

MAGiC

Graduate School Application Timeline

A guide for aspiring students

This timeline was developed with an application to PhD psychology programs in mind but can broadly apply to other PhD programs

24-18 Months Out: Explore Programs & Interests; Get Experience; Build Relationships

- Keep a running list of topics, researchers, and projects that fascinate you.
- Use classes, articles, talks, and events to identify research interests.
- Consider how degree types (PhD, MS, MD, PsyD, etc.) align with your career goals.
- Ask grad students/professors for program recommendations related to your interests and start a list.
- Attend talks, read discipline-specific publications, and explore department websites.
- Seek experience in your field of interest or gain relevant skills (e.g., psychology research assistant position).
- Explore resources (e.g., career center or writing center) at your university or local library.
- Cultivate relationships that may result in strong letters of recommendation.

12 Months Out: Plan for Testing and Budget for Fees and Tests

- Research whether GRE (general and/or subject) and language exams are required.
- Decide when to take tests and create a study schedule.
- Consider early testing to allow time for retakes.
- Remember, score delivery can take weeks—plan accordingly.
- Consider budgeting for application fees (usually \$50-\$170 each) and testing costs (e.g., GRE = ~\$200)
 - Many programs and the GRE offer waivers that you may qualify for

6 Months Out: Finalize Program List

- Choose 4-7 programs where you'd be happy and have a strong research fit for.
- If seeking a PhD, look into specific researchers you may want to work with and email them to express interest and to make sure they're accepting students. Read at least one paper by them before reaching out.
- Look for 2-3 faculty per program whose work genuinely interests you.
- Factor in location, lifestyle, departmental culture, and support structures (e.g. graduate student union, affinity groups, etc.).

5 Months Out: Get Organized

- Build a tracking system (e.g., spreadsheet) for application requirements, deadlines, and progress.
- Common materials include: online forms, transcripts, CV, essays (personal statement and writing examples), test scores, and recommendation letters.

4 Months Out: Draft Application Materials & Start Reaching out to Recommenders

- Begin writing your statement(s) of purpose, CV, and other required essays.
- Seek feedback from mentors and revise (multiple rounds of revisions recommended).
- Understand how all components should support a cohesive personal narrative.
- Reach out to potential recommenders to ask if they are willing to write for you.

3 Months Out: Start Application Portals

- Set up online application accounts early.
- Begin filling out forms and uploading materials.
- Enter recommender info to trigger letter request emails (recommenders send letters directly to the University)

2 Months Out: Request Supporting Documents

- Order official transcripts and score reports well ahead of deadlines.
 - Confirm recommenders
 - Most programs want 3 recommenders
 - Ideally, faculty members or post-docs; grad student could work
 - Talk with each recommender about your narrative and goals.
 - Send to recommenders (these can help align their letters with your story):
 - Your CV
 - A clear list of schools and deadlines
 - Statement of Purpose and any other essays for each school

1 Month Out: Final Review & Submission

- Carefully proofread all materials.
- Double-check that you're uploading the correct files to each program.
- Submit applications—you can submit before letters arrive but monitor status in portals.
- Gently remind recommenders if they haven't submitted a week before letters are due.

Month 0: Take a Break

- Relax and acknowledge the hard work you've done!
- Stay alert for follow-ups or interviews but allow yourself to rest.

*You Did
It!*