Applying for Postgraduate Study

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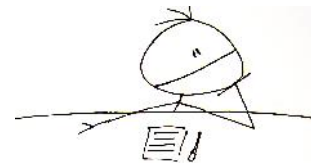
Agenda

- Context
- Factors to consider before doing a postgrad
- Research Vs taught
- Effective applications
- Personal Statements
- Next steps

Why do postgraduate study?

- "I really enjoy my subject"
- "I need a masters/Phd. To pursue my chosen career"
- "I want to convert to a new discipline"
- "I don't know what to do – this will give me time to decide"
- "My tutor suggested I apply for this course"

Steps to becoming chartered member PSI/BPS

- Recognised undergraduate degree (Graduate Basis for Registration)
- Accredited postgraduate training
- Judged 'fit to practice' independently
- Entry of Register of Charted Psychologists for relevant Division

PSI Accredited Courses

TCD
- DClinPsych in Clinical Psychology May 2011
- Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

UCD
- DPsychSc in Clinical Psychology
- MA in Educational Psychology

NUIG
- DPsychSc in Clinical Psychology

UL
- Ph.D in Clinical Psychology
- M.Sc. in Work and Organisational Psychology

What do employers think about postgraduate study?

Employer Views

For
- Postgraduates may be more mature
- Advanced knowledge and skills
- Demonstrates a determination to succeed / desire for self-development

Against
- Academic experience not necessarily better than work experience
- Too specialised/narrow?
- Unrealistic salary or job expectations

When should I study?

When?

- Straight after degree?
- After time out?
- After working full-time?
- While working?

Where should I study?

Where?

- Availability of programmes
- Entry requirements
- Modes of study available
- Funding
- Reputation of course/institution
- Personal considerations

Should I do a taught postgrad or a research postgrad?

Taught Postgrads

- Delivered and assessed through taught modules
- Some independent research - dissertation
- May include continuous assessment, examinations
- Entry requirements and application deadlines vary

Research Postgrads

- Critical investigation and evaluation of an approved topic
- Work under supervision of a senior academic
- Closing dates vary depending on funding

Research?

- Satisfaction and intellectual stimulation but can also be challenging/demanding
- Government funding earmarked for PhDs
- **BUT** investment has not yet translated into employment opportunities
- Need high levels motivation and interest
- Potentially working 40+ hours a week

PhD - Issues to consider

- Motivation
- What will you get from it? (papers, conferences etc.)
- Funding
- Supportive supervisor
- Future prospects

Finding the right research programme

- The institution
- The research topic
- Your supervisor
- Teaching opportunities
- Funding

Choosing your Supervisor

- Explore the research activities of potential supervisors
- Read their published work
- Meet with potential supervisors to discuss your interests

FIND OUT:
- Can they give you the time/support you will need?
- Does their style and personality match or complement yours?
- Do they have a proven track record as a supervisor?

Before making your final decision…..
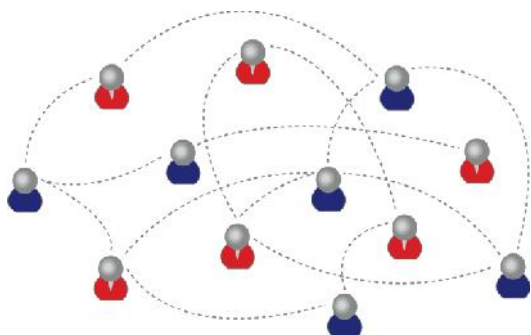
Talk to as many people as you can

Ask questions…

- What are previous graduates of the programme doing?
- What are the employment prospects like?
- What do past and current students think of the programme?
- What kind of industry connections does the School/Department have?
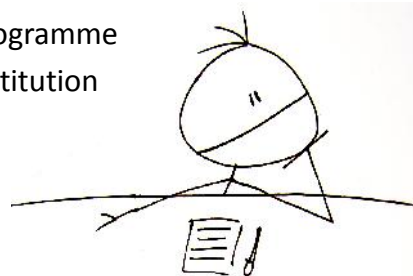

Use your network

How do I make an effective application?

Application requirements may include…..

