees:

Master's Degree: A master's degree in is a graduate-level degree that generally involves 2 to 3 years of study after you complete your undergraduate (bachelor's) degree. Master's degrees include, but are not limited to:

- Master of Arts (MA)
- Master of Science (MS)
- Master of Education (MSEd)

- Master of Social Work (MSW)
- Master of Public Health (MPH)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA)

More jobs are available for people who hold a master's in psychology than for those with a bachelor's, including serving as a counselor or research assistant in environments such as:

- Career Centers
- Public Schools and Colleges
- Government Agencies
- Human Resource Divisions

- Law Enforcement Institutions
- Mental Health Clinics or Hospitals
- Private Research Laboratories
- Non-Profit Organizations

Doctoral Degree: A doctoral degree is a graduate-level degree that generally involves 4 to 8 years of study after you complete your undergraduate (bachelor's) degree. Doctoral degrees include, but are not limited to:

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)
- Doctor of Medicine (MD)

- Doctor of Public Health (DPH)
- Doctor of Social Work (DSW)
- Doctor of Education (EdD)

You must hold a doctoral degree in most circumstances if your goal is to become a psychologist. Within psychology, you can choose from two different types of doctoral programs: a research-focused Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program or a practice-focused Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) program. If you are interested in psychiatry, you would need to pursue a medical degree (MD).

The **PhD** is the traditional doctoral-level degree. PhD psychology programs are plentiful, but also fairly competitive, with more rigorous admissions criteria. PhD programs typically focus on research. PhD psychology programs also provide training for those who want to practice psychology in clinical settings.

A **PsyD** is typically pursued by individuals interested in the hands-on practice of psychology. PsyD programs provide training in applied topics such as diagnosing mental illness, performing psychological assessments, and conducting clinical interventions. The PsyD focuses less on research and thus requires fewer research/statistics courses, however, research does remain an important component of this degree.

 st^* Payment information for both master's and doctoral degrees are provided on our overview table below. st^*

Before Applying to Graduate School

What are the different fields and concentrations of Psychology I can pursue?

Psychology has many different fields and subfields. While you are deciding your next step, it is important to consider which field is important to you and why you want to pursue it and contribute to it.

This will help you better determine which graduate program you want to attend and what prerequisites are needed to successfully apply and thrive in a program. Below are some common concentrations:

- Behavioral Psychology
- Clinical Psychology
- Cognitive Psychology
- Counseling Psychology
- Critical Psychology
- Developmental Psychology
- Educational Psychology

- Experimental Psychology
- Forensic Psychology
- Health Psychology
- Industrial/Organizational Psychology
- Neuropsychology
- Quantitative and Measurement Psychology
- Social/Personality Psychology

Below we have additional resources to help you understand the different fields of psychology and their related professions.

- a. Career Advising from the Department of Psychology
- b. Undergraduate Psychology Committee Presentation on Fields and Degrees in Psychology

Does the career I want require a graduate or professional degree?

Before pursuing a graduate degree, it is important to ask yourself this question. Many professions within Psychology and its related fields do not require more schooling than a Bachelor's degree. However, many Psychology and Neuroscience students end up pursuing graduate degrees.

<u>Our career information guide for careers in Psychology, Neuroscience, and related fields</u> has information about select careers and the degrees needed to work in them.

Committee Consideration: Do I want to take a break after completing my bachelor's?

As a committee, we believe taking a break from school is a valid option that should be considered. Students, it is okay to take a step back and reprioritize your goals for your future personal and professional lives.

What can I do during my break: Maintaining Physical and Mental Health

Taking a break can allow you reorganize your future goals by connecting with your network and support systems, spend time with friends and family, or taking a well-deserved and necessary vacation. Additionally, taking this time to focus on your physical and mental health by having routine doctor's visits and checking-in with a therapist, if needed, would be greatly beneficial.

Prioritizing your overall well-being early will help you in the long-run, which is often neglected due to challenges such as constraints of time or healthcare costs. Graduate programs are much more challenging than undergraduate programs, so taking time needed to refresh is not only beneficial, but necessary.

Before Applying to Graduate School

What can I do during my break: Academic and Professional Activities

Your break doesn't solely have to be away from school or your professional goals. You can continue working or volunteering in clinical, research, or in social services capacities that can be used to build up your resume/CV, help you save money for graduate school, and give you the skills and experiences you need to see what it is like working in your desired field.

