

What are the Steps to a Clinical Psychology PhD?

A practical guide for undergraduate students

Developed by [The Hamilton Lab](#) at Rutgers University
& [Science Simplified Network](#)

Creators of this document include: Dr. Jessica L. Hamilton, Doctoral Students (Allie Bond, Simone Imani Boyd, Melissa J. Dreier, & Maya Dalack) & post baccalaureate lab coordinator Saskia Jorgensen, and The Hamilton Lab current and past undergraduate students (Alea Watson, Adia Moore, Sam Gerry, Jas Sarna, Priya Mehta, Jahnia Joseph-Belfon, Nicole Kane, Meher Muzzaffar), and more. Special thanks to the Coalition for the Advancement & Application of Psychological Science for their contribution to this document!

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT: WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT ISN'T, AND WHY WE CREATED IT

This document is intended to be a **guide** and it is *not* intended to be prescriptive (to follow exactly as stated) to help you be prepared and informed as you consider and apply for clinical psychology PhD programs! We recognize everyone is different, which means that every path to clinical psychology PhDs will also be different.

This document is intended for students to use at *any* point of their undergraduate education, and not just when starting in Year 1. We often hear from some students that they “feel behind” and from others that they “have no idea where to start.” So, this document is for anyone at any stage of undergraduate education or interested in pursuing a PhD in clinical psychology. This includes those who first attended a community college, transferred at some point in their training, are in college for more than 4 years, and those who are hoping to return to psychology after another career.

We know there is a “hidden curriculum” for obtaining a clinical psychology PhD, and our field **needs** folks with diverse identities, backgrounds, and perspectives, especially folks who are typically underrepresented in the field (e.g., first generation students, people of color, and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds). Our goal is to help demystify the process and reduce barriers to obtaining a Clinical Psychology PhD (should they choose!) to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, *and* belonging in our field.

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What is a Clinical Psychology PhD?

- **A few (brief) notes about Clinical Psychology PhD programs:**
 - Clinical psychology PhD programs are best for people who want to focus on research and clinical work; though skills can be applied to a range of fields (e.g., public health, policy, etc). If you are interested in *only* clinical work (without getting solid research training), PhDs may not be the best fit!
 - Read more here about a Clinical Psych PhD degree (and comparing it to other degree programs (PsyD, Masters programs)) [here](#).
 - Clinical Psychology PhDs are often fully-funded programs, which means that your tuition is free, insurance is provided, and you get an additional living stipend (~\$30,000/year). However, some programs may only be partially-funded programs, so this is important to know when applying to the program.
 - These programs are typically 4-7 years in length at your university (where you apply, get accepted, and complete most of your training)
 - Clinical Psych PhDs often require a 1-year clinical internship that involves an application and “match” process (similar to medical school), where you will complete clinical training full-time for one year.
 - It is very common for people to complete postdoctoral training (stipend \$50-70,000) in a specialized area of research or clinical practice and apply to get clinical licensure during this time (licensure rules vary by state)
 - Clinical Psych PhD programs include a mix of coursework, clinical training, and research training
 - Coursework of 3-4 courses per semester (which is heavier in first 3 years of program)
 - Clinical training typically begins in Year 2 with assessment and treatment often at an in-house clinic and at external clinical practicum sites (which can be tailored to your specific interests, based on availability)
 - Research training focuses on building your research skills (i.e., conceptual, technical, statistical, and communication) and your independent research program area (i.e., what you are interested in and will contribute to the broader field)
 - All programs have milestones throughout, which often include a Masters degree (in Year 2-3), a qualifying exam or pre-dissertation project (to demonstrate broader competency before completing dissertation), and the dissertation (research project focused
- **What can I do with a clinical psych phd?**
 - SO MANY THINGS! You can do research, clinical work, teaching, advocacy, and outreach work across multiple settings (e.g., university, schools, clinical settings, hospitals, industry settings, government, journalism, non-profits, and more!). Clinical Psych PhDs gain so many valued skills that can be applied in nearly any field you are interested in!
 - See videos of some PhDs talk about their careers [here](#)!

