GRADUATE SCHOOL: NOW THAT YOU’RE HERE....
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These are some informal notes to help you with some of the issues that graduate
students face. Required legal caveat: nothing offered below is intended to replace,
circumvent, or re-interpret university and department policy. Non-compulsory full
disclosure notice: I’m not the graduate chair, and so you should speak with the
graduate chair, the graduate secretary, and your supervisor on specific matters of
department and university policy.

Rules and Regulations
Many of the rules of grad school are unfair, archaic, arbitrary, and enervating. They
are rigorously enforced nonetheless. To navigate and evade them, you need to know
them.

So: read the graduate handbook, the university calendar, and university policy for
the official regulations and requirements. No, really: read them. Put this down and
go read them now. They may bring you wisdom and enlightenment, or they may
bring you frustration and confusion. Nonetheless, you should check them out, for
ignorance of the stifling and evil bureaucratic entanglements is no excuse.

Remember that your interpretation may not be the only one, and that the graduate
committee, chair, and dean make decisions based on the rules, precedents, and
equity.

If you have questions or problems, you should first talk with your supervisor and
the graduate secretary. They will be able to resolve many difficulties quickly and
easily.

Some General Tips for Grad School
You will learn more from your fellow students than from your instructors. Never
again will you find an audience more inclined to listen to the most minute details of
your work, if only for the sake of reciprocity. Take advantage of this.

Read their work with an eye to stealing their best ideas and avoiding their worst
errors.

Be gracious in your public praise and criticism. Brutal honesty in this area is not a
virtue; recognize that your colleagues too take their work seriously and that no one,
ever, believes there is such a thing as "constructive criticism" when it is aimed at
them. A certain tolerance, even a little mild hypocrisy, is the grease on the cogs of
society that allows it to function smoothly.

Take criticism graciously, even if you suspect it is malicious.
Having said that, remember: it's graduate school. You are being judged by your ideas, analytical skills, and writing ability. Don't be afraid to disagree with colleagues and professors. Develop and defend your ideas and critique those of others. Ask questions and push for good answers. Read everything you can.

Just don’t be obnoxious; life is too short. And if you are rude to people, you will pay for it in ways you may never even know about.

Maintain friendships, inside and outside the university. You don’t have to be friends with all your classmates, but you should be professional and collegial. Informal gatherings—at the pub, over dinner, etc.—can be some of the most intellectually rewarding and stimulating parts of grad school. Seek these out, even if you are by inclination a hermit.

Remember that alcohol is a depressant and may reduce inhibitions. Remember that some people need all the inhibitions they can get. You may be one of those people.

Do not be overly impressed with the enthusiasm, erudition, and intellectual sophistication of your fellow students. These are often feigned.

Learn to feign enthusiasm, erudition, and intellectual sophistication.

Learn to read quickly and effectively. Skimming is often essential, but bad skimming sucks and is always obvious. Don’t just read the beginning and end of the assigned reading. Find a telling point or anecdote somewhere in the middle you can bring up in the seminar. Make sure you understand the general argument.

Watch out for beautiful, eloquent, convincing sections that end with, "However, that is not the argument I am making."

Be on time for classes, meetings, etc. Don’t get into the habit of showing up late or cancelling appointments. Being late says, "I have more important things to do than this." Professors and fellow students will respond in kind.

Go to as many thesis defences as you can as soon as you can. They are public events. It’s good to give each other moral support and you will be less nervous if you understand the process.

Back up your work on your computer. Make hard copies, early and often. Remember that "my hard drive died" is widely regarded as the 21st century equivalent of "my dog ate my homework." Yes, it happens, and it may actually happen to you. But as an excuse for a late paper, it will be regarded with suspicion. Even if it actually happens twice, no one will believe you the second time.

Worship the graduate secretary. The staff are the only people in the department who really know what is going on. The graduate secretary can make your life
better—or miserable—in ways you cannot even imagine. Check for allergies, but small gifts are not a bad idea when someone has made a special effort on your behalf.

Gifts to your professors are a bad idea. They may be interpreted as a bribe, and if you were rich enough to offer a suitable bribe, you would likely not be in grad school. If, on the other hand, you are now slapping your head and wondering what to do with the Fender Stratocaster or BMW you bought for me, well, send it over with a nice card and we'll figure out a way to deal with it. (Note to legal department—this is a joke.)

Attend the department colloquia regularly. You will learn the most wondrous things from topics and presenters you thought you would hate. Even suffering through a bad presentation will give you valuable lessons in what not to do.

Go to the Qualicum Conference, usually held in February. When you have some research to present, go as a presenter. You will likely have fun and giving a paper will be a line on your CV forever. Lines on CVs are important for funding, fellowships, and other applications, while meeting with other students and faculty informally is a good thing.

Talk to your supervisor about presenting at the History department colloquium and attending regional, national, and international conferences. Giving papers is very important for funding applications, especially for funding from SSHRC.

Make sure your supervisor sees a draft of your paper several weeks before you are scheduled to give it. It is may better to wait until your second year to present a paper, as you will be busy with courses and may not have any original research to present before then. But if you do have suitable work, sign up to present.

Don’t screw around with the library. Get stuff back on time and pay your fines. If you have outstanding fines, you will not be able to get your degree until they are paid. Yes, this is unfair and sneaky. But librarians actually run the world; get used to it.

Look up new words you come across while reading, and learn how to pronounce them. Yes, some of those phonetic systems used in dictionaries are nearly impossible to figure out. Look in the front of the dictionary for explanations. Asking what words in the readings mean in the seminar is not cool.

Pushing your fellow students in seminars to define their terms and jargon, however, is a very good idea. It is a cool paradox that asking people to explain what they mean makes you appear smarter, not dumber. But remember, it is possible to over-use this secret weapon.

Nutrition and sleep are essential. Eat some citrus fruits and leafy green vegetables.
Coffee is not a vegetable, though recent studies suggest it may help prevent liver damage from excessive alcohol intake. Kraft Dinner is not a vegetable, either, and may not even be food. Salsa might be a vegetable, but don’t count on it.

Get some exercise. No matter how fast you cycle through the channels with the remote, it isn’t exercise. Wii workouts might just count, unless you’re curling.

Get some sunlight. Your body needs it to manufacture Vitamin D.

Don’t get too much sunlight; use sunscreen.

Get weird symptoms checked out promptly. Make sure your medical premiums are paid. SFU has medical people on campus; go to them if you don’t have a local family doctor.