Please keep in mind that there are PAID opportunities for work in Psychology, Neuroscience, and related fields. While it is challenging to find paid work, there many opportunities across various spaces. Always tune in with your network and mentors for opportunities that can be used for your future.

We have collected a host of resources on our <u>Community Resource Database</u> that addresses finding work during and after completing your undergraduate degree. Below are some resources from our database dedicated to such:

- **a.** Our main resource database includes resource compilations and information from different organizations on internships, summer programs, research experiences, job listings, and connecting with diverse psychological organizations: **Main Resource Database.**
- **b.** Our upcoming events document collects upcoming events, workshops, program sessions, and other opportunities students can looking forward and apply to: **Upcoming Events**.
- **c.** Our archived resources folder illustrates previous opportunities offered to students, such that students can review requirements for these positions, as well as anticipate and prepare for these when they are offered again: Archived Resources.

What can I do during my break: Final Thoughts

We recognize that for most students, taking time-off can be a difficult choice to make due to needing to have full-time or part-time work for survival and quickly continuing school to maintain personal and professional timelines.

We hope that by considering taking some time-off, however feasible, can relieve the pressure of being in school or an academic setting for an extended period of time. Enjoying more of what life has to offer than the continued focus of constantly working or being occupied is life sustaining, not a deficiency or weakness.

Next Steps: Application Preparation

If you are now certain that you will be applying to graduate school after assessing which field you would like to go into and if that field and related career needs a higher degree, your next step will be to determine which graduate degree level you want to pursue.

We have created two different tables. The table right below is a graduate school considerations table, in which we share with you all some things to consider while you are applying for school and summarizes the points we made so far. The second table you will find at the end of this guide demonstrates differences between master's and doctoral programs. This table goes over similarities and key differences of these programs in order to help you make an informed decision on which program to apply to.

Preparing to Apply to Graduate School

As mentioned previously, the table below provides students with considerations when applying to graduate programs and summarizes questions students should be asking themselves as they begin to prepare to apply to programs.

Considerations and Questions When Applying to Graduate Programs	
Personal Considerations	Financial Considerations
 Am I ready for the time commitment of this program? Do I feel prepared (academically, financially, and socially) to start this program? What are my strengths and where can I improve in preparation for the program? How will my personal and social life intersect with being in this program? Am I comfortable being away from my family and friends? (if program requires moving) 	 What is the cost of this program? How much will this program cost during its duration? What scholarships or internal funding is available for this program? Will I be able to afford it? Am I comfortable with student loan debt? Where is the program located? Will I need to move and find housing? Am I comfortable with moving to a new city/state?
 Is the program license-eligible or a research program? How long after I complete this program will I be able to find work? Will only need a master's-level degree for this profession? Or will a doctoral-level degree be needed? 	 The APAGS, APA's Graduate Student group, has created a financial disclosures scale for current and prospective students to monitor financial considerations for graduate school. Source: https://www.apa.org/apags/resources/fees-tool
Programmatic Items	Career and Professional Development
 What are the application requirements for this program? What is the application deadline for this program? What are the fees associated with applying to this program? How long will this program take to complete? 	 Will this be a supportive program for me and my goals? Will I have a faculty mentor? Does the program offer professional development: clinical, career, or research opportunities that I am interested in? Is there space for connecting with fellow students?

Summary questions before you determine the field you want to work in:

- Do I want to work within the topics of this field?
- Are the questions being asked in this field important to me?
- How quickly will I be able to work after getting a degree from this field?
- Does this career provide enough financial support to help me reach my personal, academic, and professional goals?
- Will I be content spending time learning and working in this field?

Preparing to Apply to Graduate School

Committee Consideration: Assumptions when applying to graduate school.

To help students avoid making small mistakes that can lead to difficulties when applying to programs, we have listed a few tips students can consider as they prepare to apply to graduate school.

Meeting Program Requirements:

- Students should carefully review all program requirements before submitting their applications.
- Programs receive hundreds of applications per application cycle and having all the appropriate requirements met is the first step to a successful application review.
- Applying to programs without meeting requirements can lead to rejections. For example, if a
 program's minimum GPA requirement is a 3.0 and a student is applying with a GPA of 2.8, they will
 most likely get rejected, even if their other materials are acceptable.