What you can do as an undergraduate to learn and prepare for a Clinical Psychology PhD: Guide by Year of College (assuming Years 1 - 4)

Opening Note: While this guide is broken into Years 1-4, these tips apply more broadly to any college experience (including non-traditional paths).

If you are in Year 1 of College:

General Notes

- Congratulations! You're in college!
- Take some time to adjust to college: It's important to learn about what you like and what you don't!
- Determine your academic and extracurricular interests: Get involved in clubs or groups that you are interested in. Shop around!

Courses

- Take 'Intro to Psychology' or another psychology-related course
 - You'll learn there are a lot of different subfields in psychology, including, but not limited to: [cognitive](#), [social](#), [clinical](#), [developmental](#), and [behavioral and systems neuroscience](#).
 - Note: Sometimes neuroscience is its own major or in a different department or it can be a specialization/concentration within psychology.
 - Note: [School psychology](#), [counseling psychology](#), [experimental psychology](#), and [industrial-organizational psychology](#) may be included in other departments!
 - These different fields will matter more for the research labs you are interested in (for Years 2-4) and for pursuing a PhD/MA later on
 - Remember that minors (or second majors) may also be an option for you if you have many interests. You don't need to declare these things right away, but keep in mind that the option exists

Thinking Ahead:

- If you are interested in pursuing a Psychology Major, start exploring and asking questions about psychology as a major
 - Which classes do you look forward to? What topics do you find yourself asking questions or wanting to learn more? Which areas feel most related to what you *might* want to do in the future?
 - Talk to other students who *have* decided on this major.

- Talk to professors that you enjoy taking classes with and learn about potential career fields
- Visit your school's career development center
- Talk to an advisor, including a specific advisor within the field you are interested in and get an idea of what classes are offered

If you are in Year 2 of College:

General Notes

- You finished your first year of college! Guess what? You don't have to have it all figured out just yet... or even by the end of this year (though you have to make some initial decisions)!
- Deadlines to watch: By the end of your second year, you will likely need to declare a major (Moving forward, we will assume it's psychology or a related field!)
 - Note: There are still so many possibilities ahead of you and you can change majors (or add majors/minors) as you continue to develop your interests and figure out what you want to do
 - You may start thinking about a senior thesis / honors thesis - every school might look different, so having those deadlines on your radar may be helpful (jump ahead to see why you might do this)

Courses

- Continue taking core or required classes and start thinking about which areas of psychology are most interesting to you and available at your university/college
 - Look at what courses are required for the major
 - Check out a degree navigator or similar tool for your major
- [Join Psi Chi](#): The Psychology Honors Society to gain a network of support and stay connected with peers about opportunities in psychology
 - Learn more about the local chapter in your university/college
 - Note: This is a student organization, and you must have a higher than a 3.3 GPA to join. It is great for CV and resume!
- Consider taking statistics and research methods (or equivalent) to gain skills
 - Note: Stats isn't as scary as you think! It also becomes more important (and fun!) later on when you get to use those skills and re-learn them for asking and testing your own research ideas and questions

Getting Started in Research

- **What is research in psychology?**
 - We promise, it's cool! And likely way different than you think!

