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People are giving advice to incoming grad students. Here's some tips that you're probably not going to hear from other people that will make your life easier in the long run.

1) Browser tabs stress you out. They are unstructured, visual reminders of work you haven't done.

Close your tabs daily and don't treat your browser as a todo list. If you want to read something later, save it in Pocket or Instapaper or put it on a real todo list.

^^^ People try to get cute about this or talk about the impossibility of closing their tabs. Don't let them suck you in! It's very easy to keep in check if you close them every day when you get on your computer. Extensions like xTab can help limit what you open.

2) Your download folder is not a todo list and if you treat it that way it will stress you out.

Empty your download folder every day. If something is important enough to read, it's important enough to write down on a list and schedule.

3) Unsubscribe to one email list every day. Along with the relentless wave of email advertising, you'll get put on a lot of lists. Go out of your way to keep your inbox clear of this shit. If there is nothing currently in your inbox, search your archive for "unsubscribe".

4) This one is controversial, but if you use a citation manager don't fill it up with aspirational entries. Only use it for things you've actually read/cited. It's very easy to build an overwhelming, mostly useless Zotero library. Keep a separate "to read" list.

software, proprietary *anything* as much as possible. It's not just that these expenses of these things pile up, but you're also going to have a long career and software dies. But plaintext is forever

5) Get in the habit of doing some kind of version control for your writing. Avoid terms like "draft" or "final" in your file names, use dates instead. If you use ISO 8601 dates (eg. 2021-09-01), they are machine sortable and will appear in order in your file manager.

6) Writing, editing, and formatting are different tasks, but modern word processors treat them as equivalent. It's very easy to get sidetracked by formatting options while writing (even if you think you are too smart for this). I did most of my drafting long hand or in markdown.

7) If you are running on a unix-like system, even a very limited familiarity with regular expressions and tools like grep and sed will improve your life dramatically. This is doubly true if you are a humanist. Triplely true if you keep your notes in plaintext.

8) If you are doing archival work, go not only with a plan of what you want to look at, but a system for organizing notes and images. I create directory structures and plan naming conventions in advance. Organization in the moment is easier than post-hoc reconstructions.

9) Be mindful of the ways that your tools and their assumptions/abstractions structure the ways that you think about work. Ex: If Zotero is the main way you organize your notes, it will encourage you to think of the individual sources as the central organizing concept.

10) The primary utility of the outline isn't to "plan" the final state of a text. It's to create a plan for action and a list of what needs to be done. It also helps you confront some of the limits of your knowledge and understanding *before* you start writing.

11) Writing and research are separate tasks. While they can be mixed, it's psychologically perilous! If possible, take only the materials you need to write with you when you go to write. I don't even bring whole books, but just relevant passages, relevant notes, etc.

12) People will try to sell you the promise of frictionless research, either by selling you a perfect notetaking app, promising searchability, letting you build up a corpus of every source you *could* consult, etc. But don't forget that this *some* friction is



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13) Some tools are like quicksand. Graph notetaking apps like Roam, some personal wikies, etc can encourage a kind of "empty work," the feeling of productivity in the absence of substantive results. If, like me, you have some obsessive and compulsive tendencies: be on guard.

14) If, like me, your primary way of coping with anxiety is through avoidance, it can helpful to think reflexively about it. When I was finishing my PhD, I asked myself nightly "What's something that I could finish in an hour tomorrow that would make me feel less stressed?"

^^^ Maybe this is too ACT-y for people but, in addition to professional psychological help, it's useful to think about your anxiety as a source of at least some useful information. This strategy helped me to mentally disentangle "important" from "dangerous." ymmv, ofc.

15) A lot of this was computer-related. I don't think that's just because of what I study. Your relationship with your computer (for good or for ill) is going to be one of the most important ones in your career. It's worth taking the time to make sure it's a healthy one.

16) Last, and most importantly, your work *is* work. Believe that in your bones. Don't let anyone tell you that because you care about it, because not everyone is able to do it, because academia is a *calling*, that you aren't entitled to decent pay and a decent work environment.

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To that end, join your union. If you don't have one, find some people you trust and start one. It's a ton of work, but don't let that scare you. Alongside all the stuff you already know about unions, building one is a transformative, life-changing experience.

That's it! Good luck!

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