

Graduate School Advice

IIT Hyderabad

Sai Ashish Somayajula

Do's and Dont's

Well!

Do's and Dont's

Let's ask ChatGPT and see what it has to say lol

Do's

Do's:

1. Set clear goals early.
2. Cultivate good relationships with advisors.
3. Embrace a growth mindset.
4. Manage your time effectively.
5. Collaborate with peers.
6. Attend conferences and workshops.
7. Take care of your mental health.
8. Seek professional development opportunities.

Don't's

Don'ts:

1. Don't procrastinate.
2. Don't hesitate to ask for help.
3. Don't overcommit.
4. Don't isolate yourself.
5. Don't ignore feedback.
6. Don't compare yourself to others.
7. Don't rush through important milestones.
8. Don't neglect your health.

My experience as a PhD

Let me give a personal opinion on this!

My experience as a PhD

- Nothing will make sense in your initial years of PhD.
 - You are thrown in the wild
- Do not shy away from emailing big shot professors – but do it the right way!
 - Go through the research, mention in what project you want to contribute and how? Mention some ideas you have
- Be patient and explore before you commit to a professor.
 - Talk to their PhD students and Post Docs
- Do not be attached to your projects/ideas, especially in your initial years of PhD. Be very fluid.
- Keep talking to senior year PhD students, who are usually much wiser. Their experience reduces your efforts.
- Make sure you communicate your efforts effectively in your group.
 - For instance: Do not say, “I did not get results”. Say, “I tried A, did not work because of ... then tried B...”

My experience as a PhD

- Have 2-3 projects running, with one main project which is your passion and other side projects. If one doesn't work, you can fall back to the other.
 - Choose your battles wisely
- Set boundaries and mention when it is not alright and when it is getting a bit too much in a polite and understandable fashion.
- Make sure you prioritize your mental health and have a good work out regularly.
- Getting papers is an exponential curve.
 - Patience is the key
- Grad school teaches discipline.
- Do not lose hopes if things don't go as planned.

Big Labs vs Small Labs

- Big labs
 - More peer support (given a collaborative culture).
 - Scope for more papers.
 - Maybe less attention from advisor.
- Small lab
 - More like working in a start-up.
 - More stakes on you and your project.
 - Limited success in initial years
 - Learn a lot more professionally.

Power of Effective Communication

- When faced with a situation
 - Always communicate in a polite but straightforward fashion
- I can think of multiple tough scenarios which got easily resolved with effective communication
 - There can be scenarios where your advisor wanted you to work on a project, but you wanted to go for an internship
 - It is always easy to assume that if you disagree with your advisor then it might impact you.
 - However, in most scenarios, presenting exactly with proper reasons why you want to do that can help clarify things.
 - Outcome might not be in your favor, but you have a nice discussion/debate. 😊

PhD vs Masters

- Masters

- For finishing masters and doing a job in the USA, I suggest working for a few years and then going into a better university with better funding opportunities. Market is not good and taking a loan and studying is not an advisable option.
- If used as a steppingstone for converting to PhD, please apply as early as possible since PhD needs time and huge amounts of energy.
- I personally encourage you guys to do a **PhD** if possible.

Jobs

- Jobs
 - Choose the project carefully
 - Ensure you are contributing meaningfully to the product, etc.
 - “Choose your boss carefully” – many MBA books state this
 - Try out the work atmosphere and if it turns out toxic do not hesitate to find another job
 - How to identify toxicity:
 - In any progressive workplace, receiving constructive feedback from your boss or PI is expected and may feel uncomfortable as it challenges your work.
 - However, a key indicator of toxicity is how you feel after the discussion: Do you feel motivated and empowered to improve, or do you feel drained, unvalued, and demoralized?

Q/A