- Research can look a lot of different ways, which can include animals (e.g., mice, rats), experiments, surveys, behavioral tasks, neuroimaging (i.e., brain scans), participant interviews, intensive monitoring, treatment monitoring, and more!).
- Tasks for undergraduate research assistants can include an array of different tasks. Some labs may have you put data into spreadsheets and create surveys, while others will have you work directly with participants, help with presentations, papers, and communicating science!
- **Explore research labs** available at your schools (yes, even if you are interested in clinical or working with patients in the future because graduate training in clinical psychology does BOTH!).
 - Here's why you might want to do this:
 - This is a great way to learn about what you do and *don't* like in research and within the field of clinical psychology as a whole
 - Finding your interests within these spaces and labs can also help inform what classes to pursue in the future, in addition to what opportunities may interest you post-undergrad (and exposure to people who have navigated these steps before)
 - If you go into clinical work, these skills are important to stay updated on new research, best clinical practices, and analysis of what good and effective clinical work might look like, etc! Also - some labs in clinical psychology directly study clinical work, such as how well certain therapies work between populations and how to improve them, how these treatments are disseminated or implemented in different settings.
 - Want some insight or more guidance when you see A LOT of potential research labs? Consider setting up a meeting with your favorite psych professors so far - could you work in their lab? Do they have suggestions of other labs you could reach out to?
- **How do you know what to look for when you are looking at research labs in psychology?**
 - Think about the general topic or field of psychology. If you are interested in clinical, then it is important to get experience in the field of psychology that you might be interested in pursuing (though you can get experience in more than one!)
 - Within that field, think about the big picture questions they are asking and what methods they are using to answer these questions. Are these interesting to you?
 - You don't need to know anything about research - just having an interest and being motivated to learn more is a great place to start.
- **Consider applying to a research lab!**
 - The best way to get experience about a potential career field is to learn about it directly! More info on this below!
 - This is also a great way to develop relationships with professors! This comes in handy during recommendation letter time, and for tips on pursuing potential careers!
 - Explore ways to get involved in research through other programs in your school during the year (Rutgers ones include [Aresty Research Program](#), [LSAMP](#), [iGEM](#))

- You might join a lab that isn't a great fit - that doesn't mean you don't like research, maybe you could try again somewhere new! Don't be discouraged.
 - Even if you do like a lab, you could switch it up if your interests change. It isn't a forever commitment.
 - It's okay to wait/hold off for a lab you are excited about if you think you might be much happier somewhere else.
 - The type of lab you are in won't determine your whole future (e.g., you could work in a social psych lab in undergrad and work in clinical psych in the future)

Thinking Ahead

- **Career Exploration:** Explore different types of degree options depending on your interests by reading Mitch's [uncensored guide](#) (e.g., Social Work, Clinical Psych PhD)
 - Specific tips: Think about connecting with graduate students in your field of interest! Here are examples to "cold" emails: add link
- **Summer research opportunities** at your school or elsewhere (e.g., these are Rutgers ones, but there are likely ones available at your school: [Cooper Summer Research Fellowship \(C-SURF\)](#), [Research Intensive Summer Experience \(RISE\)](#), [Aresty Summer program](#), etc). These programs are sometimes funded! These are also often aimed at people beginning in research (RISE), where others may focus on those who already have a research mentor (C-SURF). If you have a paid job in the summer and want to stay involved, reach out to labs about volunteering in the summer (which may help you also stay involved during the year)

If you are in Year 3 of College:

General Notes

- There is a lot going on this year, and the suggestions below are just intended to help you know what some of the options could be! But know that you can pursue these opportunities at other times (Year 1, 2, or 4), so you don't have to do it all at once!

Courses

- Take more courses, including higher-level research courses
 - Look into honors options if that is available at your school and you have the experience and grades to pursue it!
- If you haven't already, you should definitely consider taking statistics and research methods (or equivalent) based on your school requirements
 - These courses can help you learn more about research!

