

Top Ten Things

Graduate students need to know ***NOW*** for writing papers now, and a thesis, project or extended essays later.

Working smart is essential to your survival so polish your skills early.

1. **Getting tired of working harder than others at reading, writing, comprehension and classroom participation?**
 - Check out the Student Learning Commons for help to improve these skills, time management, and much, much more.
2. **Annoyed all the time with working hard with your computer?**
 - Throwing hard, long, repetitive, sweating labour at repeat, computer-based tasks is not effective use of your time and effort. It is a danger signal. It is time to pick up some additional skills.
 - Learn how to get the computer to do as much of the laborious, repetitive work as possible. You don't need to turn yourself into a machine to achieve mechanistic consistency in your document.
 - Listen to your guts. Your mind will yell "There HAS to be a better way to do it than THIS." There is. Stop labouring and go find the better method immediately, in the help menu, the Thesis Office webpage, or a good manual. Learning a new trick to avoid tedious work is fun and gratifying.
 - You will need these professional writing skills and tools both now and in order to succeed professionally in your future career, so budget the time early to
 - Whether you are using MS Word, 2003 OR 2007, or LaTeX or any other, plan time for a software learning curve into your schedule. Word processing software is NEVER "intuitive" regardless of manufacturer hype.
3. **Document formatting is primarily structural, and only secondarily cosmetic.**
 - Never leave "formatting" to the last.
 - Formatting **structures** can make writing and editing faster and smoother.
 - Get your format structures into place before you write, by adopting a template.
 - After that, the looks can evolve and be adjusted, while still maintaining quality and consistency.
4. **Use the templates and helpsheets from the library website for every assignment.**
 - There are MSWord, OpenOffice templates and links for LaTeX.
 - Your learning curve will be less steep.
 - Every writing task will become easier, and the needed skills will be there when you start your thesis.
 - You will be able to combine content from previous papers without time-consuming retro-fixing.
 - And the thesis template will take care of most of the regulations you need to meet for submitting a final thesis/project/essays to the library.
 - Helpsheets are also available for many topics, from referencing and plagiarism to copyright and glitch fixing.
5. **Think modular: all assignments during your grad program contribute to your end thesis or project.**
 - The literature review you do in the first semester is going to become part of your final thesis or project report.
 - The methods you propose in a research design course can form part of your thesis proposal and final methods section.
 - Pictures, figures and tables you create or borrow from others may be needed again.

6. Gathering references is an early, ongoing job, not a last minute task.

- Identify, learn and use your program's required or preferred style manual from your first semester.
- Better still, learn and use a reference database, so you can effortlessly insert all the information needed for a proper reference (including copyright holder contact info) and automatically generate references in the style of your choice. Consult any librarian at the University Library.
- Find out who the reference librarian is for your department, and come get acquainted. They are incredibly knowledgeable about finding information and reference sources for your field of study.

7. You are going to be publishing a book.

- A thesis or research report, because it is made available to the public at the library, is not a course paper. It is not in the category of private research and private study.
- Use of a template and professional word-processing tools will virtually guarantee a final thesis or report meeting the standards for publishability, and makes it easy to go beyond that to a professional, "real book look."
- It will be easily available to any inquirer, including current employers and those considering you for job interviews, so it needs to have the looks of a contemporary, professional report in your career field.
 - You may have issues with digitizing your work and putting it online. See "Digitization of Theses: Issues, Cost/Benefit/Forms"

8. Learn your copyright responsibilities under Canadian copyright law before you borrow anyone else's work, especially graphic material.

- It is going to be published in the legal sense of being made available to the public through the library.
- Learn now how copyright law affects the thesis/project publishing process (see "Working within Copyright" at the Theses office webpage, address below).
- You may be writing with co-authors or submit portions as articles to journals. Learn how this can change your right to publish the article in your thesis.
- Build the required tasks and responsibilities into your timelines.
- You will be publishing in Canada, where the laws are more stringent than in the U.S.
- Your professors, and U.S. based mentors, may not be fully informed about key difference between Canada's "fair dealing" and the US. "fair use" provisions.
- Identifying and recording who holds copyright (including over your own published articles) where to contact them, and the conditions they require you to meet for use is now an essential part of any secondary research, literature review or annotated bibliography work.

9. Plan your timelines every semester.

- Every human endeavour takes twice as long, per person involved, as you expect.
- Know your department and university deadlines, so you can coordinate your personal timelines closely with your supervisors.
- Stay informed about when supervisors are out-of-town, on personal leave, or on sabbatical.
- Plan your last semester carefully, because you may also be TA-ing or teaching courses, marking papers or exams at a detail level, when you also need to be revising your own work at a detailed level.
- Try to schedule your defence before the end of undergrad classes. Availability can affect the choice of external examiners. You don't want to be defending with committee members unavailable, and your supervisor leaving town before your approval page or revisions can be signed off.

10. If you need help, ask for it, early and often.

- Make friends with your graduate assistant/coordinator/secretary or program assistant. They are your most important ally on staff at the department/program level.
- You may not know what help you need. You may not know what questions to ask.
- But if you find yourself confused, puzzled, surprised, blanked out, feeling stupid or stupefied from overwork and not enough sleep, or just sense you don't know what is going on, you can still ask someone else "What's wrong with this picture?" or "Who is the right person to ask about this?"
- The Theses Office creates new helpsheets for online access, whenever two or three students ask the same question. Theses Office web address is below. Check there when you have a question. Email address is below if you have further questions.