

How to Successfully Apply for  
Graduate Study in Psychology

A Resource Workbook



Houston Chapter  
Of  
The Association of Black Psychologists  
November 2007

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### Applicant Worksheet

#### Training Requirements

- Degree Desired \_\_\_\_\_
- Area of Concentration \_\_\_\_\_
- Training Model Preferred ( check as many as applicable)
  - Research Scientist \_\_\_\_\_
  - Scientist-Practitioner \_\_\_\_\_
  - Professional \_\_\_\_\_
- Program Reputation (List important aspects) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Qualifications: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Objective Criteria

Coursework (List individually with number of credits in parentheses)

- Psychology Courses  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Science Courses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Mathematics and Statistics Courses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Computer Science Courses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Honors Courses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other Courses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Grades

- Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_
- Psychology GPA \_\_\_\_\_
- Last 2 Years' GPA \_\_\_\_\_

**Standardized Test Scores**

- GRE-Verbal \_\_\_\_\_
- GRE-Quantitative \_\_\_\_\_
- GRE-Analytical Writing \_\_\_\_\_

**Nonobjective Criteria**

- Candidates for letters of recommendation
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- Experience ( Paid or volunteer)
- Research \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Field  
Related \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Clinical and Human  
Services \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Personal  
Characteristics \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses**

➤ Strengths \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

➤ Weaknesses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Program Preferences**

➤ Faculty  
Interests \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

➤ Special Populations \_\_\_\_\_

➤ Accreditation \_\_\_\_\_

➤ Geographical  
Location \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

➤ Disability Related Needs \_\_\_\_\_

➤ Financial Considerations

➤ Sources of Financial  
Support \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

➤ Types of Financial Aid to  
consider \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

➤ Mentors \_\_\_\_\_

➤ Other Factors to  
consider \_\_\_\_\_

## Curriculum Vita (CV)

- Highlights your skills and training in relation to the preferred position in which you are applying
- Should be short and concise, maximizing information available about you but not requiring too much reading time
- CVs tend to be lengthier than resumes because you chronicle your experiences to date

### The CV elements:

- Name, address, phone and email address
- Make sure this is current and stands out
- Educational Experience
- College degrees ( or current pursuit) with relevant initials
- College/University where degree attained and year awarded ( or anticipated date of completion)
- Practicum experiences ( if applicable)
- Provide a summary of each experience in ten lines or less
- Certificates or licenses ( if applicable)
- Provide exact title of license, state issued and certificate number
- Related professional and job experience
  - List from most to least recent position
  - Provide for each position a seven to ten line summary of duties and responsibilities
  - start and end dates (month/year)
  - exact job title, name of supervisor, name of agency/institution and city/state
- List any teaching experience (if applicable)
- Research experience
  - Title of research project with start and end dates (month/year)
  - Name of adviser
  - A few brief sentences explaining the purpose of the research
- Include names of psychological instruments included to demonstrate your knowledge of assessment
- Honors, achievements and organizations
  - Educational societies ( e.g. Psi Chi)
  - Memberships in professional organizations
- Keep in mind while constructing the CV
  - Make the tense/voice consistent with your past or present participation
  - Passive voice for former projects
  - Active voice for current projects
  - Only include post high school information
- Include name and page number as header or footer on each page
- Ask a peer to review your vita for assistance with grammar and editing

### **Cover letter**

- Keep cover letters short, professional and to the point, in about two paragraphs
- First paragraph
- Brief statement describing your status as a graduate student
- What materials have been submitted
- If in response to a listing indicate where listing seen
- Sentence stating your desire to be formally considered for the position
- Second paragraph
- List eligibility and/or candidacy for the position
- Statement indicating the reader can contact references
- A few sentences on how your skills, training and goals are congruent with the position
- Be succinct, professional and appealing to make readers eager to review your CV

## Personal Statements


Adapted from Mason, M. J. (1994). How to write a winning college application essay. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Rocklin, GA.: Prima Publishing

### When writing admissions essays/personal statements


#### Graduate school essays focus on:

- Leadership
    - What leadership opportunities have you taken advantage of?
    - What are the qualities of a good leader that you possess?
  - Experience
    - What has happened in your life that shaped your career choice, your drive and motivation?
  - Goals
    - Goals should have some connection with reality
  - Special Circumstances
    - May discuss areas such as economic background, international origins, physical handicaps, traumatic experiences etc...
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- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ Write clearly and with good grammar</li> <li>✍ Read essays that have proved successful</li> <li>✍ Don't ignore your audience</li> <li>✍ Be yourself. Relax and communicate the real you. Ask yourself "Who am I?"</li> <li>✍ <b><i>Complete a personal profile by answering these questions:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ List 5 people who have influenced you</li> <li>○ What do you read?</li> <li>○ List 3 virtues that you admire and respect</li> <li>○ Describe 3 significant lessons you have learned</li> <li>○ Describe 3 memorable experienced you have had</li> <li>○ Discuss a failure that taught you something</li> <li>○ Respond to 3 quotes that mean something to you</li> <li>○ Describe your greatest success</li> <li>○ Name 5 things that you know</li> <li>○ Discuss your definition of happiness</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✍ Don't write too much about too many things</li> <li>✍ 3 steps for gathering information about yourself               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Self-reflection, interview and research</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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- What do your parents remember about you?
- What are our earliest memories?
- What is an education supposed to provide?
- List 5 special things about you
- What is your “one-sentence philosophy of life”?
- What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you?
- What makes the world go round?
- Name 5 places that impress you
- Name a favorite social activity
- What is your favorite intellectual activity?
- Describe yourself to a stranger
- Describe a fear you conquered
- List 3 goals you have in life
- List 10 things you like and 10 things you don't like at all
- What do your friends say that they like most about you?
- What question have you always wanted answered and why?

