

How to Succeed in Grad School, 1– 6

July 7, 2010 · by David Lindskoog · in humour.

I wrote these a while ago as a series of humorous self-help tips for aspiring grad students. I thought it would be worth republishing them here, as I was reading them a while ago with fond memories. Enjoy!



graduate school: it's like looking directly into the bulb of a high-powered flashlight for two years, only more expensive

Well, now that I've almost completed a graduate degree, I pretty much figure that I'm the new authority on the subject. Luckily for all you readers, I've compiled a handy dandy list of the best tips I can think of for how to succeed in that veritable circus of intellectual one-upperry that we so endearingly call grad school.

Without further ado,

1. Master the art of powerpoint presentations

Because you're not exciting enough on your own

Nothing says you're serious about getting that coveted A better than a conveniently packaged, neatly polished and crisply delivered group of slides. It's kind of like nothing satisfies my lust for a conveniently packaged, clumsily assembled yet almost magically delicious meat and bun combination quite like slipping down a Big Mac. No, not the Mac Wrap. Anything but the Mac Wrap... which in the



present metaphor I suppose would be akin to a presentation that promises greatness but ends up sorely lacking the necessary structure that only three buns... er, a succinct and coherent outline can provide.

There is a delicate way to go about putting together and delivering a delicious presentation whose aftertaste will linger long enough to keep your girlfriend from wanting to kiss you for hours. But there are also many forms that the final product may take. I, for instance, am partial to extra images. They're like those pickles that come on McDonalds burgers... adding just enough extra flavour to get the point across more saltily. Others who don't like pickles may prefer slides with a more one-dimensional feel. It's the balance that's important.

I could go on about the Big Mac thing. But I think I shall move on. I recommend checking out: <http://www.presentationzen.com/> (<http://www.presentationzen.com/>)

2. Be comfortable with your procrastination

You can worry about worrying about it tomorrow

Unless I'm horribly mistaken, it's almost like a law of physics that a lot of people that succeed in higher education are chronic procrastinators. To that I say, why change the habit that got you your first degree in the first place? Something's working, my friend! What's the use in worrying about it, or even talking about how much of a procrastinator you are, if (1) you're going to cause yourself to feel bad, and (2) you're not really going to do anything about it anyway. The only exception to the above would be if worrying about or talking to other people about your procrastination actually occurs during the procrastinatory act, or if this is itself the chosen method of procrastination.

The bottom line: if you're a procrastinator, congratulations. You're probably not going to change that fact so accept it. Hell, rejoice it. You'll save yourself the worry. If you're not a procrastinator, you are probably sent from the future to assassinate the future leader of the human resistance. So why are you going for this degree anyway?

3. Figure out how to sound like a jerk without actually being a jerk

Because it will come off as intelligence

Nothing is quite like a journal article where the authors take three or four pretentiously long words to say something that can be said in one. There's really only a few possible explanations for this prevalent habit in academia. (1) They're trying to impress someone (attractive aspiring journal editors take note), (2) they are sustained by the tears of grad students, and/or (3) they don't want the general public to be able to read the damn paper.



That being said, the people who will evaluate your work likely feed off of the tears of graduate students, so they will appreciate you taking the effort to check out thesaurus.com for those few extra adjectives.

The other side of sounding like a jerk without actually being one is that you might be able to employ the ability to inspire fear or entice rage to your advantage. It's kind of like celebrities in the press. No press is bad press, right? If that holds true, the more attention you can draw to yourself, the better. I call this the Paris Hilton Principle(PHP).

4. Exams? More like “knowledge-exploration invitations”

Because euphemisms just help us fall deeper and deeper into blissful delusion

In my experience (and it should be noted that while I may not have experienced everything, I have pretty much imagined experiencing everything, and according to some lines of philosophical thought, that's pretty much the same thing), the best way deal with things like 'exams' or 'quizzes' (methods of assessment that leave a decidedly undergraduate taste in one's mouth) is to go about preparing for such

intellectual muscle-flexing in the most ignorantly positive way you know how.

Now, I've never been one for studying much, but you may find this to be a useful activity. You could even engage in such practices as (ugh) making cue cards, or making yourself nice little pneumonics like Bu-Bi-Pu (bulimics binge and purge) or Cops <3 Poo (coprophiliacs love poo).

But what works better than studying? The power of positive thinking. Yes, that's right. Just use the power of intention and you can do pretty much anything. That's pretty much proven science, isn't it? Think of an exam as if it were an invitation to a party, except the party is in your brain. And the sole purpose of this party is simply to explore what you already know, like going on some kind of a psychedelic adventure into the forbidden recesses of your subconscious. At least, that's how I think of it.

5. Learn to love cheesy metaphors describing your “training journey”

I guess they figured we've finally outgrown Dr. Seuss' 'Oh, The Places You'll Go'... which makes me sad

The journey, the traveling companions, the magic mirror, what's in your backpack, taking the high road, making rest stops along the way, and leaving the nest. These are but a select few of the many metaphors you are likely to experience as you weave your way through the tapestry of grad school (ha!). And if you got a bit of a headache going through just that list, you're going to have to learn to love 'em or perhaps reconsider your decision to pursue higher education. Because this is what higher education is really about, you just don't find out about it until it's too late. In fact, I might be in real danger for revealing this fact.

I actually think that Dr. Seuss has a lot to offer on this point. In fact, I would recommend you sell all of those old undergraduate textbooks you have collecting dust and replacing them with your favourite Dr. Seuss books. There is literally no problem in life that Yurtle the turtle can't shed light on. And think of his training journey! Now there's a guy I can rely on come thesis time! And don't even get me started on 'Theres a Wocket in my Pocket!'

6. Parallel your thirst for knowledge with a thirst for fine wine

Hey, nobody said a \$10 bottle of wine couldn't be fine!

There's no better time than grad school to discover your inner sommelier. Especially when you find yourself in need of some reliable self-care and 'going for a run' or 'doing yoga' sound like way too much effort. Let's face it – if not for wine, and for argument's sake let's just generalize this to alcohol in general, where would academia as an institution truly be? Answer me this, and you are a better person than I.

Good wine is actually a lot like a quality graduate education. It has a sharp tinge of acidity balanced out by rounded fruity and tannin notes and a long, smooth finish. See? Exactly the same.

I also remember hearing somewhere that grad school itself first came into existence back in ancient Greece.



The philosophers all got together and were trying to think of the best way to spread their knowledge to the masses. They then decided that the best way to do this would be to have their disciples make a hefty sacrifice as the cost of admittance into the schools of philosophy to the god Dionysus, who of course was the god of wine. The theory was that the vineyards the philosophers kept would receive blessing and they would be able to produce fantastic wine which they found genuinely advantageous to their philosophizing.

So there you have it. Grad school was born with wine in mind. Which is why the two go so well together to this day.