Do not be tempted to cut your own hair to save money unless your name is Nick Arrojo or Sally Hershberger.

The Health and Counselling Centre can offer advice and services on a wide range of issues and problems. See its website at http://students.sfu.ca/health, or go to the offices in the Maggie Benston Centre.

If you’re a TA, check with the TSSU about medical and dental benefits. Use them.

Keep a journal of what you’re doing in graduate school. Not the partying part, but the thinking, reading, and writing part. Jot down your reactions to materials you’ve read, research you’ve done, thoughts you’ve had.

Review the journal regularly—if you’re not reading, researching, and writing steadily, figure out why and take appropriate action.

Remember that being smart is a good thing, but nobody likes a jerk, not even a smart one.

Remember that you’re not the first person to read a book, or to write one.

Pay your income tax. Scholarships, fellowships, and awards are taxable. You may be entitled to some deductions, but check this out with a reliable, knowledgeable professional. If you ignore the tax authorities, they will find you eventually and will present you with a bill. A big bill. I know this from bitter personal experience. While the tax authorities are not as powerful as librarians, they are much, much meaner.

Research
Read the journals, especially the book reviews, in your fields. Define your fields broadly. This is how you keep informed, and you need to be on top of the literature.
Graduate school costs money. There are all kinds of hidden expenses: books, computers, books, printing, books, photocopying, books, journals, travel, books...the list goes on. Plan for this.

Books can be hard to find, hard to get, and expensive. The library rarely has more than a single copy of a book, and these get shared by 20,000 students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Faculty have longer loan periods than students and are notorious for not returning things on time anyway. Plan for this.

Check public libraries, bookstores in town (Macleod's Books and People's Co-op Books are good sources), and on-line book sellers. The Advanced Book Exchange (abe.com) is a network of used book stores; you can search and order on-line. I've used it a lot and haven't had any problems. I know Amazon is evil, but it is efficient and you get what you want. The devil always works that way.

So: books. Hard to get when you need them, and expensive. Think of them as tools of the trade. Sometimes, only one tool will do the job, and if you don't have it, you're in trouble. Plan accordingly.

John Tosh's *The Pursuit of History* is a useful introductory book and it will give you some familiarity with history as it is practised today. It will at least help you master some of the jargon and the greatest hits in some fields. Look for the most recent edition.

That academic fashion revolves around ideas rather than heel height, hem length, or colour preference does not prevent us from slavishly following fads sometimes. As with all fashion, be aware of the trends and make concessions to them, but keep in mind that simply following fads is not the same as developing your own style.

Reading is an interactive thing. Take notes, ask questions, make observations as you read.

But don't write in library books. This is a really evil thing. No one cares about your brilliant insight when it's written in a library book. They only care that you have committed a heinous crime.

Don't even correct obvious errors in the book. No, you cannot entirely erase pencil marks. Remember that modern DNA testing makes it easy for librarians to figure out who wrote in the book. They will hunt you down and your fellow students will cheer as you are led off to the guillotine. I'm not kidding.

Read a lot. That's why you're here. But remember that at a certain point, adding another book to your reading list is likely to be an exercise in procrastination, not research.
Archival research takes much longer than you think. Some archives store material off-site and require several days to get it. Others have restricted access to materials, non-standard hours, and weird holidays.

Much of your research will turn up nothing. That’s the nature of research, but it still takes time to find out you can’t find out anything. Plan your trips to the archives: get finding aids, check them out on-line, talk to the archivists, but don’t just walk in cold and expect to get what you need when you need it.

Take accurate and full citations of all your research material as you encounter it. There are few things worse than trying to find an obscure source—that one that you just knew you would never forget—two years later. I speak from bitter experience.

Some people like to use a computer to take notes in the archives. If you do, be careful not to turn yourself into a human photocopier. Whenever you make notes, you make decisions about what is important and what is interesting and what is irrelevant. This gets easier as you go along, but the important thing is to apply your brain to the material, not type everything into your computer.

When I started my MA in 1985, only one of my fellow students had a "portable" computer. It was about 2 cubic feet in size, had a handle on top, and weighed 47 pounds. We were all deeply envious. We marvelled that he could transcribe so much material so quickly and print it all out whenever he wanted. He still hasn't finished his thesis.

The lesson of this story is not that computers are smaller and lighter than they used to be. The lesson is that simply recording information is not the same as doing research.

You will do more research than you will be able to put in your thesis. If you’re lucky, the ratio of material found to material used is about 10-1. Start a file of “great stuff I found and might use for another article or something later on.”

Writing
Do not trust spell-check or grammar-check programs. The best of them are still not great.

Either bookmark on your computer or get your own hard copy of the *Chicago Manual of Style* or a copy of Kate Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, often called simply *Turabian*, which is a shortened version of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. These will tell you how to do footnotes and cite everything from books to movies to websites to that really good idea you overheard on the bus yesterday. The *Chicago Manual of Style* will also give you ideas on proofreading, editing, usage, and even book design.
Get the latest edition, because—and this should scare you—*sometimes they change the rules*.

Become a pedantic crank on the accepted style for footnotes, bibliography, serial commas, numerals, newspaper, book, and article titles, ships’ names, italics, quotation marks, and the rest. This will save everyone considerable time and if vigorously applied, may count towards feigning erudition and intellectual sophistication.

It is especially important because your profs are probably older than you are, and so they will deeply resent watching the sands of time run out as they correct your comma faults and footnote formats and italics. They will take this resentment out on you.

For example, here’s one thing that really bugs me: extra space between indented, doublespaced paragraphs. I hate that. Fix it. Try clicking on “Format,” then “Paragraph,” then set “Spacing before” and “Spacing after” to “Zero” and uncheck “Don’t add space between paragraphs of the same style.” Seriously, I really hate that extra space. You have been warned. Is it kinda crazy? You bet. Nonetheless, you ignore this at your peril. Find out what things drive your supervisor crazy, and avoid them. The things, not your supervisor.

Getting these details correct is also important because there is an entire team of people in the library whose sole job it is to prevent graduate students from getting their degrees because there is a formatting error in the thesis. Seriously. And these people really like their job and approach it with a zeal most of us reserve for doing a cannonball off the high board. Make their job difficult by doing yours well.

Read *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. This will instruct you in many great and wondrous things, ranging from parallel construction to the difference between a colon and a hole in the ground to the difference between imply and infer to how to edit your work. You have to know the rules before you can break them creatively. I am told that Picasso was an excellent draftsman who really could draw a human face with only two eyes that were roughly where they should be when he wanted to.