Joining a Research a Lab

- Read more about getting started up above (include link)
- **How do I decide which clinical psychology research labs to apply to?**
 - Read a bit about the psychology (and specifically clinical research labs at your university, nearby universities, or affiliated programs)
 - Twitter is a great way to learn more about the field, see what professors and labs are doing, and stay up to date on research. No need to post if you don't want to!
 - Think about what topics interest you. What questions do you want to answer with research? Are there specific issues you care about? Does the lab have a focus on diversity and inclusion?
 - Learn more about the lab; yes, there is a lot of learning in this process!
 - Check out their website, read about their studies, and ask current lab RAs what kind of tasks they do
 - Are they hiring RAs now or in the future? If it is not clear, you can email them (the PI) or someone (the lab coordinator) in their lab to find out more!
 - Consider research labs outside of your department/university (especially if there aren't as many opportunities for clinical psychology or a specific area of research in your school).
 - Related fields (Public health, sociology, social work) may be doing research that interests you. Check out what they're doing and if it interests you, apply!
 - Other settings: Medical schools such as psychiatry departments (usually more volunteer-based than credit-based) may have opportunities and collaborations with your psychology department
 - Other universities or schools nearby or far away may be a good fit! Especially after COVID-19, sometimes there is the possibility to work as an RA remotely!
- **Apply to join a research lab in the fall and spring**
 - When to apply? Some labs may hire year-round, so it's never too late or too early to look into this! It could be good to apply at the end of one semester for the upcoming semester or year, especially if you want to take it for course credit (see below). Note: it can take a couple tries!
 - To apply, click on the lab website or contact the professor or lab directly.
 - Labs will have different applications and processes
 - Consult with your psychology advisory about who may be a good fit or steps to applying for a lab
 - Did you know? You can volunteer, get paid (work-study positions can be available), AND/OR get research credit!
 - *Something to ask and look for:*
 - What's the structure of the lab like? Who do RAs work most closely with? (PI, grad students, lab coordinator, other)? How does this impact professional development opportunities in the lab?

- Is there a description of the experiences that undergraduate RAs have in the lab? What kinds of opportunities do they have for undergraduates? (Note: This may be helpful to ask during interviews or through email to learn more)
 - What might these opportunities include? Types of skills and experiences? How can these build upon each other for a more ultimate goal, like a publication or poster?
- Thinking about a senior thesis? Ask about this! If this is a motivator for you getting involved in a lab, confirm that the lab might be able to support you in this.
- Email to follow-up after 2-4 weeks and re-express interest
 - If you don't hear back right away, don't panic! Professors receive a lot of emails, they may have missed yours. Follow-up with them a few weeks later to re-express your interest.
 - If you don't get in, ask for feedback to improve next time.

Summer Research

- *This* summer is especially important to think about getting involved
 - In the spring, apply for summer funding to allow you to be paid to do research over the summer, which is especially helpful if you plan to do a senior thesis in psychology or you want to do an independent research project
 - Some universities/departments have summer research funding opportunities. Apply for this to get paid to do research!
- **Summer research opportunities** at your school or elsewhere that are sometimes funded! These are also often aimed at people beginning in research, where others may focus on those who already have a research mentor.
- **Volunteering in research:**
 - If you have a paid job in the summer and want to stay involved, reach out to labs about volunteering in the summer (which may help you also stay involved during the year)
 - If you do want to pursue a research-related opportunity this summer, but do not do a summer fellowship, there are ways you may be able to get involved and volunteer in a lab near where you live.
 - Talk with the lab director to see if there are virtual or hybrid options
 - See what other universities are around where you live, see if they have labs that interest you, you may be able to do tasks for their lab in the summer
 - This might be a time to get started on an honors thesis or senior project - you will be better off if you get involved in a lab well before this summer so that you have the relationship and connections to have a mentor for your thesis

Thinking Ahead

- Begin thinking about who can write you a letter of recommendation for jobs and/or graduate school in the future

- Make connections with professors
- Talk to your psychology professor, psychology advisor, or lab director (if you're in a lab) about your goals and next steps
 - Note: They want to help! It's up to you to advocate for yourself and let them know what you are thinking. Reach out and schedule a meeting; don't wait for them to come to you!
- **Start thinking about whether you want to do a senior thesis**
 - This varies at each university, so it is important to speak to academic advisors about the deadlines to ensure you can apply. Even if you don't complete a senior thesis, you can still complete an independent research project in the summer or your senior year.

