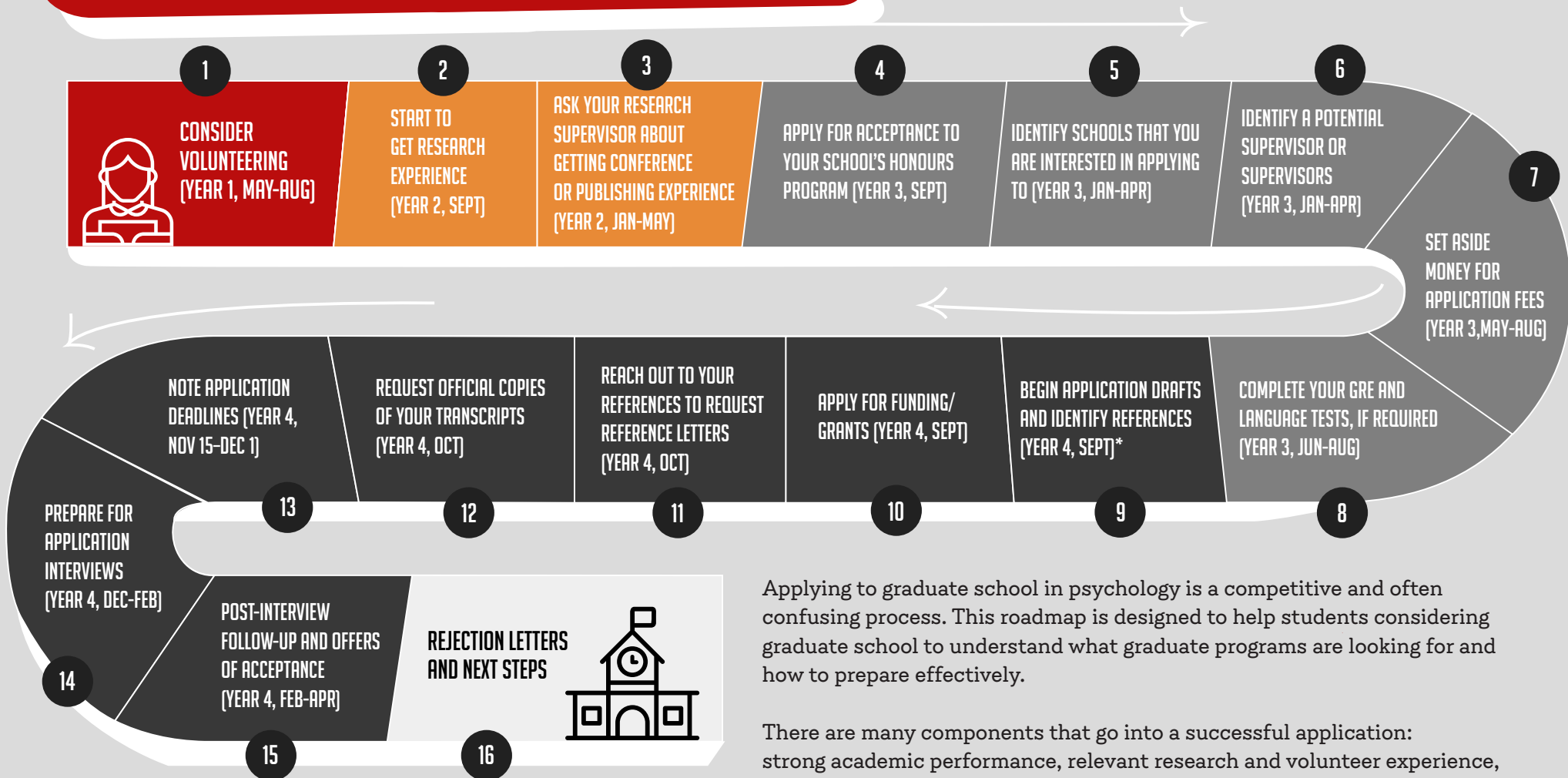


THE PATH TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PSYCHOLOGY IN CANADA



Applying to graduate school in psychology is a competitive and often confusing process. This roadmap is designed to help students considering graduate school to understand what graduate programs are looking for and how to prepare effectively.

There are many components that go into a successful application: strong academic performance, relevant research and volunteer experience, reference letters, alignment with a potential supervisor's work, grants or funding secured, and more.

But, you can't accumulate all of this experience at once – doing so effectively requires a bit of early planning, or some late-stage pivots, to make sure that you are set up for success. To assist with planning, this guide is intended to provide a general set of timelines and suggested benchmarks.



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Like every path in life, your academic and training journey is not likely to be linear. There will be hiccups and meandering side roads, speed bumps, and potholes to avoid. Don't be discouraged if your path doesn't look like this or if you aren't hitting these benchmarks right when you are "supposed to". Every journey is unique and you will backtrack, jump ahead, and maybe even find that some things aren't useful for you! That is okay and very much to be expected. We hope that this serves as a useful guide to come back to so that you can see those important dates and metrics to be thinking about, but don't let it constrain you to just one path or way of doing things!