 ***5 elements of a good essay***

- Write something to grab the reader's attention
- Simplicity
- Realism
- Sincerity
- Surprise

 ***Dos and Don'ts***

- Be positive and Upbeat
- Find an editor
- Be tasteful
- Keep it simple
- To thine own self be true
- Write for strangers
- Limit quotations and don't try to interpret them
- Avoid music analogies and stories about concerts, etc.
- Don't describe vacations unless it includes a relevant incident
- Get to the point
  - Eliminate descriptive, flowery language
- Keep it short – don't go beyond the word maximum

Application Checklist

- Program Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Application Deadline \_\_\_\_\_
  - Financial Aid Deadline \_\_\_\_\_

Application Elements	Date Requested	Date Received
Transcripts		
GRE General Scores		
GRE Psychology Scores		
Letters of Recommendation		
Program Application Packet		
Financial Aid Packet		
Other		

Adapted from American Psychological Association. (1993). Getting in: A step-by-step plan for gaining admission to graduate school in psychology. Washington, DC.: Author

 Additional Notes:

## Interviewing With Graduate/Professional Schools

Tip: Be able to articulate how your goals and qualifications match what the program has to offer and convince them that you will be an asset to their department and program

In general, graduate/professional schools will be asking questions about:

- **You** - your goals and strengths
- **The institutions and program** - what appeals to you
- **The faculty** - your awareness of what they are currently doing in the field

### Sample Graduate School Interview Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your career goals?
- Why do you want a graduate degree in \_\_\_\_\_?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a student?
- Why would you be an asset to our department?
- What kind of teaching or research experience have you had to date?
- Why should we accept you into this program?
- What makes you a good candidate?
- What appeals to you about our program?
- To what other schools are you applying?
- Tell me about the research project you were involved in with Professor \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why do you want to be in the profession? Think through the process. What event(s) led to the decisions? What experiences and people influenced the decision?
- What other careers have you considered?
- How did you become committed to this choice?
- How do you feel about the many ethical issues that face the profession?
- How have you investigated the field outside of the classroom? (work or volunteer experiences) What did you find? What did you learn? How did you change through the experience?
- In what extracurricular activities have you been involved? What role(s) did you play? How did you grow through the experience? Did your participation lead to change or have positive results?
- How do you view the future of your chosen profession?
- How do you see yourself fitting in?
- Why should the admissions committee accept you above other candidates?
- How are you unique? What and how do you expect to contribute to the profession?
- What type of professional would you like to be and why?
- In what type of setting would you like to practice, work, or teach?
- Explain your lowest test score. (GRE, MCAT, LSAT, GMAT, etc.)
- Is your orientation clinical? research? applied?
- What are your outside interests? Talents - music, art, etc.? Athletics? Reading material, music, films?
- Are you a well-rounded person?
- How have you gotten involved in community service?
- How do you deal with stress?
- How do you plan to finance your graduate education?
- How do you deal with uncertainty or failure? Examples in your life? What did you learn?
- How would you be described by family, friends, teachers?
- What are some of the reasons that you have chosen this profession?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in it?

- What are some of the rewards and some of the frustrations of this profession?
- What was your most rewarding college experience?

They will expect you to have questions as well. Your questions will demonstrate your interest in the program, your analytical and inquisitive mind, and your personality and interpersonal skills. You should try to emphasize your intellectual curiosity, motivation, ability to discuss current events/issues in your field, and ability to work with professors.

## 20 Questions for students to ask Graduate Schools, Departments, and Programs

### Time to Degree

1. What is the average departmental time to degree for Ph.D.'s?  
If an incoming student already has a Master's, how long is the time to degree?
2. What is the timeline of completion (including course work, comprehensive exams, and dissertation milestones)?
3. What is the attrition rate?

### Mentoring

4. What are the guidelines, if any, for faculty mentoring?  
How does a student find a mentor?  
How do committee members mentor?  
How many times per year do doctoral advisors meet with students to monitor progress?  
What has the advisor published?  
Is the advisor actively involved in research? What is the advisor's reputation as a teacher?  
To what extent is the advisor willing to involve students in his/her research?  
To what extent does the advisor show interest in or support the student's own research?
5. Can mentors/advisors/committee members be selected and appointed from outside the university?

### Program Options

6. Are joint dissertations possible?
7. What interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary opportunities are available?
8. What types of teacher training are available for both academic and nonacademic careers?
9. What types of internships or externships are available?
10. Are there electronic portfolio tools available to gather information about/products of the degree process?
11. How actively are students involved in departmental governance?
12. What types of teaching, research, or administrative assistantships are available?
13. Are there opportunities and training in grant-writing, and publishing?  
Is there exposure to disciplinary associations, publications, and conferences?

### Benefits

14. What types of funding are available? For how long?
15. What types of health care benefits are available to graduate students?  
What types of childcare options are available?

## Career Planning

16. What types of professional development activities (groups, colloquia, seminars, etc.) are organized for/by the students?
17. Are there any opportunities for networking/training with outside professionals (both in various types of institutions and outside the academy)?
18. What types of positions (academic and nonacademic) do students find after graduation?  
Can the department/program provide accounts of graduates' job experiences after graduation?  
What are the salary expectations/scales?  
Does the department/program keep track of its alumni, and have any of the alumni offered to be contacts for current doctoral students?
19. What proportion of students obtain jobs after graduation?
20. What types of career placement services are there?

--From Northwestern University's Career Services