Another excellent book is William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*. It is a valuable book that will help you edit your work and learn the craft of writing. If you are panicking about your writing, take a look at *Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing*, by Robert Boice. It’s a weird book, but helpful if you are finding it hard to sit down and write. Ask your supervisor for suggestions; everyone has their own favourite manual or book on the subject.

Don’t proofread from the screen. Print out a copy and proofread that. It is much more effective. Useful tip: print it in a different typeface than the one you use on screen. That will make it seem a little less familiar so you can proofread more effectively.
Read your work out loud. Your ear will catch things the eye will miss. You don't need to put it in iambic pentameter, but think about cadence and rhythm as you go through the thesis. Historians pride themselves on their writing (so do sociologists, but they're fooling themselves), and they pay attention to the writing of others.

**Basic Grad School Stuff**

- **Registration**
You have to register for every semester you are in the program. The last time I registered for graduate school the World Wide Web meant Communist infiltration of the Free World, so don't ask me about the actual procedure. Check on-line, and then ask the graduate secretary.

You either register for courses, including the "writing thesis" course when the time comes, or you register to go on leave if you are not taking courses or working on the thesis.

If you're not registered for a course or on leave, you have left the program. That's all you have to do to leave: just don't register. If you don't register but hadn't planned to leave the program, you will have to apply for re-admission to continue your degree. Re-admission is not automatic or guaranteed.

On-leave status requires the permission of your supervisor and the graduate committee. The university regulations say on-leave status is granted if leave is necessary, and necessary usually means a documented reason such as family, medical, or financial problems. If you go on leave for 3 consecutive semesters, the dean's office will ask that you withdraw from the program until you are able to continue regularly. This will save you money, but you will need to re-apply to continue your work, and re-admission is not guaranteed.

- **Supervisors and Committees**
The first person you should speak with if you have questions is your supervisor. You had a supervisor appointed when you were accepted, but you can change this. Usually your nominal supervisor will be happy to stay on, but it's always good to make sure. It's your job to determine who should be your supervisor and to approach professors and inquire if they will supervise you and serve on your committee.

Talk to other students about potential supervisors. It is important to find a supervisor you can work with. The trick is to find a balance between expertise in your subject and compatibility. A world-expert in the field who makes your life hell is no better than an good-natured professor who knows nothing about what you're doing. Do some research to determine who is working in the period, region, or topic you're interested in, or uses a methodological approach that you find compelling, or is an excellent editor who works well with students.
Find out what your supervisor’s schedule looks like over the next couple of years: you don’t want to time your defence to coincide with your supervisor’s three-year Antarctic field trip.

You need to determine committee members for your thesis. Discuss this with your supervisor. Not all professors play well with others, (some still run with scissors, for that matter) so you want to eliminate potential conflicts between your supervisor and committee members. Ideally, the committee members will complement the supervisor with their expertise in an area, approach, or editing.

You need to select your committee by the beginning of the second semester. Failing to do this causes major problems. Your supervisor needs to fill out paperwork on this.

Each committee works differently. Some supervisors will want to see regular chapters on the installment plan. Others will prefer to see the entire thesis at once. Some committee members won’t want to read your work until your supervisor has approved a draft; others will want to see chapters as you produce them. Some supervisors will assume that everything is fine unless you tell them otherwise, while others will prefer regular updates and meetings. Think about how you work best and discuss this with your supervisor and committee member to determine how you will work together.

Your supervisor and committee should comment critically on your research, your theory, your methodology, and your writing. Their job is to make your thesis better by correcting errors, pushing you to think harder, and suggesting ways to improve the writing. Yes, it is annoying and frustrating.

The only thing worse than a supervisor who does this is one who doesn’t. If your supervisor returns your draft without significant comments, it may mean your thesis is perfect. It may also mean your supervisor hasn’t given it enough attention. Find out which, and act accordingly. If you’re not happy with the way you are supervised, talk to your supervisor and the graduate chair.

Consider the following. Schizophrenia is largely hereditary. The population is increasing. Therefore, we should expect the number of diagnosed schizophrenics to be increasing. But it isn’t. Therefore, schizophrenics must be some place where their behaviour is not considered odd.

Where could they go and remain unnoticed? It would be a place where their jobs were not supervised; where they could treat other people badly without consequence; where they could survive even if they were vague and detached from day-to-day activities; where they could devote immense time to tiny, absorbing, yet often irrelevant detail; where they would be the centre of attention; where bizarre behaviour would be ignored, even rewarded; where ideas that most people think
silly would be entertained and discussed seriously and endlessly; where an inability to communicate is considered a sign of intelligence.

Think about this as you choose your supervisor and committee. In fact, think about it right now. Seriously consider dentistry as a career option.

- **If I am Your Supervisor**

If I am your supervisor, contact me by phone, by email, or by coming to my office. My office hours change every semester, and I am not on campus every day, but we can usually arrange to meet on relatively short notice. If you email me and I do not answer in a day or two, email me again. I’m not ignoring you, I’m just busy, and appreciate the prompt.

You may be tempted to call me at home. Resist this temptation, unless you need bail. Calls made while you are under the influence of mind-altering substances, legal or illegal, or sleep deprivation, are right out. Calls outside of regular business hours are dangerous as I am cranky upon awakening. For the record, the last time I was awake for the late news, Peter Mansbridge had dreadlocks, Lloyd Robertson had not been embalmed, and the Canucks were serious contenders for the play-offs. Note to students not familiar with Canadian network news or sports: insert polite laugh here and go ask someone who these names are. And yes, I understand that nobody watches network news any more, anyway. But you are a historian, and so references to the past should not startle you.

Other supervisors will work differently. Remember that while some professors are friendly and informal, your relationship with all of them is a professional, not a personal, one.

**Courses**

The graduate courses are not designed to help you write your thesis. They are designed to give you a wide knowledge of the writing of history. Courses equip you to understand how historians work and to understand the very different ideas, methods, and techniques they use as well as provide information about particular periods, regions, or themes. As a historian, you will be reading widely and need to know how the profession is developing and changing. The reading and research for your thesis is something you do outside of your course work, and you should start now.

The department offers seminar courses and directed reading courses. The department generally schedules seminars in each of the fall and spring semesters, including the compulsory MA seminars. Seminars are not normally held in the summer. Because course work is about training you in the broad fields necessary for the profession and because you learn from other students as well as professors, you are encouraged to take the offered seminars rather than directed readings, even when these are not in areas or topics directly related to your thesis.
Students may ask a professor to do a directed reading course. Professors are under no obligation to give directed reading courses; they receive little credit or reward for doing them. Some feel that it is important for students to work with other students and thus dislike one-on-one directed reading courses; they may require a certain number of students agree to take a course before offering it. In any case, few people are around to give courses in the summer semester, so plan accordingly.