Any student interested in graduate school in psychology may find this guide useful as the information contained within is not specific to a particular specialization in psychology (e.g., clinical psychology, experimental psychology, etc.). However, students should always consult the website of the graduate school to which they are considering applying for specific deadlines and information about application. The university where you are applying is always considered the final authority on deadlines; the date windows reflected in this resource are approximate and are suggestions only.

1. Consider volunteering (Year 1, May-Aug)

- Graduate schools want to see a strong track record of volunteering, research experience, and academic excellence. Building a strong track record can take time!
- **Tip:** This is what people mean by "networking"! You are getting to know people who can provide references and opportunities
- Not sure where to start? Consider university clubs or student associations, local hospitals,

and other mental health organizations near you. Pick organizations you are passionate about.

2. Start to get research experience (Year 2, Sept)

- This usually comes from volunteering, or working, in a research lab. Most researchers have a lab and will need help with various research tasks.
- **Tip:** If you aren't sure who to reach out to, consider professors who have taught classes that you have enjoyed as a starting point. Most researchers also have a lab website where you can see what research they are doing. Once you have identified a researcher(s) that you think you might want to work with, consider sending them an email to let them know you are interested in volunteering or working in their lab!
- **You should know:** Many universities have summer undergraduate research opportunities, allowing you to work in a research lab during the spring and summer semesters. Check your university's research office website, or ask your academic advisor to see if your university has a similar program available.

3. Ask your research supervisor about getting conference or publishing experience (Year 2, Jan-May)

- Academic conferences happen at various times of the year and involve students (both undergraduate and graduate) as well as researchers presenting their research in a formal conference setting. Presentation styles vary, but it is more common for students to deliver poster presentations. Let your research supervisor know this is something you are interested in and discuss a plan forward.

4. Apply for acceptance to your school's honours program (Year 3, Sept)

- Check with your school for when they begin accepting applications to their honours program. Usually, you will need to complete two years of your degree and may have additional requirements (e.g., GPA, course requirements, etc.) that must be met before applying.
- **Tip:** An honours degree (or equivalent) is required for acceptance into most graduate programs in psychology. Check your university's requirements for specific information.
- **You should know:** What is an honours equivalent degree? Universities will often specify "honours equivalent" as a requirement, but what counts as equivalent will vary. Searching for "[Your university of interest] international equivalencies" in a search engine will usually return a page where your school outlines what they deem as an equivalent degree.

5. Identify schools that you are interested in applying to (Year 3, Jan-Apr)

- You want to give yourself some time to decide on what school(s) make sense for your needs. Usually, it is a good idea to apply for a few schools if you can afford to apply to more than one school.
- Are you interested in science, clinical practice, or something else? Are you interested in a master's or a doctorate? MA vs. MSc? PhD vs. PsyD?
- **Tip:** There will be many factors that go into your consideration. A few things to think about: Does your school offer funding? Do they have a good reputation? Do they have any information on where their graduates work after they finish? Is the program more focused on research or practice?

6. Identify a potential supervisor or supervisors (Year 3, Jan-Apr)

- Applications will often require that you specify at least one faculty member that you want to work with, and it helps when that faculty member knows who you are! Consult the faculty website to see if your supervisor is accepting students. If you don't see this information listed, you might need to email your prospective supervisor directly.
- **Tip:** Don't overthink it! Faculty want to hear from you. A simple email telling them why you are interested in working with them and asking if they are accepting students for the next year is often enough. Your email should be professional, but brief.

7. Set aside money for application fees (Year 3, May-Aug)

- Depending on the program to which you are applying, application fees can be expensive (\$100-\$250) and can add up if you are applying to multiple schools.
- **Tip:** If you are struggling to afford the application fee, consider reaching out to the university registrar or financial aid office at the school to which you are applying. Sometimes, schools will provide assistance with the application fee if you cannot afford it. Also consider your own university – they may have financial assistance to help with paying application fees.

8. Complete your GRE and Language Tests, if required (Year 3, Jun-Aug)

- If English or French are not your first languages, you may need to submit language test results with your application. Consult your university's application page to see if this requirement applies to you.

- **You should know:** Many schools no longer require or consider GRE scores but you should always double check with the school where you are applying.

