



Alex Eble

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4 years ago, 26 tweets, 7 min read [Read on Twitter](#)

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1/Many

Dear PhD students and advisors: with input from [@jscottclayton](#) [@peterbergman](#) [@amrasabicPHD](#) and our students, I put together a collection of advice and best practices for thriving in a PhD, with a focus on econ and related fields.

This thread is the tl;dr version

You can find the full document here: alexeble.com/s/PhDGuidebook...

Note: tons of this came from twitter and other internet pals. While I try to cite as many people as possible, some names are probably not named. Sorry! Thank you anyway!

Alright, here goes:

Message 1: Invest in yourself.

The PhD gives you time and space to pick up valuable skills. Here are some:

- Learn how to code (Stata + one of [R,Python,Matlab]).
- Learn how to present your work. Jesse Shapiro's slides are a great resource for this: brown.edu/Research/Shapi...;

Zettlemeyer's take is also great: ed.ecogestion-cournot.unistra.fr/wp-content/upl...

- Learn how to present yourself (meetings, smiles, handshakes, etc.). Read this book, twice: amazon.com/Pitch-Perfect-...

Message 2: you can control your productivity

- Invest in organization/time management/personal effectiveness by reading and experimenting. Getting Things Done by [@gtguy](#) is great, but a lot to take in. Start with the incremental suggestions from lifehackers like [@james_clear](#)

- You are not equally productive all the time. Look up "biological prime time" and do some mini-experiments to figure out when yours is. When you've found it, protect it ferociously for your most important work (e.g., reading hard papers, coding, writing).

- Protect this time from distractions too! Avoid texting/facebook/news/etc. like they were poison. [@freedom](#) is a great app for temporarily turning off the internet on devices. So is locking your phone in a desk drawer and turning off wifi on your computer.

- You work way better with sleep, good nutrition, and exercise. The PhD is a great time to slough off old habits of too much caffeine and too little rest. It is a bad time to double down on being an adult who eats and spends

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Message 3 (imho, the most important one): Take self-care seriously

You are going through a pressure cooker. Take care of yourself. Mental health, physical health, and hard work are complements in creating research and getting you a great job.

Three sub-messages here:

3.1 (!!! if you only take one piece of advice, take this one !!!). Get professional talk therapy from a psychologist. It serves two purposes: 1) prophylaxis against the inevitable mental health issues that are going to come up, and 2) investing in your efficacy as a person

We all have unresolved issues from past experiences that affect us; therapy improves how you deal with stressors and interpret challenges in life and work, both now and into the future. The returns to getting better at this are hard to overstate.

If you feel very sad, get help. The PhD is very demanding. At some point, many students fit criteria for clinical depression. Resources:

- National Graduate Student Crisis Line: 1-800-GRAD-HLP or 1-800-472-3457
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- If your life is in danger, call 911. Seriously.

Longer-term resources:

- Your university's health center website will have instructions on how to set up a counseling session
- Columbia's can be found here: health.columbia.edu/content/counse...

3.2 Develop a support group. Find a trivia night / yoga session / pickup basketball league / some other social network outside of economics. Even if interacting with people is sometimes painful (🤔), finding pleasant, non-economics contact with the outside world is crucial.

3.3 Work on your physical health

This is a hugely important input into how productive you will be, from energy levels to happiness.

1. Find an exercise routine that works for you and stick to it
2. Eat well / avoid eating crap. (see message 2)
3. Take sleep seriously

Message 4: Normalize struggle and failure

Much of the PhD is trying hard at something, failing, then learning from profs/peers/the internet what you did wrong. Don't take it personally when you fail. It is part of the process.

Corollary: people like things they are good at, and it takes a long time to get good at research; don't infer that you do not like it from initial difficulty

Corollary 2: celebrate all wins. Problem set turned in? Dance. Test finished? Treat yourself. Paper submitted? Party time

Message 5: Treat the PhD like a job.



Set working hours for when you come to the office/library/sit down at your home desk, when you leave, what days you are working and what days you are taking off. Make it regular.

Message 6: most of the learning happens with you.

