

10 Tips for Surviving Grad School

Career Development Center

- 1. Take advantage of professors and other contacts around you.** Chances are you won't find yourself in another research position like this one where you have access to some of the best and the brightest in your field. You may need those contacts for your first job after you graduate, too, so best to cultivate relationships early on and not just when you're ready to ask for recommendations.
- 2. Revise your approach.** Starting graduate school with the attitude that it will be a breeze just because you were a stellar undergraduate probably isn't the best idea. Pursuing an advanced degree won't be the same as pursuing your bachelor's, nor should it be. Go into the experience with high expectations for yourself, and the attitude that you'll need to devote more time to your academic life to be successful.
- 3. Get organized.** Much of what you do on the graduate level will be useful down the line, whether that means an assignment will become a part of a portfolio or the research you do will find an eventual place on your resume. Come up with a system where you can compile anything you may return to after graduation, separate from any thesis materials you already know you'll need.
- 4. Take initiative.** There isn't much hand-holding in graduate school, and you'll largely be expected to figure things out on your own. The time to become more independent is now. If you do have questions about your financial aid, a big assignment, or anything else, it's up to you to find the answer. Your professors will definitely appreciate you coming to them sooner rather than later.
- 5. Expect to be busy.** If you struggled with time management as an undergraduate, you'll need to think about breaking that bad habit as soon as you start your new life as a graduate student. The assignments you're given will be more involved, the exams you take will take more preparation, and you'll be spending more of your time on academic work, whether that's on research, a thesis paper, or keeping on top of your studying.
- 6. Prioritize.** There will be a lot thrown at you from the minute you start graduate school, and it's up to you to figure out what's most important to do now, and what can wait until later. Don't procrastinate: Big projects may need to be tackled piece by piece, and you'll be responsible for not letting all of your other work and responsibilities slide in the meantime.
- 7. Study now.** It's much harder to procrastinate on graduate level work than it may have been when you were an undergraduate so stay on top of your studies. The best way to avoid burnout (and all-nighters) is to manage your time. Keep a calendar, to-do list, or whatever will help keep you on track, because we guarantee the coursework and assignments expected of you will be more intense than those you may have been used to as an undergraduate.
- 8. Become an expert.** Take advantage of research opportunities. When else will you have access to the caliber of academic professionals and materials that you'll have in graduate school? Getting more involved in research in your field may also help you cover your tuition and fees, as numerous fellowships, grants, and assistantships are based on your experience and willingness to conduct research.
- 9. Budget wisely.** It may be difficult to save money while in graduate school, but it should be your goal to live frugally. You probably have student loan debt waiting for you from your bachelor's, so you shouldn't rely on loans to cover all of your college expenses. Find some part-time work that plays to your strengths or looks good on a resume, like working as a research assistant, and stick to a budget. You'll thank us later.
- 10. Branch out.** Even the most studious among you need to leave the library sometimes and get acquainted with the rest of your graduate school class. Make sure to take advantage of what your school has to offer from time to time, whether that's a lecture series, a student group affiliated with an issue you support, or free pizza in the student lounge. Even graduate students need a break sometimes.