Maintaining a Standard Grade Point Average (GPA):

- We encourage students to maintain a fairly standard overall GPA throughout your undergraduate journey.
- For doctoral and master's programs, the minimum GPA requirement can typically start at a 3.0.
 - GPA's lower than a 3.0 will most likely result in rejection from a master's or doctoral program.
 - GPA's at a 3.0, while challenging, can lead to acceptance into a program if other aspects of the application (personal statement, letters of recommendation, GRE scores) are exceptional.
 - Competitive GPA's for doctoral programs are typically above a 3.5.

Gaining Experiential Learning Experiences:

- We encourage students to begin acquiring experiential learning experiences early, such as becoming a
 research assistant in a lab, volunteering at a hospital or clinic, or having experiences in psychology-related
 spaces.
 - Ideally, having these experiences starting towards the end of your freshman year or sophomore year will allow you space to grow and learn and not have you overwhelmed in your senior year looking for experiences.
- Programs are looking for well-rounded applicants, and by having experiences outside the classroom, demonstrates your ability to work in the field and applying your education to practice.
- Experiential experiences also are a highlight during your personal statement, as you will be able to discuss
 how these experiences shaped your understanding of Psychology and how graduate education can build
 on your foundational knowledge.
 - For PhD programs, emphasis is put on prior research experiences and working in research labs. Students do not to need to have published research to be competitive for a program, however, having a publication increases chances for acceptance.
 - For PsyD programs, emphasis is put on prior clinical experiences. Students do not need clinical experiences to be competitive for a program, however, clinical experiences working in a hospital, clinic, or school will increase chances for acceptance.
- Please check-in with your professors or psychology advising on how to procure opportunities.
 - Additionally, you can check out our <u>Community Resource Database</u> for more resources and opportunities.

Applying to Graduate School

What are the application materials needed for graduate school?

There are several items needed for students when they apply to graduate school. This includes GRE General and Subject exam scores, letters of recommendation, personal statement or a statement of purpose, curriculum vitae (CV) and resumes, and official transcripts.

Many of these are also applicable if students are applying for work, so preparing for graduate programs vice versa preparing for work, allows to students to have these materials ready whenever a potentially opportunities arises. Below, we give descriptions and tips for each element.

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and the GRE Psychology Subject Exam:

For admission to a graduate program, you *may* have to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The general GRE test covers verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing.

The GRE is primarily a computer-based exam, with the beginning portion of the exam dedicated to writing essays. There is also a GRE subject test in psychology. The GRE is administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and waivers are available that can reduce the fee.

The GRE Psychology subject exams are largely for doctoral programs. Master's programs generally do not ask for the subject exam. The subject exam covers topics similar to what you have learned in your undergraduate psychology courses such as: history of psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, abnormal psychology, and cognitive psychology. Both GRE's have limited test dates, so make sure to plan accordingly.

For a comprehensive overview and resources, please visit Magoosh, which is a testing service geared towards preparing for the GRE. Resources are below:

- Main website: https://magoosh.com/gre/
- Study Guide and Plans: https://magoosh.com/gre/2020/gre-study-plans-and-guides/
- Study Schedules: https://gre.magoosh.com/study-plans
- Free GRE Exam: https://magoosh.com/gre/gre-practice-test/

We are not sponsored or affiliated with Magoosh in any way. We are sharing these resources because they are free and shared publically.

Some graduate programs are participating in the "GRExit" movement, where they have removed the GRE as an admissions tool. However, many programs still use the GRE as a metric for entry. Below is a list of Doctoral Psychology and Neuroscience Programs, their requirements, and if they removed the GRE:

- United States and Canada Doctoral Programs in Psychology and Neuroscience Admissions
- At the moment there is not a list available for masters-level social work, mental health counseling, or school counseling available, as these programs availability eclipse doctoral programs nationwide. We encourage students to seek information on respective program websites.

Applying to Graduate School

How to Start Preparing for the GRE:

The hardest part about preparing is starting. Try to start small and then build from there. You do not have to do a lot today or tomorrow, but start with doing something test-related.

