

Typical Application Materials

Regardless of what graduate degree or program you desire to pursue, there are basic components that are going to be a part of most, if not all, graduate school applications.

Grades

Your grade point average is going to be one of the first pieces of information any graduate program will evaluate your application. While some programs have cut-off criteria (e.g., no GPAs lower than 3.5), other programs accept lower GPAs if other components of your application can compensate. You will need to submit official copies of your transcript of all colleges you have attended (including two-year colleges) with your application.

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

Essentially, the GRE is the SAT or ACT for graduate school. It's a four-hour standardized test that includes a verbal, quantitative (math), and written subtest. Some graduate programs may have cut-off scores for the GRE, but others will consider lower scores if other application components can compensate. More information about the GRE can be found at its official website: <http://www.ets.org/gre>. There are also a number of helpful books for GRE prep: <http://gradschool.about.com/od/gre/tp/topgrebooks.htm>

Research Experience

Most graduate programs expect you to be involved in research by serving as a research assistant for a professor or conducting your own independent study under the supervision of a faculty mentor. You can explore what opportunities exist within the department by browsing the department website. Ideally, you will want to work with a faculty member with similar interests as your own, but any research experience will be beneficial for your success for getting into graduate school.

Work, Clinical, Service, or Volunteer Experience

Some graduate programs will prefer applicants with some applied experience working within discipline. Relevant work experience at the undergraduate level includes observation and exposure to the environments and populations you will be working in and with later on in your career. For example, clinical psychology applicants might do volunteering at nursing homes or homeless shelters; I/O psychology applicants might work in an HR department; social psychology applicants might volunteer on a survey team for United Way. Participating in groups like Psychology Club or Psi Chi can also be beneficial.

Other Application Materials

Generally, most graduate programs will want a personal statement and a curriculum vita submitted with your application. 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. Psi Chi has put together a guide for writing an excellent personal statement http://www.psiichi.org/pubs/articles/article_756.aspx. A curriculum vita (CV) is an expanded resume that focuses exclusively on your academic achievements. Tips for writing a quality CV can be found at <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/career-minded/200806/writing-your-curriculum-vitae>