If you are in Year 4+ of College:

General Notes

- Apply to join a research lab (it's never too late!)- see above!
- Think more about research interests:
 - Clinical psychology is a big field! Which areas are most exciting to you?
 - Are you interested in understanding or treating clinical problems? Both? Is there a specific disorder (e.g., depression), process (e.g., sleep, peer relationships), or population (e.g., infants, children, adolescents, adults, older adults) that are of interest? What topics excite you?
 - Is there someone doing this research in your school or university? Note, that someone may be doing this research in psychology, but not in the department of psychology (check public health, medical schools, counseling psych). Even if you cannot do research with them, it might be helpful to ask to have a conversation with them to learn more about their work and get guidance!
 - Again, go on twitter and learn more about the field, see what professors and labs are doing, and stay up to date on research. No need to post if you don't want to!

Research: Psychology thesis or independent research project

- **Do research with a professor or research lab!** This can include a psychology thesis or independent research project.
 - A senior thesis or independent research project does NOT mean that you do this on your own or that you necessarily need to conduct your own study or collect your own data!
 - Often 'independent' refers to the fact that you have helped to develop the research idea (i.e., brainstorm the research question that will be asked based on literature reviews) and meaningfully contributed to some/all parts of the research process such as determining the research approach, study design, statistical plan (how you will analyze the data), analyses (analyzing the data), and interpreting

the findings, etc. You will work closely with faculty and/or graduate students throughout this process!

- **Why is it important to complete a thesis or independent research project?**
 - This is your chance to dive into a topic in your field of interest and learn more about it *and* the research process. This is a hands-on experience of developing research questions and hypotheses, understanding methods of research and analytic approaches, testing your hypotheses using statistics, and interpreting, discussing, and disseminating your findings.
 - These skills are the foundation of pursuing a PhD in clinical psychology (and most other fields), which can be helpful for you to figure out if this is of interest to you (did you enjoy parts of this process, even with the potential uncertainty of doing something new and challenging?).
 - It also looks great when you apply for graduate programs or other positions because you are demonstrating your interest and commitment to this area through your thesis project and showing that you can do it!
- **When to apply for a senior thesis?**
 - This varies at each university, so it is important to speak to academic advisors about the deadlines to ensure you can apply. Even if you don't complete a senior thesis, you can still complete an independent research project.
- **Some things to consider:**
 - Completing a senior thesis usually requires pre-planning before the semester to complete, and you will need a professor (and your research mentor!) to guide you in this process.
 - Many professors will require you to work in the lab for at least 1 semester before agreeing to this, but it does not hurt to ask if you are interested in pursuing one and this does not apply to you.
 - There are no specific tips to completing the senior thesis in this guide, but we recognize that this can feel really scary because it is new! There are lots of resources available to you in your lab (grad students, other undergrads, and your PI/professor). Our best advice for success is to ask lots of questions (directly and on google!). People often say 'don't be afraid to ask questions', but really, you can be afraid to ask questions– but do it anyway!
 - If you don't get the opportunity to write a thesis/independent project as an undergraduate, that's okay! You will have opportunities to do this after graduating (post-bacc, Masters) and can still pursue and succeed in this field.

Clinical Experiences

- You might consider ways to dip your toes into clinical work! While most graduate programs weigh research experience more heavily than clinical experience, it might be a good way to explore your interests and gain some skills.
 - Many universities have opportunities to get internships and clinical work through university programs where you can work at organizations that are connected to the university and have a record of working with undergraduates from the

university. Sometimes there is also a class or weekly meetings paired with this that can help support students and make the experience more enriching.

- There are lots of crisis lines that offer valuable training and opportunities to engage in clinical work. Consider joining one of these!