- You can start by visiting the Magoosh site, watching GRE Videos, answering practice questions through
 websites, test banks, or test-prep apps, reading about the exam, or looking up schools that want the
 general GRE or Psychology GRE Subject Exam.
- Your initial goal should be to get acquainted with the exam. You can start by doing the things mentioned above, or begin taking practice tests. Getting into the flow of how the test looks like, regardless of your score, can help you map out a study plan. Magoosh also has a list of study schedules/timelines.
- Generally, people will study for a couple hours each week for 2 months before taking the GRE. However, it's most important to set a study schedule that works for you.
 - It is normal to feel scared and overwhelmed as standardized testing is scary and not indicative of your strengths as an applicant or person. Your exceptional work and accomplishments will speak for themselves!

Letters of Recommendation:

Graduate programs require 2-4 letters of recommendation. These letters can come from professors, advisors, research mentors, or employers. For most grad programs, letters from full-time professors are preferred, and the best way to get to know full-time professors is by becoming a research assistant in their lab or taking a class taught by them. Ask your potential letter writers early in the application process so that you can ensure you have enough recommendations.

We have more guidance on letters of recommendation through the following resources below:

- <u>Communicating with Professors Guide</u>: This guide aims to help students begin communicating with their professors. Whether it is joining a lab or asking for a letter of recommendation, we have guidance here on how to approach this task.
- Community Resource Database Workshop Q&A: Several students asked about gaining letters of
 recommendation if they don't communicate with a professor or decide to take a break from school.
 We have guidance here on how students can approach asking for a letter in those circumstances.

Personal Statements and Statement of Purpose:

When applying to graduate school, a personal statement should explain why their program is a good fit for you. Your job is to stand out among other applicants.

In contrast, a statement of purpose answers specific questions about why you chose the field, your interest in the particular program, your proposed plan of study, and your career goals.

Applying to Graduate School

Tips on Writing a Strong Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose:

These materials are extensions of your academic journey and hold together other aspects of your application like your transcript, letters of recommendation, and your CV/Resume.

- While the "personal" in "personal statement" signifies adding personal detail to your statement, be
 mindful not to disclose too much personal information that might detract from why you are applying
 to a potential program or a professional opportunity.
 - It is okay to have personal anecdotes as long as you are connecting it with your overall journey and goals related to attending a potential program or professional opportunity.
- A good personal statement will explain your professional and career goals, show how your experiences
 make you a strong candidate to pursue those goals at a program, and explain why you want to get your
 degree at that specific program.
- Start drafting a base personal statement that you can adapt overtime and tailor to desired programs.

For more guidance on personal statements and statements of purpose, and all things graduate school, see the following resources below:

- <u>All About Graduate School</u>: We have collected resources on this spreadsheet that outlines materials students need for successful graduate applications. For personal statements and statements of purpose, check out the second tab titled "writing resources". Full Folder HERE.
- <u>Personal Statements, Resumes, and CVs</u>: This folder is dedicated to the aforementioned materials, with presentations, templates, and example statements.

Curriculum Vitae (CV) and Resumes:

A curriculum vitae (CV) lists work history and experiences, like a resume. Graduate admissions committees review your CV to measure your accomplishments.

- Emphasize your education and the most relevant and recent work experience applicable to psychology. Those with less experience should find volunteer work, extracurricular activities, community service, or internships applicable to their area of psychology.
- CVs allow you to have more experiences and speak at length of your work and research history. Resumes are shorter and are quickly assessed and are generally for jobs.
- A typical resume is 1-page to 2-pages at most, while CVs can have longer page lengths and can go over 2-pages.

Transcripts: Graduate admissions committees will review your official transcript. This is to ensure that you meet the course requirements needed for their program, as well as how you perform academically. Your GPA is important, as many graduate schools are competitive.