If you are interested in a directed reading course you should find out which professors teach or research in the area you are interested in. Talk with them to see if they will agree to give a directed reading course. See the graduate secretary to complete the paperwork needed to register in the course.

Do some research first; outline the area and list some books you would like to read. Some professors will insist you draw up your own bibliography; others will hand you a reading list. You will have to write papers, but these may range from large historiographical essays to book reviews to research papers; that is something to be worked out with the professor.

It is also possible to take courses in other departments and at UBC, but these need to be approved by your supervisor and the graduate chair.

Language courses do not count towards your MA or PhD course requirements.

**Funding**

If you are independently wealthy, you can skip this section.

You don’t have to be a Marxist to figure out that economics—money—is important. Many students are not offered any funding when they are accepted into the program. In general, the most we offer on acceptance to the program is three semesters of support for an MA, and four semesters for the PhD, though it is possible to get more.

All offers of support are contingent on funding being available. What we get to disburse is given to us by the university, and it changes from term to term. If undergraduate enrolments are down, we may get fewer TAships, for example. Whatever your letter of acceptance said about funding, all funding is contingent on getting good marks—that is to say, grades in the A range—and making timely progress.

In general, if you receive SSHRC funding, we will not give you TAships or GFs for the duration of that funding and any offer of funding from us will not be extended to the post-SSHRC period. That is, if we offer you three semesters of support on acceptance to the MA program and you later get a SSHRC for three semesters, you are unlikely to receive further support from us. You may get further support, depending on how much money we have, but you shouldn’t count on it.
SSHRC is the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Yes, it should be SSHRCC, but is usually just SSHRC. I don’t know why the last C is usually dropped. Budgetary reasons, I assume.)

SSHRC is pronounced "shirk," which will provide your non-academic friends and family with much opportunity for stupid jokes at your expense. Get used to it.

If you were not offered money on being accepted to the program, you may become eligible for funding in subsequent semesters, based on your marks, progress, and available funds.

For most funding, including fellowships and TAships, the department ranks all the applicants. The GPA is usually the single most important consideration. It is hard to make a convincing case for X to get funding if Y has a higher GPA.

Everyone will recommend that you apply for everything you are eligible for. This is not because they are assured you will get an award but because they don’t know the GPAs of all the applicants and because GPAs aren’t the only factor. Decisions are made by the grad committee, and it tries to distribute money as widely as possible on the basis of equity as well as merit. Equity may be roughly defined as weighing progress through the program, GPAs, and previous funding.

Apply for every award for which you are eligible unless you are independently wealthy. Even a small award will let you order out for pizza, and will be a line on your CV forever.

Apply for SSHRC grants. The process will help you think about your research and the money is worth it.

The SSHRC deadlines are in early fall, so start planning now for gathering letters and transcripts and writing your proposal.

Check with the grad secretary regularly for deadlines.

No one is going to remind you to apply for money or remind you of deadlines. It is your responsibility to find and apply for awards, fellowships, scholarships, and TAships. Even if you have been assured that you will receive funding, you need to apply for it.

The graduate secretary will post deadlines for awards adjudicated by the History department, but there are many other awards available, often hidden in strange and wondrous places. Awards, applications, and deadlines are your responsibility.

Remember that many of these applications require letters from professors, and you need to give them plenty of time to write letters.
**Reference Letters**

You will be applying for grants, jobs, schools, all sorts of things that require reference letters. Writing reference letters is part of a professor's job. Don't be shy about asking people to write for you.

Don't supply stamped envelopes—we can mail things like that for free. It's not a good enough perk to completely forget about other career options, though. After all, how often do you mail things?

Do make sure you give people ample notice when you need a reference letter. Bring transcripts, essays you have written for their classes, statements of research interest, and anything that you've been asked to submit along with your application. If you've worked for them as a TA or research assistant, include a note with the appropriate information and dates. We're professors: we're supposed to be absent-minded. Help us.

The most important thing about a reference letter: you have to give us something to work with. Good grades, good work as a TA or RA, papers given at conferences, articles submitted or published, good contributions in seminars: these are some of the things that make it possible for us to write strong letters.

Be aware that we often have to write letters for several people for the same application and are often asked to rank all the candidates for whom we are writing. You can't all be "the best student I've ever had." So plan your career so you are the best candidate on the list. Late completion of courses, the prospectus, the thesis, etc., and grades lower than the "A" range will likely mean a professor cannot write the strongest letter for you.

Some professors have been known to agree to write a letter and then write one that is not helpful. Check to be sure the professor can and will write a good letter for you. One way to do that: "Excuse me, Professor X. I need a reference letter for my application to Yale. Would you write a strong letter that would help me get in?" It is entirely appropriate for you to ask this.

Some responses that indicate you should ask someone else for a letter:

"Who are you?"
"Ahh, err, hmm, well, ahh..."
"I can certainly write a strong letter, but I don't think it will help you get in."
"Let me think about it."
"Are you kidding?"

Universities are hierarchies. Letters from tenured professors often count more than letters from untenured or sessional instructors. Letters from senior professors often count more than letters from junior professors. Professors with strong publishing records are generally better recognized and their letters may carry more weight.
This is completely unfair, but it’s the way it is. Consider this as you plan your graduate career, including when you choose your supervisor and committee. This is especially important for the PhD.

**Teaching Assistantships**

Fellowships and scholarships are great; free money is always nice. Being a teaching assistant, however, will give you excellent training for teaching. SFU TAs have much more responsibility than those at most other universities, and this experience will be useful to determine if you like teaching and to help you apply for teaching jobs. It can also be an extremely rewarding experience.

The contract and the instructor you are TAing for will outline the work that is expected from you. It is important that you do this work efficiently. You have to do the work anyway; if you do it promptly, students and faculty will appreciate it very much. And there is nothing worse than having to mark assignments into your break.

Actually, there is one thing worse than marking during your break—it's having to mark the same week your own essays are due. Plan ahead.

Get a copy of your contract and read it. If you think it is being violated, talk with your shop steward as soon as possible.

