APPLYING FOR GRAD SCHOOL: HOW DO I PREPARE?

- Practical Experience
- Letters of Recommendation
- Personal Statement

HOSTED BY THE PUP OFFICE
Studying Health Psychology → Academic advisor → Numerous internship rejections 😞

Undergraduate research assistant for an HF lab → I/O Graduate program and Master’s thesis

Undergraduate research assistant for an I/O lab → Volunteer with autistic children at URS

Clinical interests?

Declared Psychology major → Declared Marketing major
How can I be proactive and get practical experience?

- Lab research
- Practica
- Internships
- Volunteer work
Practical Experience

- Start now!
- Even one quarter of practical experience is better than none
- Even experience out of your specific field (e.g., my work at URS) is better than none
- Use these experiences to:
  - Rule out what you don’t like
  - See what you do like
  - Network
  - Gain potential references
  - Gain valuable work skills
  - Build your resume
Independent (Lab) Research

- PSY 498 – Independent Research Credit
  - Counts as PSY elective credits
- Find out what faculty are researching
  - www.psych.wright.edu → Faculty
  - Talk to your professors
- Approach faculty about possible openings
- Be willing to perform “trivial” tasks
  - Data entry
  - Running study participants
- Be willing to wait, they may not need anyone for a few months
- Especially valuable for students interested in research graduate programs
Practicum

- PSY 432 – Practicum in Psychology
- About 10 hours a week
- Counts as a 4 credit hour PSY elective
- Various opportunities in the Dayton area
  - Child Care, Youth Services, Family Services, Violence Prevention, etc.
- May be performing major tasks or administrative tasks
- Come to 342 Fawcett and look at the Practicum binder
  - Contact a listed company
  - Set up an agreement
  - Fill out practicum form, contact Dr. Schneider
  - Fill out green registration slip
Internships

- Visit Career Services over in Student Union
- Typically paid positions
- Harder to come by than Practicum or Volunteer

http://www.usaintern.com/jobs-internship/internships/Ohio/
http://www.internships.com/
Volunteering

• No pay, no credit hours, just valuable experience
• Try it out for a few months—nothing to lose
  • Flexible with your schedule
  • Sense of satisfaction from helping others
  • Figure out what you like, don’t like
  • Good opportunity for letter of recommendation
  • Good to put in your resume/personal statement

http://www.volunteermatch.org
http://www.handsonnetwork.org
http://www.volunteerdayton.org
http://www.lifeconnectionofohio.org/volunteer.html
http://www.ursdayton.org
Letters of Recommendation

• Most schools want 3 letters
• Professional references
Letters of Recommendation

• Who can speak to your work ethic, skills, and strengths?
  • **Professors (but typically not TAs)**
    • Have you had more than one class with them?
    • Have you worked in their lab?
    • Do you speak with them before/after class?
    • Do you participate in class often?
  • Boss at work
  • Internship/practicum supervisor
  • Volunteer work supervisor

• Start building these relationships as early as possible!
To Whom it May Concern,

I am privileged to write in support of my student, Dan Peel. Dan studied in my classroom and laboratory program for close to three years, during which time I witnessed his tremendous growth and development. This development came not only in the area of research and leadership, but in maturity and character as well.

Dan entered XYZ University a precocious high school graduate. At first, he had difficulty accepting his place as a less experienced lab member. But soon, he learned the valuable trait of humility, and enjoyed the opportunity to learn from his older peers and his professors.

Dan quickly learned to manage his time, work in group situations under strict deadlines, and to recognize the importance of a strong work ethic, persistence, and intellectual integrity. He has long since become the most valuable member of my student-lab team, and a role model for his newer classmates.

I recommend Dan to your fellowship program with absolute confidence. He has made me proud, as his teacher and mentor, I am sure he will continue to do so as he grows in your program and beyond.