Thinking Ahead

- Now, is the scary and exciting part of deciding what happens after college! Maybe you have had it all figured out since your freshman year and followed each step of this guide exactly. More likely is that you're like most of us who jumped in at different stages and still have a lot to figure out!
 - Explore different types of psychology degree options depending on your interests by reading [Mitch Prinstein's uncensored guide](#) for Applying to Graduate School in Clinical Psychology', which discusses related fields!
 - Specific tips: Think about connecting with graduate students in your field of interest!
 - Look out for free virtual conferences hosted by clinical psychology organizations in areas that you may be interested in (great to learn about on twitter!).
 - Learn more about the next path to your graduate degree, which include:
 - Post-baccalaureate research positions (*usually* in the winter/spring)
 - Masters programs in psychology or related fields (wide range: usually December – spring, pending program)
 - Applying as an undergraduate in the fall (usually by December)

What to do after you graduate to learn and prepare for a clinical psych PhD

The Gap Year(s): Post-Baccalaureate Research Position on the Path to Clinical Psychology PhD Programs

- **What is a Post-Baccalaureate Research (commonly called “Post-bacc”)?**
 - A post-baccalaureate position is an opportunity for you to further develop your interests and skills within research and within the field. These positions are typically held for 1-3 years (but they can be longer!) following the completion of one's undergraduate/bachelor's degree (hence “post-bacc”). Post-bacc positions may be in academic settings (i.e., university research labs) or in medical centers (i.e., academic medical centers, hospital systems).
 - There are also some post-bacc opportunities through the National Institute of Health's (NIH) IRTA program. *Anything else like this to add?*
 - Post-bacc positions may have titles such as, “lab coordinator”, “lab manager”, “clinical research coordinator”, or “research assistant”.

- **Where to learn about open positions?**
 - Begin to create a list of mentors, schools, and academic medical centers where they are doing research that is interesting to you or provide training opportunities you are interested in.
 - Online job posting website: [Harvard List](#); [list of websites here](#)
 - Join free or reduced cost student or organization listservs (like the [Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies \(ABCT\)](#), [Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology \(SSCAP\)](#), [Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology \(SSCP\)](#))- sometimes labs will send out job posting and opportunities on these email servers!
 - [Cold-emailing](#) (i.e., emailing people you don't know personally who do research that is interesting to you!).
 - Discussing with mentors at your current university - they may know of resources to find jobs not listed here or may know people within their network who are looking to hire!
- **What should I look for in a post-bacc position?**
 - o Focus on mentor-based programs where you apply to work with a person (rather than just to the program), which can help you learn about graduate school and the application process.
 - o Learn about what opportunities there are for research (e.g., conference attendance, contributions to posters at conference or manuscripts, courses, etc)
 - o It can be helpful to select a lab (if available to you) that focuses on the research area that you are most interested in and hope to pursue for graduate school. This can be a part of the research 'fit' that PhD programs mention because it is clear you are interested in and excited about this path. However, this is not always possible because of availability, location, and other life circumstances! That's okay– and it can be helpful later on to highlight the specific skills you gained that generalize across fields and how that experience led your current interest in a topic.
 - o Twitter is a great way to learn more about who is hiring and what professors and labs are doing, which may be helpful. No need to post if you don't want to!
- **When to apply for these positions?**
 - o If you are cold-emailing researchers, you could reach out during the winter to introduce yourself, express interest, and start to gauge who might be taking students.
 - Note: It's normal for people not to reply. It is NOT personal. They are often overwhelmed with the number of emails they receive, so it can be helpful to send a prompt (~2 weeks later) re-stating your interest!
 - o Due to grant cycles, as well as graduate school decisions for current post-baccs, it is common that PIs will not know for sure whether or not they will be able to hire a post-bacc until the spring.
 - This can be stressful if you are in your senior year of college and your friends in other fields are getting jobs early on in the year. Do not worry!

This is normal, and more positions will be posted into the spring and summer.