There is often an urge to divert time from your course work and research to TAing. Resist this urge. It is tempting because it is easy to justify extra time spent on teaching on ethical and pedagogical grounds and it lets you appear to be conscientious and noble. It also lets you avoid doing your own work. The job is a job. You need to do it responsibly and carefully, but do not forget that you will be on the dustbin of history if your grades suffer or your progress through the program stalls.

If you find that you are using more hours for marking, etc., than outlined in the time use guidelines (TUGs) talk to the professor immediately. It is extremely difficult to receive overtime pay, so your best strategy is not to work extra hours.

**Progress in the Program**

Grades and timely progress through the program are the most important criteria for awarding graduate fellowships and teaching assistant positions. Any offers of funding are absolutely contingent on grades and progress.

It is important that you complete your course work and other requirements on time. A deferred grade or delayed language exam will take you out of the competition for financial awards. Since deferred grades automatically turn into failures early in the next semester, deferring delays the pressure in the short term but adds to it exponentially a little later.
If the grade is deferred and turns into a fail, it becomes a matter for the dean of graduate studies and so it is unlikely that we will be able to change it later even if you do the work, so avoid deferred grades.

If you must defer a grade, talk to the instructor long before the assignment is due. Be prepared for them to refuse an extension or deferral. You are being judged on your work, and part of doing the work well is meeting the same deadlines everyone else has.

Every professor knows that students encounter personal problems, stress levels, work loads, family commitments, political activities, etc. in graduate school. Some may sympathize and make allowances, but some may sympathize and still refuse to cut you any slack. Others simply won’t care. Still others will be deeply offended if you bring your personal life to the workplace. Some will insist that it is a matter of equity that everyone be expected to complete the requirements at the same time, and will either refuse to accept late work or will apply a late penalty. So do not assume that a deferred grade will be given.

Your supervisor is required to make out a progress report on your work at least once a year. If you do not submit the information needed to fill out the progress report, you will be deemed to be making unsatisfactory progress and will not be allowed to register the following semester.

Some scheduling highlights that are used to define "timely progress" in the MA:

- Finishing your course work in two semesters
- Doing the language exam at the same time as the rest of your cohort.
- Finishing your thesis prospectus by the end of your second semester and defending then or during the break between semesters.

Your third semester is for research and writing the thesis. That means you need to start the work long before that third semester. Aim to finish during that third semester, even if you have to defend in the fourth semester. Departmental resources are slim and it becomes harder to fund people the longer they are in the program.

Timely progress in the PhD:
- Course work finished by the end of the second semester
- Language exam completed
- Field exams and prospectus completed by the beginning of the fourth semester

**PhD Fields and Exams**
As a PhD student, you need to take a course and study three fields of historical inquiry in addition to writing a thesis of 250-400 pages. These fields are taken with different professors, and you should consult with your supervisor regarding which fields you should take.
At the time of writing this, each field is comprised of about 45 books or the equivalent in articles, with 3-4 articles approximating a book. Professors may run the field in different ways. Some will want to meet with you regularly, others not. Some will give a list of books to read, others will insist you draw up your own list with their advice and consent. Some may stress historiography, others may stress themes; the list may be made up of recent books, older books, or some combination. You have input into designing the fields and should be actively engaged in putting them together.

If you're doing a field with me, develop a series of thematic questions you want to explore, and build the field around those questions.

Use the field as an opportunity to engage with debates, rather than simply report on them.

Don’t assume that the latest material is also the best material; reading the classics is useful, if only to avoid that nagging sense that you’ve come in at the middle of a discussion and don’t quite know what people are talking about.

Warning: when historians comment on historiography and writers, they often get important things wrong. If, for example, someone tells you Hegel thought the world consists of ideas, or that Marx thought a workers’ revolution was inevitable, or that post-modernists cannot logically hold to an ethical position, they are flat-out wrong, either because they haven't done the reading or because they are over-simplifying to make a rhetorical point. Either way, you need to be careful. Read the original writers themselves whenever you can.

By the end of your first three semesters in the program, you will be tested on each of the fields. These examinations may take the form of an essay, or a more formal exam. Discuss this with your field supervisors.

Typically the formal examinations for each field last 3 hours. You won’t have access to books or other materials during the examination. The examinations may differ in format from field to field. Professors may give you a single question to answer, several questions, or allow you to choose some questions from a list. The examinations are marked by your field supervisor and are given to another faculty member to read and assess.

If you pass the written examinations, you will then have an oral examination. Typically this lasts 2 hours and is largely, though not exclusively, focused on elaborating on the answers given in the written examinations.

The Thesis Prospectus
Both the MA and the PhD require you to write, submit, and defend a thesis prospectus by the end of your second semester for MAs, or the third semester for
PhDs. The prospectus generally runs 9-12 pages in length. The object of the prospectus is to launch you into the thinking, researching, and writing of your thesis. A prospectus does three things. It poses a historical question, thesis, or argument. It explains why that question, thesis, or argument is worth exploring. It outlines how you will attempt to explore it.

Put another way, the prospectus asks and gives provisional answers to three questions: What? Why? How?

What are you planning to study? Because this is a thesis, not a popular book, your work will make an argument. It will examine and explain the past, not just tell a story. It is a proposition (in the formal, logical sense—get your mind out of the gutter!) about the past that needs to be put forward and defended with evidence.

Why does your thesis matter? Why should we care about it? This is about historiography. What have others said—or not said—about this topic? The answer to this will vary. It may be that Indian historians have made some very interesting arguments about something that no one has yet considered in Canadian history. Or that new theoretical ideas can be tested in your time and region. Or that no one at all has asked what you believe (and can show us) to be an important question. This section will explore what is new about your topic and will sketch the work of other historians.

This is the oft-dreaded "theory section." Another way to think of it is "literature review." Another way is "historiographical argument." Take your pick. But you need to explain why this topic matters given the perspectives of other historians.

A short digression on theory. Theory doesn’t mean you have to label yourself a Marxist, a post-structuralist, a neo-empiricist, a new old social historian, or whatever—although you should know what these are. It means you have thought about your topic, not just in terms of the primary evidence that is out there but in the light of the work of other historians. It means you've thought about what your topic means in the larger picture, that is, the larger historical literature. It means you have thought about making an argument that makes reference to appropriate and applicable work done by others. It means you outline the larger approach you think is useful and valuable and explain why.

This doesn’t have to be an exercise in writing post-modern theory or a critique of it, though it may be. It does have to demonstrate that you have read relevant material, can show why your project will be an original contribution to scholarship, and will explain something that is worth explaining.

