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Introducing Your Virtual Advisor

In This Online and Pocket Companion Program You Will Learn:

❖ About areas of psychology (e.g., cognitive, developmental, social, and industrial–organizational psychology)
❖ About careers in psychology based on type of degree
❖ About a PhD versus a PsyD versus an MA (or MS)
❖ About preparing for graduate school, inside and outside the classroom
❖ About “goodness of fit” and the process of applying to graduate school
❖ About crafting your vita, writing your personal statement, and obtaining letters of recommendation
❖ About interviewing
Have you ever found yourself thinking, “I only wish I knew then what I know now?” Maybe you took a new job, got a new roommate, or became involved in a relationship. Then, after some time, you found yourself wishing that you had known at the outset everything that you learned since that time—the hard way. Hindsight is 20-20, as they say. Think of all the trials, tribulations, and heartache you might have spared yourself, if only you’d known.

Well, that’s what The Virtual Advisor is all about. It will help you ahead of time with your application to graduate school. By giving you a behind-the-scenes look at every step and stage in the process, The Virtual Advisor harvests all of our years and years of experience and serves them up to you before you apply. Think of The Virtual Advisor as your personal guide or coach, advising you in relation to each and every step you take in the process of graduate application, before you even begin.

The Virtual Advisor is divided into two parts: (1) The Online Companion and (2) The Pocket Companion. Each one is designed to complement and extend the other. The Online Companion is located at http://www.thevirtualadvisoronline.com, and you access it with your access code. Using a personal approach, The Online Companion provides an in-depth overview of the wide range of graduate school considerations and talks you through aspects of graduate school exploration, preparation, and application. You’ll learn about different degrees, careers, and salaries in psychology, as well as how best to prepare yourself for the future of your choice. You will have lots of opportunities to assess your current position in relation to the “ideal” and to interact online as you examine yourself and explore your future. Along the way, you will meet other graduate applicants, see some of their application materials, and, in The Online Companion, listen to their graduate interviews, too. Because The Online Companion is online, it’s available whenever you are, and you can return again and again to any of its modules, or download them for podcasting. So whether you are on a bike or bus, walking or running, or just sitting down with a latte, The Online Companion can accompany you.

The Pocket Companion is the perfect complement to The Online Companion. It concentrates on those features of your graduate application over which you have the most control at this time: your vita, your personal statement, and your letters of recommendation, advising you in detail exactly how best to approach each one. By giving you lots of examples and leading you through the process step by step, The Pocket Companion helps you craft the strongest possible graduate application materials.
Wherever you are in the process of thinking about graduate study in psychology, *The Virtual Advisor (Online Companion and Pocket Companion)* can help. Perhaps you are just now considering graduate school, or wondering whether you should pursue a master’s degree or a doctoral degree. Maybe you have a pretty good idea that you would like to pursue a doctorate, but you are trying to sort out the differences between particular degrees—how, exactly, does a PsyD differ from a PhD?—or the differences in areas of specialization—are clinical and counseling psychology programs really *that* different? *The Virtual Advisor Online Companion* can help you with those questions in clear, straightforward, no-nonsense terms. It can help you with other questions as well, including ones you never knew you had (e.g., What is an *attrition rate*? What degrees offer licensure? Should you write a thesis?).

More than that, however, *The Virtual Advisor* actually coaches you through each component of your graduate application, inch by inch, from wherever you are to wherever you want to go. No two students ever start from exactly the same place, nor do they often have the same goal or objective. Everyone is different, so there are no hard-and-fast answers to such questions as “Should I have extensive experience in one laboratory or experience in many laboratories?” or “Should I get a PhD or a PsyD?” Your background, experiences, and credentials are distinctive, just as your goals, aspirations, and objectives are unique. And that’s a good thing. Graduate schools are looking for unique people whose qualifications and career objectives fit with their distinctive offerings. A good match is vital to a successful application and, unlike “well-roundedness” in undergraduate admissions, “general excellence” is not always sufficient for admission into graduate schools in psychology. That’s where your application materials come into play.

In *The Virtual Advisor*, we break your graduate application materials down into two groups: (1) objective components and (2) subjective components. *Objective* components are things that are common, descriptive, and more or less beyond your control at this point. Your transcripts, your GPA, and your GRE scores fit this bill. Yes, you may still be able to add a point or two to the first (or second) decimal place in your GPA, and you may well be able to bulk up your GRE scores by taking lots of practice tests or a GRE preparation course, but your coursework, GPA, and GRE scores are more likely to help qualify you for *further* consideration than they are to gain you admission into a graduate program. Yes, admissions committees will sit up and take notice if you were a triple major in psychology, philosophy, and physics.
with a 4.0 GPA, or if you crack the 1500-point threshold on the GRE, but most students do not distinguish themselves solely with these objective measures. Neither do these facts, outstanding as they are, really address what graduate programs are looking for, which is a goodness of fit between the applicants and themselves. So, although a 4.0 applicant with a GRE score of 1500 would almost assuredly be capable of completing any given graduate program, the admissions committee is still going to ask how that person would fit in, with whom he or she would work as an advisor, and what distinctive experiences, qualifications, or skills he or she would bring to the program. The objective components of your application are like the peephole in your front door: they provide a promising glimpse of the person who is outside knocking, and they may even get you invited inside. However, the question remains: Who is this applicant, and what does he or she want? The subjective components of your application can answer those questions.

The subjective components are all about you, distinctively. It is important to note that you have substantial control over these components and what they say about you. Into this category we place the vita, the personal statement, and the letters of recommendation (yes, you can influence the content of your letters of recommendation, and we will tell you how). They are subjective because they represent you personally, individually, and they do so from somewhat different perspectives. Each of these items has a distinctive function or purpose, too, and understanding that purpose can advantage you substantially.

In The Virtual Advisor Online Companion (http://www.thevirtualadvisoronline.com), we address all of the objective and subjective components of the graduate application, and we take you from the earliest point of considering graduate study—exploring careers in psychology—to interviewing, and on to the final point of notifying programs about your decision to accept or decline their offers. In The Pocket Companion, we concentrate on those subjective components, the ones that are within your control and will make you stand out. It is those subjective components that most students worry about, too. You know what a good GPA looks like and what good GRE scores are (and we will tell you in The Online Companion what you need for different kinds of graduate programs), but most students are uncertain about the personal statement, vita, or letters of recommendation. Most students have never written a personal statement for graduate school, never drafted a vita for graduate study, and never even requested, much less read, any letters of recommendation for graduate schools.

But all that is about to change. Taken together, The Virtual Advisor Online Companion and Pocket Companion will give you a behind-the-scenes
view of personal statements, vitas, and letters of recommendation and show you how to make yours shine. In fact, the whole purpose of *The Virtual Advisor* is to give you an insider’s perspective on every facet of the graduate school application. By the time your application reaches the schools of your choice, you will have benefited from the considerable experience we bring to the table, experience that you can profit from now, instead of learning the hard way, after the fact.

And that is the purpose of *The Virtual Advisor*. It relieves you from having to say, “I only wish I knew then what I know now.” If you feel you would have been well served by having had a sneak peek at that job, that roommate, or that relationship well in advance of getting involved, then take heart. When it comes to your graduate applications, *The Virtual Advisor* gives you that glimpse and allows you to develop more informed, effective graduate application materials. In the end, our goal is to help you maximize your chances of getting into the top graduate schools of your choice. So let’s get started!

Greg J. Neimeyer
Diane Stevenson