9. Begin application drafts and identify references (Year 4, Sept)*

- In addition to your application form, graduate schools will usually require that you submit: a Curriculum Vitae (CV), a personal statement of interest/intent, a statement of research/career interests. Most (if not all) will also require you to submit reference letters. Some schools may also have additional supporting materials that are required, such as statements on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).
- **Tip:** A CV is much like a resumé, except that it focuses more on documenting how you acquired your expertise rather than on selling yourself to an employer. Examples include education, volunteer experiences, research and laboratory experience, academic and professional achievements.
- **Tip:** Assuming you have been following this guide, there should be a few professors and/or supervisors that you can ask about a reference letter. It is helpful to start asking about reference letters early, so you know who you can approach closer to your application.
- **You should know:** Personal statements are meant to provide the committee with an idea of who you are and why you want to pursue a career in psychology (e.g., clinical psychologist). It can feel unnatural to feel like you are bragging about yourself, but don't forget that you have an important story to tell!

10. Apply for Funding/Grants (Year 4, Sept)

- There are a lot of grants that you can apply to depending on your province and the schools

that you are applying to. Bringing funding with you to a graduate school can be a benefit to your application, so it is always worthwhile applying. Regardless of what province you intend to study in, you should apply for national funding opportunities through one of the three tri-council funding agencies. See [\[link\]](#) information on tri-council Canada Graduate Scholarships for Master's students.

- **Tip:** Concerned that your research question might shift during your master's? This is normal and expected of research, especially if you aren't in your master's yet! Your application details your proposed research. The way that you are investigating your question might change and you will report this when you make your annual report to the funding agency. Give as much detail and plan as much as you can, but don't worry if your research might change as you get into your program.

11. Reach out to your references to request reference letters (Year 4, Oct)

- Good reference letters take time! You want to give your references at least 4-6 weeks to draft your reference letter. Reaching out too early might mean that your reference forgets by the time applications are due, but too late does not give them enough time to submit. When considering who would be a good reference, first consult your prospective university's website for information on reference requirements. Consider a combination of volunteer supervisors and research supervisors – an ideal reference is someone who can speak well to your experiences and has a lot of credibility. Try to maximize these dimensions when considering who would be a good reference.
- **Tip:** If your reference has not submitted their reference two weeks out from the deadline it

is acceptable to send them a friendly check-in. People make mistakes and they might have forgotten! Once you have sent one reminder and heard back from your reference there is no need to follow up again – many universities expect to receive some references late and usually have internal deadlines to allow for late reference submissions.

- **You should know:** Often you need to enter information about your references in the application form before they can submit a reference. This will send your references a confidential form to complete their reference. If you don't enter their information, your references won't be able to submit!

12. Request official copies of your transcripts (Year 4, Oct)

- Transcripts can take up to a month or more to come from your university so you will want to request them with ample time. Some programs will accept unofficial transcripts at the time of application and will require official transcripts before you are officially accepted. Check the transcript requirements of your university to make sure.

13. Note application deadlines (Year 4, Nov 15–Dec 1)

- Always check with the school to which you are applying for specific deadlines

14. Prepare for application interviews (Year 4, Dec–Feb)

- Many graduate programs in psychology require short-listed candidates to complete interviews as part of the application process. These interviews may be completed virtually in early stages, but schools will also usually expect you to visit in-person before accepting. Sometimes this does not happen until you have received an offer, but sometimes they will want to interview you in-person before extending an offer.

- **Tip:** It can be expensive to travel for interviews or open houses! If your school does not offer, don't be shy about asking for reimbursement for travel. If you are worried about paying the cost and waiting for reimbursement, don't be afraid to ask if you have any other options to cover travel costs.

15. Post-interview follow-up and offers of acceptance (Year 4, Feb–Apr)

- Once you have completed any interviews you might have, you might receive an offer of admission to one (or more!) programs. The letters should detail the offer as well as any financial aid or funding associated with them. Accredited programs are required to give you until April 15th to accept or decline those offers, so don't feel the need to jump on your first offer! Take some time to consider your options, discuss with friends, family, and colleagues.

16. Rejection letters and next steps

- The acceptance rates for graduate programs vary depending on the school or the type of program to which you are applying, and can be quite low in some instances (e.g., 1–3 % for clinical psychology). This means that rejection is very common, especially among first time applicants. If you did not receive an acceptance letter this round don't be discouraged! Many applicants will use an additional year or more to continue to build their CV. A few options for doing this:
 - Continue to volunteer, or consider expanding your volunteering, if you have time.
 - Ask your honours research supervisor if they have funding for you to work in their lab for the next year. Even if your supervisor does not have funding for you, they may have some ideas about opportunities that you can apply for. This can both expand your research experience and also provide you with some income while you consider next steps and, possibly, re-apply.

TIMELINE SUMMARY



Consider volunteering



Start to get research experience



Ask your research supervisor about getting conference or publishing experience



Apply for acceptance to your school's honours program



Identify schools that you are interested in applying to



Identify a potential supervisor or supervisors



Set aside money for application fees



Complete your GRE and English Language Tests, if required



Begin drafting your application supporting materials



Apply for Funding/Grants



Reach out to your references to request reference letters



Request official copies of your transcripts



Note application deadlines



Prepare for application interviews



Post-interview follow-up and offers of acceptance



Rejection letters and next steps