How will you research the topic? The last section will explain how you can undertake the research to answer your question or prove your argument. This is about sources and methodology. What kind of stuff is out there for you to examine? Newspapers? Oral history? Government records? Magazines? What? You don’t need
to have actually examined all these to write the prospectus. You need to have thought about them and located some materials that are likely to hold the answers.

Spend some time checking for primary sources, even if you can’t look at the sources themselves. Discuss the problems with the sources. Are newspapers reliable? Why? How can the census be used to answer questions the enumerators didn’t ask? What are the strengths and weaknesses of oral history? You need to show you are aware that some material that likely holds some answers exists and that you’re not going to naively believe everything everyone tells you.

All of this will of course be provisional. You may well change your mind about your topic, your theoretical approach, and your sources when you begin your research. You may not even be sure that you’ve identified each of these accurately. That’s fine. The point of the prospectus is to give you a running start at the thesis, not limit or define it permanently. It is very easy to get lost in the archives or get stuck in a time-space continuum loop. A good prospectus will be a map, but there is nothing saying you have to keep to your original destination.

**Presentations and Talks**

As a historian, you will be expected to give talks, papers, and speeches. This is often terrifying. Jerry Seinfeld observed that public speaking is the number one fear held by people, greater even than the fear of death. That means that at a funeral, most people would rather be in the coffin than delivering the eulogy.

Get over it. The only people who don’t get nervous or excited or keyed up before giving a talk are probably sociopaths, so you’re not in such good company if you’re not a little nervous. A few things will help you:

Rather than rely on notecards, if you’re anxious, write out the entire talk. That way, if you blank, you can simply refer to the written version and can read full, crafted sentences until you recover.

Print it type big enough to read from a couple of feet away. And remember, the lighting will be different than the lighting at your desk, so it may be more difficult to read the pages when you’re in public.

Don’t read off your laptop. Print the talk out.

Why?

Batteries die. Plugs get unplugged. Software jams, hardware crashes. Each of these will leave you stranded.

More important, the contrast on the screen is rarely as sharp as black ink on white paper, which makes reading more difficult. Even more important, the printed page usually holds more words than the computer screen, and that is a huge advantage. It
means you can make more eye contact with the audience if you don’t have to scroll down the screen, which is much more complicated than turning a page and more likely to cause an error as you screen too far or not far enough.

Also, you can take the pages in your hand and move around a little and still read from your talk if you blank. Hard to do that with the computer.

Even if you are reading your talk, don’t just read your talk. Engage the audience. How do you do that? You don’t need to memorize the talk. Instead, just be very familiar with it so you can look away from the notes for extended periods of time. That’s another advantage to printing the entire talk, rather than notes—you can look down, read a paragraph to yourself, say that to the crowd while you’re looking at it, and then look down to read the next paragraph silently then deliver it aloud.

Practice doing this. It is surprisingly easy when you get the hang of it.

Nothing is easy when you’re terrified. How can you deal with the jitters?

First, acknowledge them to yourself, and to the audience if you’re feeling really nervous. I have opened talks by saying, “Hello everyone, my name is Mark Leier, and I’m terrified to be here tonight.” It gets a laugh, which helps you relax a little.

Unless they’re laughing because your clothes are on backwards or important parts are missing.

Important tip: insert your own name where it says “Mark Leier” above.

Another way to feel less nervous is to acknowledge that you may not be able to control your feelings, but you can control how you present. Tell yourself, “I’m not a historian, but I play one on TV.” How would an actor playing a cool historian giving a talk stand, move, gesture? They wouldn’t stand ramrod straight, they would try to look relaxed, they would move a little. They wouldn’t mumble or avoid eye contact. Steal their techniques for your talk. Again, the key is not to get rid of the jitters but to avoid the common things people do when they’re scared so you don’t look scared.

Sometimes you can’t help it. I’ve given lectures that I have delivered several times before and suddenly been overcome with stage fright; I’ve actually had my knees knock and have broken out in flop sweat. Don’t know why. What to do then? Run screaming from the room.

That was a joke. Don’t do that. You will start to feel better as the talk goes on; it’s the anticipation that is nerve-wracking, so remember, you will get calmer as you get into the talk. If you look really nervous but keep going, the audience will admire your pluck.
You won't faint. If you do, however, it will be kind of cool, and people will act very kindly towards you, so it's no big deal. But don't rely on this consistently as a way to fake your way through a talk you haven't prepared. It probably only works once or twice in a career.

When you give presentations and papers, stick to your time limit. If they say you have 20 minutes, finish in 18 minutes. If you go over the limit, you are showing disrespect for others, and they will return that disrespect. People will remember that you went over the limit long after they have forgotten what you talked about and they will not be kind.

**Writing and Submitting the Thesis**

The thesis is an extended argument. It must have a point. If I'm your supervisor, I expect you to write about theory and historiography. Other historians have written something somewhere that pertains to your topic. You need to tell me what that is and why you agree or disagree. While your work is original, it is not done in a vacuum.

The mark of popular, non-academic history is that it pays little attention to the explanations of others and concentrates only on the story. That's fine, for popular history. I like popular history; I read it, and I’ve written some. That's not what a thesis is, however.

The thesis is different from a book or an article. You are not just telling a story and making an argument. You are also demonstrating that you have mastered the craft of the historian's profession. You need to show that you can do significant, original research, usually in primary documents, oral history, or other areas. You need to show that you can think critically about sources rather than just strip-mine them for information, and you need to demonstrate that you can write fluently in university-appropriate language. The thesis is not an exercise in creative writing or in experimental writing. Your aim should be to write clearly, observing formal rules of grammar and construction, and to write in ways that engage the reader.

When you turn the draft in, ask when you can expect a response. Professors have lives that are as complicated as yours. Remember, your supervisor is doing research, teaching, writing, going to conferences, doing administrative work, and more. Supervising is only one of a faculty member's tasks. They should be able to turn your thesis around in 2-3 weeks or let you know that a longer period is necessary. If you haven't heard something by the promised time, talk to your supervisor.

Committee members are supposed to read and comment on theses before the defence is scheduled. This is so they have some input into the final product—they are consulting and advising, not just giving a thumbs up.
External examiners must be given copies of theses several weeks before the defence. And Graduate Studies at the university level needs six weeks’ notice before a defence date.

This all means that it can easily take two or three months from first submitted draft to defence. Hypothetically, it may take 3 weeks for your supervisor to go over it. Allow yourself another 2 weeks to do the revisions and resubmit. If all is well at that point, it will then go to the committee. Allow 3 more weeks for the committee to read it, and 2 weeks to do those revisions.

