

GRADUATE SCHOOL RULES

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A few years ago I spent some time pondering the graduate school experience and what advice I could offer my students. Below are ten tips that can help a graduate student successfully navigate the waters of graduate study. Most of these tips would also be useful to new faculty members. (NOTE: I was very fortunate in grad school to have had a number of excellent teachers and mentors, so not all of the tips below are based on my own experience.)

- 1. Be Calm and Patient.** Graduate school is generally less of a "grind" than undergraduate study. It is more of a "roller coaster ride" with high stakes exams, hearings, recitals, etc. Remain calm and enjoy the process. Remember that "Good things take time" (John Wooden).
- 2. Practice Good Habits NOW because "Life is a Habit."** Always be working to improve habits of personal organization (especially time management) and self-discipline. (See my recent article on John Wooden - available at NACWPI.org)
- 3. Take care of your body.** Mom was right - exercise, eat right, and get enough sleep.
- 4. Prepare for Culture Shock.** This is especially true if you go to grad school in another part of the country - for example going from the Midwest to the West Coast. Prepare yourself by looking up information on the internet. Generally, it is true that "It's not weird, It's just different."
- 5. Know Rules.** Every organization has written and unwritten rules - learn them. Carefully study the Graduate Music Handbook, if available.
- 6. Be Courteous.** Treat others as you want to be treated. Remember, professors are people too. Thesis/dissertation advisors are among the unsung heroes of academe.
- 7. Keep Head Down and Mouth Shut.** Don't try to show off in class. The best way to make a positive impression is to be early to class, well-prepared, and have a positive attitude.
- 8. Trust No One.** "The walls have ears." So be careful what you say and to whom. Letters of recommendation can be ruined, so watch out! Follow the advice of John Wooden's father, "Don't whine, don't complain, don't make excuses, just do the best you can."
- 9. Write Everything Down.** When your advisor, committee members, etc. tell you important information, take good notes and make memos to yourself. Develop your own standardized memo form - be sure it has a date on it.
- 10. Perseverance is Everything.** Stay at it! Keep learning and making adjustments. You will win if you keep going and don't give up.

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