A lot of us (🙄) come in thinking that sometime in the PhD, magic fairy dust gets sprinkled on you and you *become* an economist/quantitative social scientist. That's not how it works. How it actually works: you work hard...

...reading papers, banging your head against a computer, and thinking. Struggle, ask for help, iterate, and improve.

This is the normal process and there is no shortcut, but you aren't alone. Remember messages 3 and 4: take care of yourself, and normalize struggle and failure.

Message 7: your main job is research.

To a first approximation, don't worry about your grades in classes beyond passing. Focus on generating ideas, getting feedback, turning the first good idea into a paper, and repeating the process.

Message 8: you are a seller, not a buyer.

Your job is to gain skills that potential employers value. In picking a topic, you have three criteria to satisfy: does it excite you? Is it interesting to the people who might hire you? Will completing it teach you skills they value?

Message 9: Use this time to figure out what you want to do when you grow up.

There are all sorts of careers you can do with a PhD in economics/public policy/econ of ed. There's no one right answer. Figure out what is the best fit for you, and chase that ferociously.

Corollary: try things on for size. Talk to people in those careers that interest you; if you are uncertain about academia, do an internship in a non-academic job one of your first two summers

Message 10: "God damn it, you've got to be kind." – Kurt Vonnegut.

The process is tough. For everyone. Be nice to yourself. Be nice to your neighbors. Be nice to strangers. You will improve human welfare and generate goodwill towards you. And, with practice, it feels good. END.

Thanks everyone for the kind messages. It gives me joy beyond words to know this is helpful to so many.

Please keep the suggestions coming - tweet, DM, email (eble@tc.columbia.edu) - I will make regular updates to the guidebook and aim for big improvements over time

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Dr. Murielle Ålund
[@MurielleAlund](#)

4 years ago

At our latest @MSU_IBIO postdoc meeting @HelenMcCreery presented her recent paper with @AmandaHund , @LizScordato et al. on the importance of #mentorship in #STEM & how to remediate to the lack of guidance on how to be a good mentor. Thread! 🙌 (1/n) onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ec...

I loved every bit of that paper! This is something that should really be spread to all institutions and read by grad students, postdocs and PIs alike! Read it, spread it, get discussions

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Paystack
[@paystack](#)

4 years ago

⚡ Hi team, are you thinking of applying to @ycombinator? The submission deadline is on *Tuesday, October 2*, and we've put together a few resources that'll help you put together a strong application. Follow this thread 🙌🙌🙌

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Steven Sinofsky
[@stevesi](#)

4 years ago

1/ Time management is top of mind for all as the universally scarce resource is time. There's also a lot of advice and best practices to be had. I think a lot of what I see is counter to success (long and short term) for project and career. Here's how I think/rant on time mgmt.

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Kristen Olson
[@olson_km](#)

4 years ago

#JSM2018 Next speaker is John Eltinge from @uscensusbureau. Transparency when integrating multiple data sources - adding admin data to survey data; starting with admin data and adding survey data to make up for limitations in admin data

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DHH
@dhh

4 years ago

Zuckerberg called Trump to congratulate him on beating Hillary with its "innovative" use of Facebook ads. Internally, Facebook cheered the "imaginative" use of the platform to sway voters. "Facebook loved us during the campaign", says campaign director. buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanma...

Facebook made \$44 million on the Trump campaign between June and November 2016. As a high-spender, the Trump campaign had Facebook operatives "[provide] advice on best practices including insights on which ad formats were

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Robert A. Karl
@RAKarl

5 years ago

Start of the academic year is a great time to adopt new practices for research/organization/productivity.

#twitterstorians

Now that semester's settled in, some tips. In rough order of usefulness. Most helpful for all levels, from undergrad up, across disciplines

1) Stop taking notes in Word. Various options for better search, organization, functionality, etc; I use @devontech's

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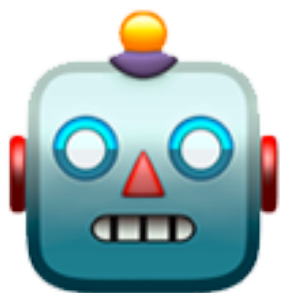
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