If that goes well and more revisions are not required, it will go to the external examiner and a defence date can be set for at least 6 weeks later. This means it could easily take 16 weeks—4 months—from your submission of a completed first draft to the thesis defence. That’s if your first draft is really good.

It can take another month or more after the defence before the library accepts your thesis. Plan accordingly.

Depending on your committee’s schedules, this timeline can be shortened considerably, but do not expect to be able to schedule a defence upon completion of your first draft. Work backwards from when you want to defend to determine when you need to submit your first draft. Check this site for help: http://nomediakings.org/vidz/time_management_for_anarchists_the_movie.html

Remember that we are all busy and have research, teaching, and service obligations as well as lives outside the university. This means that you cannot plan on having your supervisor and committee meet and discuss your work at your convenience.

September, October, and November are particularly busy months for professors as many grant application deadlines happen then and we are scrambling to write proposals. Plan accordingly.

The first draft you submit should not be the first draft you write. Your first draft is for your eyes only. Your second draft should be seen by friends, relatives, and colleagues you can bribe, cajole, or persuade to read it. Your supervisor looks forward to seeing your third draft. It is not expected to be perfect—we have to earn our salary somehow—but we do expect a very clean draft, properly footnoted and formatted, cogently argued, and written in sentences. Nice sentences.

All of your written work needs to slavishly follow the rules of style and format as laid down in the Chicago Manual of Style. Some professors don’t care much about this. Some care, but don’t know the rules. If your supervisors fall into these categories, you need to be even more vigilant because the library really, really cares that your work follows the rules, and the library has the final say. It can, and does, return work for corrections in usage and format. So get it right now.
Schedule time—lots of time—for editing. Good writing means reading that is easy for the reader to read, not easy for you to write. That means editing. Writing is re-writing, and you need some distance from your work to edit properly. That means writing a section or chapter or thesis and leaving it for a time. This means scheduling more time than you think.

While editing, always ask yourself: what is my larger argument? What am I trying to do with this sentence, paragraph, section, and chapter and how does it fit into the larger argument? It is easy to get distracted by a good story or piece of evidence that doesn't really fit but you can't bear to throw out. Learn to throw it out. Put it in a special "I like this bit but it doesn't fit" file and use it for something else later. Reduce, reuse, recycle.

As you edit, make sure you know precisely what each chapter or section is supposed to be about. Make sure the introduction makes that clear to the reader and that everything in that chapter does in fact connect to the main point.

"And now for something completely different" is not a great transition unless you are John Cleese, and not always even then. If you don’t get this reference, don’t tell me, because it will upset me. Transitions let the reader know precisely what the connections are, how to navigate the turns and twists in the argument, and why it all matters. Master them and signal your turns. Guide the reader gently—your thesis should ride like a BMW, not the bumper cars at Playland. If you are not from Metro Vancouver, ask someone to tell you what Playland is. No, I don't know what a BMW rides like. Good, I assume.

Check with the Library Thesis Office before you print your first draft for your supervisor to make sure you know all the details and rules for the finished thesis. These include font size and margin width and many more things. The office has excellent advice and instructions. Visit the website soon and often.

The library will send the thesis back if you don’t do it all correctly. This can delay your degree precisely when you need to move expeditiously to the next phase of your life. Haven’t I mentioned this before? Yes. Why? It’s important.

Budget for binding the defended thesis. You’ll need copies for the library and the department and yourself. Current binding costs are about $20.00 per thesis copy.

The Defence
Timing
This part is really important. It’s so important that I will give you a reward for reading it. If you are a student in our program and you read this part and write it out and bring it to me, I will give you a doughnut. Or a cinnamon bun. Or a couple of bucks to get a cinnamon bun.
Here it is. We cannot schedule your thesis defence around your timetable. Read this again: We cannot schedule your thesis defence around your timetable. If you write the previous sentence out and bring it to me, you qualify for the doughnut/cinnamon bun/couple of bucks. But only once, no matter how many times you read this.

Let me elaborate. Your impending wedding, employment, further studies, or holiday plans are irrelevant to your committee and the external examiner. You need to plan around their schedules and availability and so you need to think ahead to make sure you can get out of here when you need to.

To clarify: if you are scheduled to go on a space mission to save the world from a collision with an asteroid and lift-off is at 0600, we don't care.

If you are a spy and have to save humanity from nuclear devastation and are shipping out next Tuesday, we don't care.

If you have been appointed to the prime minister's cabinet and have a meeting tomorrow to outline your plans for economic recovery, we don't care. Unless it means we'll get a big honking SSHRC grant. And we'd need the cheque to clear before scheduling the defence.

Insert something really important in here: we don't care. We might care if you are scheduled to perform major surgery. On us.

Of course we care. Really. But our primary responsibility is to ensure you write the best thesis possible. We will not sacrifice the time we need to read and comment on your work to accommodate your timetable.

People will be as accommodating as possible, but have planned their work loads several weeks, months, even years in advance, and there will be times when they simply cannot read your work for several days or even several weeks. Plan accordingly so you aren't left holding the bag.

Planning means talking to your supervisor and committee members frequently so everyone knows what is going on. This is really important if you're not on campus regularly.

**Other Defence Tips**
You will be required to defend your prospectus and your thesis. People will be asking you hard questions based on what you have given them to read. The point is for you to defend your work vigorously and effectively. You are the expert on your work, and this is your opportunity to demonstrate that.
Don’t waste any time before the defence trying to anticipate the questions. You won’t guess the questions no matter how hard you try, so all you will do is drive yourself crazy.

I note parenthetically that no one has ever been able to follow that advice.

Get someone to check you out before you head into the examining room for spinach on teeth, open zippers, a button too far, revealed body parts you don’t want revealed, etc.

If you’re going to throw up, do it before the defence.

If you throw up during the defence, aim away from the examining committee and, if possible, spectators. But definitely away from the examining committee. If you have to choose, hit your supervisor, not the external examiner.

Don’t think throwing up will get you out of the defence earlier.

Treat the questions seriously. Be polite, even if the questioners don’t deserve it. Some will use sarcasm to put you on the defensive, or will intentionally distort or exaggerate your arguments to make you think creatively. Don’t take offence; instead, use the opportunity to explain your work in more detail, calmly and patiently.

Remember, they may be trying to goad you into saying something stupid. Don’t fall for it. Hard questions mean they are taking you seriously. That’s a good thing. Don’t get hostile.