- **How much do these positions make and do they include benefits (and other helpful things)?**
 - These positions typically make between \$35,000 and \$50,000 and do include benefits such as health insurance and a retirement plan.
- **What do you actually do as a postbacc RA?**
 - Post-bacc positions will look a little different depending on the environment in which you are working. Most positions will involve some combination of administrative tasks and research tasks, and many will involve some amount of direct participant/patient interaction.
 - In academic settings (i.e., university research labs or academic medical center), you may be working directly with a research faculty member at the university and assisting in their larger research projects as well as general lab functioning. This may include assisting with managing and mentoring undergraduate research assistants, conducting trainings for lab members, working with a graduate students, assisting with budgeting and purchasing lab and research materials, among other things.
 - In a medical setting, administrative tasks may include _____.
 - In both academic and medical settings, post-baccs work on research projects by assisting with tasks including data tracking and cleaning, clinical interviewing and assessments, explaining study procedures to participants, assisting with literature reviews, paying participants, and more.
- **Why would you want to do a post-bacc and why is this the most common path for those who get accepted to clinical psychology PhD programs?**
 - A post-bacc position is a great opportunity to further explore your interests, both within and outside of your education and career! It allows for some time off from school between undergraduate and graduate school where you can try things out and think through what you want your career and education to look like going forward.
 - It is also an important time to develop your skills and interests to become more competitive for graduate school applications. Working full-time (or part-time) in a research setting is very different from working in a lab as an undergraduate and gives much more hands-on experience and exposure to what research looks like on a professional level.
 - It is relatively uncommon in clinical psychology to be accepted into a PhD program immediately after graduating from undergrad. Post-bacc is an important step in not only developing your interests and skills, but also building up evidence of these expressed interests and skills through things like publications and presentations. Further, a post-bacc opportunity will provide you with the time and support to learn how to communicate your interests to future graduate school mentors and connect about shared interests, which is a hugely important part of the graduate school application process.

Masters programs as a path to clinical psychology PhD programs

- **What is a masters program in psychology?**
 - Research-focused master's programs (e.g., M.A. in Psychology, M.S. in Psychological Science) can provide fairly similar research opportunities as post-bacc programs. You may have the opportunity to learn advanced methods through graduate coursework, participate in clinical experiences, and receive close mentorship from an advisor on an independent research project.
 - Some masters programs in psychology focus less directly on the skills and experiences that are valued in PhD applications and are more coursework-based without opportunities to gain research skills (in other words, post-bacc RA jobs are the most direct path to gaining the skills and experiences that build your PhD application).
 - Master's programs usually cost money to attend, while post-bacc RAs make money doing their job and getting similar experiences
- **Why might you consider a MA in psychology as opposed to a post-bacc RA job?**
 - A master's degree prior to a PhD may be a good option for someone who:
 - Is not a US Citizen and may have trouble obtaining a visa to work as a post-bacc RA in the US
 - Did not study psychology or a STEM field during college and/or does not have any research experience (e.g., was a history major and did not work in a lab during college)
 - Has a lower GPA from college (e.g., <3.0/4.0) and would like to boost grades during a master's program
 - Needs more time to figure out the areas of psychology they are interested in
- **How do I know what types of programs to apply for? What kinds of things to consider?**
 - Terminal or Non-terminal
 - Non-terminal programs are often used as "stepping stones" to prepare you for Ph.D. or other doctoral programs
 - Terminal programs mean that they end in you taking the proper licensure test after completing the program and are accredited programs (ex. LMSW, LCSW, LPC, LCPC, etc.)
 - These programs are useful if you're unsure if you want to pursue a doctorate program (which incorporates research) or if you are certain that you don't want to pursue a doctorate degree and want to join the workforce after obtaining your Masters
 - Typically two years (unless you're pursuing a dual-degree or another special program)
 - What type of licensure (if any) will you get and how does that align with short- and long-term goals?