Sincerely,

Dr. Amy Beck,
Professor, XYZ University
Letters of Recommendation

• Asking for a letter
  • Do NOT do this last minute! Give at least 3 weeks notice
  • Stop by to ask in person, if possible
    • If not, a brief, polite email is acceptable
  • "Would you feel comfortable providing me with a positive letter of recommendation for graduate school?"
• No gifts, bribery
• Don’t take a “no” to offense. Professors are busy people. Also, they’ll be honest if they don’t feel they know you well enough.
Letters of Recommendation

• They said yes!
  • Remind them of the course you took with them, your grade, and even a paper you wrote for their class (unless the class was very recent)
  • Provide them with all necessary letter material
    • Universities, specific programs, addresses, due dates (organize by earliest to latest)
    • Letter of recommendation form (there may not be one of these)
    • Self-addressed, stamped envelopes (include professor’s professional return address)
    • Organize all of these materials (e.g., manila envelopes)
  • Ask them if they need to look at your resume/any other materials
  • Provide them with a short summary of any important achievements/activities that you specifically want mentioned
  • If there is anything that needs special explanation in your transcript, let the professor know (e.g., my GPA went down one term when I was hospitalized)
Letters of Recommendation

• Afterwards...
  • Thank them! Gifts are excessive, but a thank you card or email is courtesy
  • If you are accepted, let them know! This is the best ‘thank you’ they can receive
Personal Statement

• What is a personal statement/essay/letter?
  • May be a generic request for why you are applying, may be a few specific questions
  • 1-2 pages (typically) of selling yourself! (Length requirements may vary)
Personal Statement

• Typical letter content
  • What details of your life (personal or family hardships, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help admissions better understand your motivations and set you apart
  • When/why did you become interested in this field
  • Current knowledge/experience in the field—through classes, research, readings, seminars, work or other experiences
  • Your career goals (short term and long term)
  • Important discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain
  • Personal characteristics/skills that improve your prospects for success in the field. Demonstrate these through concrete examples
  • Which faculty you’d like to work with
  • Why you are a stronger candidate than other applicants
  • Why should admissions care about you
Personal Statement

• In a nutshell...
  • Highlight your
    • ACHIEVEMENTS
    • GROWTH AS A STUDENT
    • MOTIVATIONS AND PASSIONS
    • RELEVANT EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE
    • UNIQUE TRAITS

• All of this is better communicated through specific examples!
**Personal Statement**

- **Don’t** use the same essay for multiple schools—tailor the information
- **Don’t** be generic and boring—stand out in a sea of applicants
- **Don’t** simply state—evaluate, relate
- **Don’t** touch on sensitive issues such as religion or politics
- **Don’t** use contractions
- **Don’t** make excuses—unless absolutely necessary
Personal Statement

- **Do** strive for depth over breadth
- **Do** triple-check grammar and spelling—have someone else look over it as well (a professor is ideal)
- **Do** emphasize your strengths and how you’ll contribute uniquely to the program
- **Do** use specific examples to illustrate your points
- **Do** grab their attention in the very beginning—nothing corny or cliché, just sell yourself. Tell your story.
“Earlier this year I was involved in a car accident, and as I sat among the wreckage I was shocked to see not one person stopped to help me. Didn’t anyone care enough to help? If it weren’t for the science of Psychology, this and so many other questions about human behavior would go unanswered. I find the insights Psychology gives into human behavior very exciting, and have been fascinated by it for a long time. Working in the Child Protection Unit of Cumbria Social Services has further fuelled my interest; every day I see aspects of human behavior that could have come straight from a Psychology textbook. It is Psychology brought to life, and has made me realize more than ever how much I want to move my interest in Psychology from my hobby to my career.”

“I believe that combined with my enthusiasm for the subject, the skills I have learned through my past work experience and part time study will make me an ideal candidate for studying Psychology. My employment has taught me many transferable skills, including excellent levels of concentration and great organizational skills. I also feel my experience of dealing with the public and colleagues will prove invaluable in a people centered discipline such as Psychology.”
“I am aware that a degree is not a fast-track pass to my dream career. However, it is a qualification and an important step towards achieving my goal—becoming a Psychologist. Psychology can be seen equally a science and an art, but most important it is a source of inspiration— I aspire to live a life devoted to Psychology.”

“Throughout my graduate education and beyond receipt of my doctorate I hope to participate extensively in research. Fostered by previous work as a volunteer and research background, my current interests include intercultural relationships, child abuse, particularly the long-term effects of physical and sexual abuse on victims, as well as aspects contributing to domestic abuse. I am also interested in continuing my work with the psychometric analyses of psychological assessment measures. I realize that these are areas that have developed from the work I have done thus far and that as I continue my education my interests will evolve. I feel that a graduate education will enable me to develop more specific research interests.”
Although important, GPA and GRE scores aren’t all you’ll be judged on. Use these 3 additional admissions criteria to take control of your application!

Graduate schools are becoming more and more competitive, put your best foot forward
Thank you for attending!

Please take a minute to fill out the evaluation forms if your packet.