Lots of tough-sounding questions actually boil down to something like, "So tell me more about that argument you made in chapter two."

You may be asked trick questions that you think are setting you up for a sneak attack. You know, the sort of thing that if you answer yes to, will turn out to commit you to defending something really stupid or evil. Don’t try to figure those questions out or anticipate where the interrogator is going. Treat the question as a straight question.

Why? First, it probably is a straight question and you will look weird if you treat it as a trick. It’s like you’re dodging a punch nobody threw. Second, if it is a trick question, it’s unlikely you’ll be able to figure out the trick in time and you’ll just look off-balance and lacking in poise, and that sort of thing counts in a defence. If it is a trap, it will be sprung soon enough and you can deal with it when it comes, not before.
How do you deal with the trap? By backing up and qualifying or elaborating on your previous answer. I once got a question that went like this. Examiner: “So, Mr. Leier, you argue on p. 47 that Professor X is essentially correct in his appraisal of those events. Is that correct?” Me, suspecting a trap: “Um, maybe...” Examiner: “But on p. 278, you say that Professor X is a moron. If you are agreeing with a moron, doesn’t that make you a moron?” Me: “WTF?”

Okay, it didn’t happen exactly like that. Nobody accused anyone of being a moron, and I actually said something like, “while I strongly disagree with Professor X’s general analysis, I do believe he was correct in his discussion of whatever it was I was talking about on p. 47.” But the point is, most traps are sprung with good intent, that is, to give you the chance to elaborate and demonstrate your work. Assume this, anyway, as you answer.

Don’t address the examining committee, even your supervisor, by their first names. Call them Doctor X or Professor Y. You don’t have to suck up; in fact, that usually backfires. But a modicum of respect is always impressive and makes you look really, really cool.

Examining committees like assertiveness, but they hate cockiness or “attitude,” and may respond ferociously if they think you’re being a jerk. If you actually are being a jerk, they will definitely respond ferociously.

For our purposes here, “jerk” is defined as “acting like you think you’re the smartest person in the room and you’re only putting up with this ridiculous ceremony to get your degree and leave these dolts in your dust.”

A friend of mine, who is not a jerk, responded to a question at his defence by saying, “If you had bothered to read my thesis carefully, Professor X, you would know that I dealt with that issue on page 5.” I do not advise you take up this tactic. Nor does my friend, who still gets asked about that incident, which took place over 20 years ago.

Don’t include an acknowledgement in the draft that goes to defence. Any thanks and praise you give to your supervisor, committee, or external examiner will sound like sucking up.

Thanking family and friends—“Especial thanks to my great-aunt Millie, who, at the age of 87, took a job mining coal to support me in graduate school and is, as I write, awaiting rescue from the cave-in”—looks like you’re trying to pressure the examining committee into passing you.

Write the acknowledgement, certainly; just leave it out until after the defence. That way, the committee members will get a pleasant surprise when they read that you thank them in the bound copy you give them. Besides, after the defence you may not want to thank all those people.
Don’t tell the committee how great your work is or how proud you are of it. It’s their job to tell you if it’s good. But be filled with an inner, quiet pride in your work and use that to stiffen your resolve when the hard questions come.

Don’t be afraid to show some enthusiasm.

It’s okay to say "I don't know" or, "I hadn't thought about that" in a defence. Once. And not about a direct question on something you wrote.

Go to the bathroom before the defence.

Hydrate. An MA defence will usually last around 2 hours, a PhD defence longer, and hydration is crucial for brain activity.

Try not to spill your water.

Yes, it is possible to fail the defence. Typically it happens when a committee has not had time to read and comment extensively on drafts prior to the defence. The way to avoid this is to make sure you have lots of time to submit your drafts to the committee and lots of time to revise the drafts before the defence.

Try to have some fun with it. Enjoy being the centre of attention.

And don’t forget to eat green leafy vegetables. And citrus fruits. Before, not during, the defence. Nothing makes a defence turn nasty like losing a bloody tooth to scurvy in mid-answer.

**When the Going Gets Weird**

If you dread going to class, have to force yourself to read the books and write the papers, or find yourself ducking into washrooms to avoid your supervisor, meet the problem head on.

Talk with your supervisor. Think about things you can do, like meeting more often, improving your scheduling, planning your next steps, or changing your work habits.

If nothing helps, don't be afraid to re-evaluate your decision to go to grad school. If you're not enjoying it (given, of course, that there is an amount of toil and drudgery in any human activity), what's the point?

After all, graduate school is not a way to judge your merit as a human being or even your intelligence. Remember, as the band America put it, “Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man that he didn’t already have.” My actual point is that Oz didn’t give the Scarecrow a brain, he gave him a diploma. Don’t confuse the two.

Don’t do it for the money, either. Plumbers often make more money than professors, they get paid for overtime, and nobody asks whether their work “really matters.” To
your face. Even at family dinners and random encounters with strangers who ask what you do.

And if you think being a professor is better than being a plumber because you won’t have to deal with crap, you are in for a surprise.

If after consultation and discussion with friends, family, and faculty you decide to join a band and hit the open road, remember, the world probably has enough tambourine players already.

It definitely has enough accordion players, and even though (or because) I play one, it has too many banjo players. Plan accordingly.

Important note: despite the quote above and a certain nostalgia for the songs of my youth, I detest the oeuvre of the band America, not least for its bad grammar, incomprehensible lyrics, and banal pop arrangements. Don’t get me started on Céline Dion. The lesson is, use song lyrics sparingly in your written work. Not everyone will get them or appreciate them, and they don’t always age well.

**The Bigger Picture**

If you want to get a better sense of how academia works, take a look at three novels by David Lodge: *Changing Places*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work*. The last of these will teach you much of what you need to know about post-structuralism and post-modernism.

Important safety tip: this opinion on post-structuralism and post-modernism may not be shared by all faculty members.

Another excellent book is Emily Toth (rhymes with “both”), *Ms. Mentor's New and Ever More Impeccable Advice for Women and Men in Academia*. It’s a sort of “Dear Abby” for the academy. Much of it will amuse you. Some of it will terrify you. All of it will inform you.

Ask your supervisors for books they have found informative, amusing, or terrifying.

Browse *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Times Higher Education* for news and features on academia. Much of it will amuse you. Some of it will terrify you. Some of it will inform you.

In the meantime, as Douglas Adams so movingly put it in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, don’t panic. If you do panic, breathe.

When stuck, remember: “Writing is a generative process.” Repeat as necessary.

That’s all I got. For now.