

Advice About Transition to Research

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September 12, 2024

Grad School Advice

- Stop “learning:” start working toward concrete goals
- Figure out what your job is:
 - If you are purely reactive (like a student finishing assignments because they are assigned to you), you will probably not do so well
 - Starting in April of second year, your job is to *finish papers*
 - Seek out more advice!
- **Networking:** at least proactively meeting with faculty
- **Time Use**
 - Good time management and intelligence are observationally equivalent
 - Evaluate the costs/benefits of time expenditures
 - Do one thing at a time – sometimes boring but effective and sustainable. Improves depth of thought, reduces overwhelm, makes your life more “job-like.”

Paper Advice

- Ed Prescott: “A paper should have at most one idea in it”¹
- Start simple, focused. Doesn't have to be the best question – you learn by doing
- Your list of interests is a *research agenda*, not a checklist for a single JMP
- You don't need to express/distinguish/validate yourself with every paper
- Microdata creates opportunities – work with it as soon as possible. Even public data!

¹I can't find a source for this, so it might just be folklore.

What A (Quantitative) Paper Looks Like

- The Only Question:² “How does X shift equilibrium Y?”
 - “How would/does/did X shift equilibrium Y, when people make choices Z? What is the implied impact on outcomes/welfare/etc?”
- Method: How do I answer this question? (Empirical or empirical+model?)
- Result: What do I find?
 - Treat it as a mystery if you can
 - What does your estimate really mean?
 - Under what conditions is it valid?
 - What can we do to test it?

²This is debatable.

Controversial Advice

- Don't start working on your JMP in second/third year
 - Too much pressure, boring, limiting
 - You learn more by doing than by worrying
- The only way to understand extensions is by understanding the baseline
- Having finished papers reduces the uncertainty you have to live with
- Try to live your life as someone with a job, not as high-stakes gambler

More General Advice

- Student → professional: think less about what you're expected to do and more about:
 - What people want
 - How you can provide it
- Hiring committee members are looking to add something to their department. For teaching needs? Research collaborations? Bringing in grants? Publishing in top journals?
- Networking is important because it's all people – communities rather than neat fields
- Read abstracts, subscribe to working paper series, go to seminars, etc.