

What is The Difference Between a Ph.D. and a Psy.D. in Psychology?



Many students interested in graduate training in psychology find themselves wondering about how the two degree programs are likely to differ. Likewise, many people contemplating psychotherapy for behavioral or emotional problems might notice that clinical and counseling psychologists may have one or the other degree and wonder about which type of therapist would be most helpful. These are reasonable questions to ask.

The Ph.D. degree is a **Doctor of Philosophy** degree, which places a strong emphasis on research. Clinical or counseling psychologists who have a Ph.D. have received extensive training in the science and practice of psychology. Ph.D. training in clinical or counseling psychology prepares psychologists to conduct research as well as to provide clinical services.

The Psy.D. degree is a **Doctor of Psychology** degree. These programs are designed to train practitioners, and they typically have a greater emphasis on psychotherapy and supervised experience with patients than do Ph.D. programs. Graduates of Psy.D. programs are taught how to *understand and appreciate* research (i.e., they should read and understand scientific studies and their practice should be shaped by this research), but they are not trained to actually *produce* research – at least this isn't emphasized as much as in traditional Ph.D. programs.

So which degree should a student of psychology seek?

- Students who may want to teach in a university or conduct research will receive better training in the process of receiving a Ph.D. degree.
- Students who only want to be therapists will receive good training in either a Ph.D. or a Psy.D. program.
- In general, the Ph.D. degree requires an additional year or two of training in order to complete a large research project (the “doctoral dissertation”). The Ph.D. degree is offered by traditional universities and most PhD students receive assistance with tuition. Many Ph.D. programs provide full tuition reimbursement and a stipend (i.e., salary) to conduct research or teach classes.
- Psy.D. degrees are offered by both traditional universities and not-for-profit professional schools; a few recent Psy.D. programs are affiliated with large for-profit institutions and these programs should be carefully evaluated before a student enrolls. Psy.D. programs tend to be more expensive than Ph.D. programs and with less financial aid.

Clients considering psychotherapy with a psychologist face a more difficult decision. Many excellent clinical psychologists have a Ph.D. degree; many others, equally talented, have a Psy.D. degree. In this situation, the client should probably look to other criteria in making a decision about choosing a therapist, and the therapist's reputation and the opinion of clients who have been in treatment with this person are more important than the specific degree a psychologist has earned. In addition, regardless of whether the therapist was trained in a Ph.D. program or a Psy.D. program, one helpful criterion is that the program was accredited by the American Psychological Association. This accreditation ensures that basic standards of education and training were met.