The Queens College Undergraduate Psychology Committee	
Brief Overview of Applying to Graduate Programs in Psychology and Neuroscience	
Fall 2022	
Doctoral Programs	
Personal Statement(s) Required (some programs ask for multiple statements)	
3 Letters of Recommendation	
Updated Resume or CV	
Standardized Tests: Both General GRE and Subject	
GREs are sometimes required.	
Duration: Programs are typically finished in 4-8 years.	
Programs can be research focused or license eligible:	
License eligible degrees (examples):	
Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (PhD/PsyD)	
 Doctorate in Counseling Psychology (PhD/PsyD) 	
Research focused degrees (examples):	
 Doctorate in Social Psychology (PhD) 	
Doctorate in Neuroscience (PhD)	

Master's Program Costs

Public Colleges and Universities:

- Total Tuition costs around \$20,000 \$30,000.
- Procuring financial aid can be challenge, as most students take out loans.
 - You can find scholarship opportunities locally through your program/school/ or professional organizations such as the APA (American Psychological Association) or APS (Association for Psychological Science).
- Research assistant positions are largely unpaid, unless the research lab has a grant to pay a stipend.
- Since most work is voluntary, you will need to prioritize your time accordingly that can meet your academic, personal, and financial needs.

Private Colleges and Universities:

- Most of the above items are similar here.
- **Key difference:** Total Tuition costs from \$50,000 \$80,000.

Doctoral Program Costs

Public Colleges and Universities:

- Largely fully funded with yearly stipends from \$15,000 \$30,000.
- Generally Tuition-free.
- Sometimes offers housing and fellowships that can be accessed within the program/university or through professional organizations like the APA, NSF (National Science Foundation) or NIH (National Institutes of Health).
- Payment through teaching and research.
- Student loans are sometimes (depending on circumstances) required for housing and other expenses.

Private Colleges and Universities:

- Most of the above items are similar here and relevant for private PhD and PsyD programs.
- **Key difference:** PsyD programs are generally private schools and cost tuition, so student loans are a must.
- **Key difference:** PsyD programs can cost from \$120,000 \$200,000.

Additional Costs Considerations

- Applying to graduate school is expensive, whether it is a master's program or doctoral program.
- Application fees can range from \$65 to \$120, depending on the school.
 - If you apply to 5 schools with \$120 application fees, that's \$600 just to apply.
- GRE fees include (\$205 for general), (\$150 for subject), (\$27 per score report to send to schools).
 Additionally, you might want to consider taking the exam more than once if you feel your score does not meet a programs cut-off.
 - https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/register/fees
 - https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/register/fees
 - https://www.ets.org/gre/revised general/scores/send/
- Your current institution will also ask for a fee when you request sending official transcripts to your desired programs.
 - https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/registrar/transcripts/
- Other costs include preparing for interviews (professional attire, travel, living accommodations if
 interview is far from you), relocation costs if you decide to move to another state for your program,
 considering housing accommodations and rent, and costs related to transportation (owning a vehicle,
 or using public transportation).
- If financially feasible, it is always better to apply to more than one program. Aim to apply for at least three programs. Fee reduction programs and waivers are generally available for applications and exams.
- Please do not let these costs deter you from applying to programs! While the costs upfront can look overwhelming, they are minimal compared to final outcome of your program admission and future career!

Program Admissions

- Master's programs and PsyD programs are less competitive than PhD programs.
- This is not to say master's programs and PsyD programs won't be a challenge for admission, just that
 the competition is greater for PhD programs because of the amount of resources they provide for
 potential students.
- For all programs, you will need to meet its minimum requirements (GPA, GRE Scores, Transcript).
 - Typically, competitive applicants for master's programs have at least a 3.0 GPA, while for
 doctoral programs applicants have above a 3.5 GPA. This is not to say you cannot apply to
 doctoral programs with a 3.0 GPA, but it will be challenge for admissions.
- Where your application stands out is through strong letters of recommendation, a strong personal statement, a strong CV, and a strong interview.
 - Master's program generally do not have interviews, some do (like mental health counseling programs).
 - Doctoral programs have required interviews for admissions.
 - Doctoral interviews include meeting with faculty members, potential mentors, and current doctoral students.

Program deadlines:

- Research focused master's programs generally have dual/flexible deadlines in the Fall and Spring.
- License-eligible master's programs generally have Fall only deadlines.
- Full deadline guidelines are entirely dependent on the program and school, so make sure to double-check when applying.

Program deadlines:

- Doctoral programs by in large have their deadlines set for December for each admissions cycle.
- For example, this December's deadline (December 1st, 2022) is for admissions for Fall 2023.
- Doctoral programs only have yearly admissions.