- Academic transcripts
- Academic references
- Online application form
- Personal/ supporting statement
- CV
- Research proposal (http://researchproposalguide.com/)

Research

1. Yourself
2. The programme
3. The institution

Before you start writing, ask yourself…

- What sets me apart from other applicants?
- How did I learn about this field?
- Why am I interested in this field?
- What experience has stimulated and enhanced my interest?
- What relevant skills/attributes do I possess?

- What are my greatest achievements?
- What are my career aspirations?
- Why this college or programme?
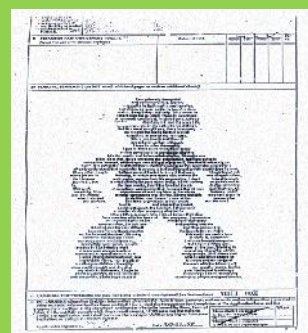- Are there any gaps in my academic record?

Successful Applications

- Demonstrate a strong interest in the programme
- Outline why you are a strong applicant
- Tailored for each application
- Positive and enthusiastic
- Clear, concise, within prescribed word limits

Personal Statements

Why Personal Statements?

- To get to know YOU
- To see if you write well
- To see if you can think logically
- Assess your level of interest/motivation/fit
- Check that your expectations are realistic
- Assess your potential to be successful

What are Personal Statements used for?

- Aid short-listing/selection
- Generate interview questions
- Confirm your suitability, particularly if 'border-line'

Personal Statement - Structure

- Introduction
- Main body
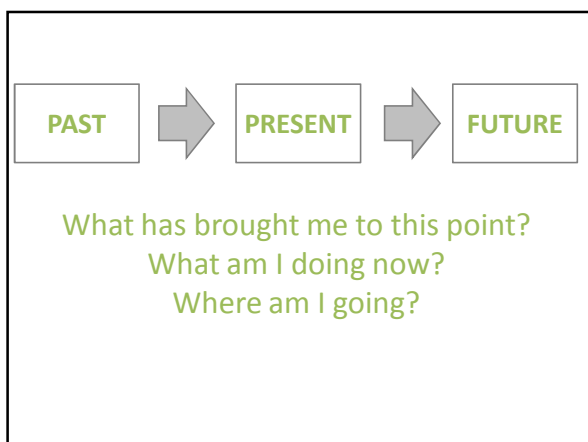- Closing

Introduction

- Grab the reader's attention or lose it
- Why applying?
- Framework for the rest of the statement.

Main Body

- Sales pitch
- Qualifications & how they relate to the course
- Interest, experience, knowledge of the subject area
- Skills, attributes, strengths, achievements
  - Course
  - Work experience
  - Extra curricular
- Goals and objectives

Closing

- Synthesise key themes
- Bring it all together

PAST ➡ **PRESENT** ➡ **FUTURE**

What has brought me to this point?
What am I doing now?
Where am I going?

Questions to answer

- Why do you want to do the course/research?
- Why this subject?
- Why this university?
- What academic skills can you offer?
- What personal skills can you offer
- What are your strengths?
- What is the relevance of your first degree to this study?
- What are your career aims?

A good personal statement…

- Answers the question
- Is thoughtful and honest
- Strives for depth, not breadth
- Transforms flaws into positives
- Demonstrates your knowledge of the programme/institution
- Exudes confidence (but not arrogance…)
- Benefits from several drafts and feedback from others

It may take a few drafts to get it right….

Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Analyse the application form
- Be clear on skills, attributes, experience required
- Provide evidence – draw on past experience
- Tailor to course/institution

Don't

- Leave unexplained gaps
- Make spelling mistakes
- Make exaggerated statements
- Be apologetic in tone

AVOID Cliché

"I have always wanted to……"

"X has always been my true calling"

- **Mature students** - Link relevance of skills and experiences to the particular course
- **Part-time study –** Convey excellent time management skills and an ability to multi-task
- **International students** - Provide evidence that English language ability meets the required standard for admission

Next Steps

Support

- Your School / lecturers
- Career Development Centre
- Institution where you plan to do your postgrad

www.ucd.ie/careers

Other Resources

www.postgradireland.com (postgrad courses in Ireland)

www.prospects.ac.uk (postgrad courses in the UK)

www.pac.ie (online applications for most* Irish universities)

www.braintrack.com (USA)

http://studyusa.com (USA)