

Preparing for Graduate School: GPAs, GREs, Admission Criteria, & Acceptance Rates

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Table 1. Course and Credit Admission Prerequisites for Master's-Only (N=861) and Doctoral (N=993) Programs in Psychology

Type of Prerequisite	Master's-only programs %	Doctoral programs %	All programs %
Minimum # of psych credits only	4%	2%	3%
Specific psychology courses only	53%	50%	52%
Psychology major only	3%	4%	4%
Specific psychology courses <i>and</i> minimum # of credits	32%	32%	32%
Psychology major <i>and</i> specific psychology courses	6%	9%	7%
Psychology major <i>and</i> specific courses <i>and</i> minimum credits	2%	3%	2%
Totals	100%	100%	100%

Source: Norcross, J. C., Hanych, J. M., & Terranova, R. D. (1996). Graduate study in psychology: 1992-1993. *American Psychologist*, 51, 631-643.

Table 2. Course Prerequisites for Graduate Programs (N=1,554) Requiring Specific Psychology Courses

Course	Required	Preferred	Required or preferred
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Statistics	56.5%	28.7%	85.2%
Research Methods/Exper. Design	40.0%	26.0%	66.0%
Childhood/Developmental	11.2%	24.2%	35.9%
Abnormal/Psychopathology	15.6%	16.9%	32.5%
Learning	8.7%	19.6%	28.3%
Personality	12.0%	15.7%	27.7%
Physiological/Biopsychology	5.5%	18.9%	24.4%
Social	4.7%	18.7%	23.4%
Testing/Measurement	9.5%	8.0%	17.5%
History & Systems	4.9%	12.3%	17.2%
Cognitive	3.6%	9.0%	12.6%
Lab course	7.8%	3.8%	11.6%
Sensation & Perception	3.1%	7.8%	10.9%

Table 3. Importance of Criteria in Admissions Decisions

Criteria	Master's		Doctoral	
	M	SD	M	SD
Letters of recommendation	2.74	.49	2.82	.42
Personal statement/goals	2.63	.55	2.81	.41
GPA	2.75	.43	2.74	.45
Interview	2.30	.76	2.62	.60
Research experience	2.04	.74	2.54	.65
GRE scores	2.36	.66	2.50	.55
Clinically related public service	1.94	.70	1.91	.69
Work experience	1.91	.65	1.87	.68
Extracurricular activity	1.46	.54	1.41	.55

Means are calculated on a coding scheme where 1 = low importance, 2 = medium importance, and 3 = high importance.

Source: Norcross, J. C., Kohout, J. L., & Wicherski, M. (2005). Graduate study in psychology: 1971 to 2004. *American Psychologist*, 60, 959-975.

Table 4. Final Selection Criteria for PhD Admission Decisions

Criteria	Rank order	Mean score
Research experience, resulting in a publication credit in a scholarly journal	1	4.45
Degree to which the applicant's skills and interests match those of the program	2	4.41
Research experience, resulting in a paper presentation at a professional meeting	3	4.24
Degree of interest expressed by faculty in working with applicant as graduate student	4	4.16
Clarity and focus of applicant's statement of purpose	5	4.12
Research assistant experience	6	3.85
Writing skills as revealed in statement of purpose	7	3.75
Status and reputation of applicant's referees	8	3.75
A strong, supporting mentor actively involved in advocating an applicant's candidacy	9	3.75
Underrepresented ethnic minority group membership	10	3.66
Degree of knowledge and expression of interest in your program	11	3.61
Number of statistics/research method courses taken as an undergraduate	12	3.48
Number of "harder science" courses taken as an undergraduate	13	3.41
Prestige and status of psychology faculty in applicant's undergraduate department	14	3.35
Prestige of applicant's undergraduate institution	15	3.30
Potential for success as judged by interview or other contact	16	3.19
Honors or merit scholarships awarded by undergraduate school	17	3.03
Area of undergraduate major	18	2.98
Social/personality style as revealed through interview	19	2.80
Relevant field/volunteer experience in placement	20	2.75
Relevant paid work experience in area related to your program	21	2.62
Neatness and "professional look" of the application materials	22	2.48
Teaching assistant experience	23	2.41
Active participation in department activities	24	2.23
Student affiliate status in a relevant professional organization	25	1.81
Degree to which applicant would help to balance the sex ratio within the program	26	1.81
Psi Chi membership	27	1.75
Multilingual fluency	28	1.64
Contribution to geographical diversity of program's students	29	1.61
Legacy status (i.e., close relation of applicant to graduate of the program)	30	1.39

Source: Keith-Spiegel (1991). Adapted with permission of the author.

Table 5. Minimum Required and Actual Scores of First-Year Graduate Students in Psychology

Measure	Minimum Required for Consideration Mean	Actual Scores of Incoming Students Mean
Doctoral departments		
Graduate Record Examination		
Verbal	529	571
Quantitative	538	626
Verbal + Quantitative	1066	1183
GRE Psychology Subject Test	552	633
Grade point average		
Overall	3.11	3.54
Psychology	3.17	3.66
Last two years	3.16	3.67

Master's departments		
Graduate Record Examination		
Verbal	449	504
Quantitative	453	549
Verbal + Quantitative	952	1055
GRE Psychology Subject Test	495	577
Grade point average		
Overall	2.92	3.37
Psychology	3.05	3.48
Last two years	3.03	3.44

Source: Norcross, J. C., Kohout, J. L., & Wicherski, M. (2005). Graduate study in psychology: 1971 to 2004. *American Psychologist*, 60, 959-975.