- Some programs can lead to different degrees with ability to practice now, such as MSW, LSW, LCSW, MEd in Mental Health Counseling (which may vary by state)
 - It is also important to recognize whether licensure is important to have now vs. later when you obtain a PhD. For instance, there are certain degrees (MA clinical level) that are more regional, and it will be helpful to know whether masters-level clinical degrees are able to be licensed in a state(s) that you would like to live in long-term
 - Cost of program:
 - One base price or is it per credit?
 - Funding/Work-study programs: Any opportunities to get paid?
 - Housing opportunities
 - Graduate Resident Assistant allows you to have free housing at your university during your graduate program
 - Internship/fieldwork opportunities:
 - Do they make you find them yourself or do they assist you in the process?
 - Is it a 1 year commitment or throughout the entire program?
- **What do you actually do in a Masters program? What kinds of experiences do you get?**
 - This will vary based on the type of program, but here are some things to think about:
 - Courses: What kinds of courses do they offer? Will these courses expand your current skills and training to prepare you for a PhD in clinical psychology (e.g., statistics, research methods, etc)?
 - Note that some MA coursework (including thesis) *can* sometimes count towards your PhD, but it is unlikely that this will significantly shorten the length of your PhD training program AND it is often up to the PhD program whether they will accept the course as credit for a course in their PhD program.
 - Save all course syllabi and final papers/major assignments for your MA to submit to your PhD program (to even be considered for course credit).
 - Clinical training: Will you get clinical training in [evidence-based treatments](#)? Think about different opportunities to gain skills related to your interests, which may include working with different clinical problems (e.g., depression, substance use, anxiety, trauma), people (e.g., children, families, adults, individuals with specific racial/ethnic or sexual/gender identities), and settings (e.g., community mental health centers, schools, university clinics, inpatient, outpatient)?
 - Research Training: Will you get research training to advance your goals or opportunities to do an independent research project or work with? Think about different opportunities to work with research labs, which can provide networking and mentorship.

Applying as an undergraduate to clinical psychology PhD programs

- **Here's why you may not want to apply this year:**
 - You are still unsure of what you specifically want to do
 - You have 1 year (or less) of research experience in a lab
 - You do not have any independent research experience (e.g., conducting thesis or other research project)
 - You have not participated in any conference presentations or publications
 - You don't really understand much about clinical psychology PhD programs or how to apply to these programs
 - That's totally okay! This could be a good reason to gain more hands-on research experience, which will provide you with more mentorship on what these programs are and how to be competitive when applying
- **When it may be a good fit to apply this year:**
 - You have multiple years of research lab experience under your belt
 - You have had the opportunity to do independent research (e.g., work on academic papers, poster presentations, and/or a study you designed and ran)
 - You know precisely what you want to study in graduate school and how you want to study it (and have some experience in that area already)
- **Consult:** It is highly suggested that you meet and consult with current PhD students in clinical psychology (and faculty mentors, if available) to consider whether this is the best time to apply.

Getting back into this path after starting on another path

- This is totally possible, and not altogether uncommon!
- **Get research experience:** Most important thing to do is to get involved in research in clinical psychology (potentially as a volunteer, part-time paid opportunity, or full-time RA job)
 - Consider explaining more about why you want to pursue this path now and what area of research you are interested in pursuing
 - Highlight how the skills you have gained through your other path have helped prepare you in important ways for pursuing research and a clinical psychology PhD
- **If you did not study psychology as an undergraduate:**
 - You may need to re-enroll in some undergraduate courses (including virtual ones!) to complete the requirements for pursuing a psychology degree
 - It might be helpful to take the GRE to demonstrate competency in psychology-focused topics

Helpful Resources

- Comprehensive Resources
 - [Your Guide to Getting In](#)
 - [Mitch Printein's uncensored guide](#)
 - [So you're applying to Clinical Psychology PhD Programs?](#)
- Applying for Clinical Psychology PhD programs
 - [Predoctoral competency requirements](#)
 - [REACH for graduate school guide](#)
 - Personal Statements:
 - [Personal Statement Examples](#)
 - [Annotated personal Statement Examples](#)
 - [Open-access materials](#)
 - Interviewing:
 - [Interview Tips](#)
 - [Preparing for Interviews](#)
 - List of resources, programs hosting open house days, and account to follow on Twitter: [Psych Research List](#), [PsychinOut](#)
 - [Project SHORT](#): Student-led organization that provides free support