

# Overview of the PhD Application Process



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**So you want to apply to  
PhD programs...**

# Food for Thought Before Applying

- **Have a backup plan:** eg masters, full-time employment, postbacc.
- **Think about finances:** stipend/benefits, personal savings, external support.
- **Department > University:** look into specific departments/programs/professors, not just the reputation of the university as a whole.
  
- *Why do you want a PhD? Do you need it?*

# General Timeline: General Considerations

- PhD applications are usually due in mid-December.
- Fellowship applications are due earlier, usually in mid-October.
  - More on fellowships later!
- GRE scores take 2-3 weeks to be delivered.
  - The GRE is not always required.
- You should ask for recommendation letters at least a month in advance.

# Recommended Timeline

- January to September: take the GRE during winter, spring, or summer break.
- June-August: start preparing to apply.
  - Look into schools, prepare your CV, brainstorm for personal statement/research proposal.
  - Optional: contact potential advisors at the schools you are interested in.
- August-October: ask for rec letters and prepare fellowship apps.
- October: submit fellowship apps.
- October-December: prepare PhD program apps.
  - You may be able to reuse parts of your fellowship apps.
- December: submit PhD program apps and celebrate!
- January-February: submit any later apps, prepare for interviews (if applicable).
- March-April: decisions come out for PhD programs and fellowships, accepted student days.

# You should apply for fellowships!

- Most US-based PhD programs will fund their students.
- If you are funded by the university/department, you may need to work on a grant or get a TAship/RAship.
- Fellowships provide you and the school external funding, which means the school saves money and you gain a bit more freedom → win/win!
- Bonus: receiving a fellowship looks good on your CV.
- Check out some [funding](#) sources on our [resources](#) page!

# Parts of the Application

- Application fee: ~\$100
- CV/resume
- Personal statement\*
- Statement of purpose\*
- Research proposal\*
- Interviews: field-dependent

\*Sometimes these components are combined.

# CV/Resume

- A CV is like an extended resume.
  - It can include extra details and cover the full scope of your career.
- A resume is a short one-page summary of the most important and most relevant parts of your career *right now*.
- Some information you might include in your CV:
  - Education
  - Research Experience
  - Work Experience
  - Volunteer Service
  - Funding
  - Honors



# Personal Statement

- The personal statement is about *you*:
  - Your skills
  - Your interests
  - Your preparation to pursue your interests
  - Your past experiences relevant to your interests
- Typically 2-3 pages
- Sometimes combined with the research statement
- Tailor your personal statement to the application!

# Research Statement

- The research statement is about your *research*.
- Depending on the application, you may not be required to actually do the research in your research statement.
- Sometimes, the research statement is all about demonstrating that you can:
  - Formulate a research question
  - Review relevant literature
  - Design experiments/methods to address the research question
  - Analyze results
  - Predict what will happen and plan for roadblocks
- Research statements are seen more often in fellowship applications than PhD applications.

# Interviews

- Not every discipline interviews its PhD applicants!
  - More popular in Psychology
- Some programs “pre-interview” applicants before interview weekend, but this depends on the program and even the professor
  - The pre-interview is more casual but the interview weekend is more formal
  - If you attend an interview weekend, be sure to look up the professors and skim through a few recent papers
- Interviewers want to learn about your interests, experiences, ideas, and fit with the lab
- You can ask questions too!

# Yay, I was accepted! Now what?

- Consider the department culture, research, resources.
- Think about finances: ask about the stipend and benefits, research the cost of living (typical rent, utilities, groceries), look for other possible support.
- Talk to other students and potential advisors! Fit is important.

# Oof, rejected. Now what?

- Don't take it personally: PhD apps are super competitive!
- Take some time off to shake it off.
- Consider your backup options.
- If you want to apply again, think about how you can use the next year(s) to strengthen your application. Ask some trusted mentors/more senior students, if you can!

**Questions?**