

# Seven Suggestions from Professor Tips

For Graduate Students



How to make the best of your graduate studies

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## Preface

This booklet was originally written in Japanese and compiled by the Center for the Studies of Higher Education (CSHE) at Nagoya University. This English edition aims to demonstrate Japanese higher education practices to researchers, practitioners and trainers around the world, with the hopes of facilitating further discussion.

### *Seven Suggestions from Professor Tips*

*Seven Suggestions from Professor Tips* is a series of booklets compiled by the Center for the Studies of Higher Education (CSHE) at Nagoya University. The series aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the university. Educational quality is enhanced when the various parties involved (students, faculty, academic and student affairs staff members, university executives, and others) make tiny improvements in their everyday practices. Therefore, each booklet offers each of these groups suggestions for daily practice, categorized by purpose. Moreover, it is thought that integrating the improvement efforts of all involved parties will go a long way towards enriching the quality of university education as a whole. Accordingly, all booklets employ the same structure and aim; that is, seven suggestions for better teaching and learning at university. Suggestions are offered by Professor Tips, a fictitious character who was first featured in the book, *Learn with Professor Tips: How to Develop Your Course Design*, authored by members of the CSHE.

### For Graduate Students

#### - How to develop your career

In the sixth booklet of our series, we offer suggestions and specific ideas to help graduate students improve the quality of their studies. We have collected outstanding examples of graduate student work using a variety of research conducted both within and outside the university, and put these together for you in plain language using the *Seven Suggestions from Professor Tips* format.

Some readers are likely to be uncomfortable with our use of the word "studies". In practice, graduate students are typically expected to take the lead in conducting academic research. This booklet does offer several tips for conducting more effective research activities, but it is important to remember

that the purpose of enrolling in graduate school is not simply to generate new knowledge and master the skills needed to do so. A unique feature of graduate school is learning how to communicate this new knowledge and put it to use—and figuring out what kinds of environments and frameworks best support these efforts. Graduate students need to develop the ability to create circumstances that are more conducive to expanding the knowledge they have gained and having it widely received. In other words, graduate school can be considered a training ground where students learn how to be independent experts in their field. This process also includes figuring out how to build a career using the expert knowledge they have gained.

This booklet was designed with several kinds of students in mind. The first is those who have gone on to graduate school, but aren't sure how to begin their studies. Another is those who are struggling because their academic lives are not what they expected or imagined they would be. A third is those who are satisfied with the daily life of a graduate student, but want to enjoy themselves even more. It is our hope that the ideas presented here will enrich both the academic lives and future careers of these readers.

The aim of this booklet is to provide a framework that graduate students can use to boost their academic performance and share their good practices. Its content, therefore, is not designed to evaluate your current academic work, but as a resource to help you as an individual enhance your daily performance in small increments. You may not be able to implement all of the suggestions right away. However, we encourage you to think about, discuss, and engage with more challenging items.

In developing this booklet, we've also looked at practices outside of Japan and made an effort to adapt them to the way Japanese graduate schools function. With the help of Nagoya University graduate students, we're working to collect a number of these practical examples and examine them. We are also being closely advised by faculty members of Nagoya University as well.

It is said that graduate education in Japan is headed for a period of reforms, as an increasing variety of career paths are now open to those who complete a graduate degree. We hope that you find this information useful both in making your academic work richer and more productive, and in supporting your success after you graduate.

## How to use the *Seven Suggestions from Professor Tips*

Tips for making the most of this booklet:

1. The seven suggestions are written in a simple, easy-to-remember way. You can use them as a framework to organize and systemize your efforts.
2. The 49 ideas presented are likely to include ones that you have never tried. We encourage you to try those that you are interested in. It may require a little courage and effort, but you start with the easy ones and work your way towards more challenging goals.
3. You may have better ideas than those contained in this booklet. We encourage you to share them with your classmates and juniors, and inform the Center for the Studies of Higher Education about the things that work for you. Your suggestions will help us make our future publications even better.

We hope this booklet will be of help to you as you seek to jumpstart your study and make the most of your university experience.

## Suggestion 1

### Interact with faculty and staff intensively

Research activities form the heart of your graduate studies. It is important to spend meaningful and productive time with your supervisors and lab/seminar staff. Interaction with other faculty and staff members will give you a chance to evaluate your lab and seminar work more objectively as well as consider your research concepts and future career from an even greater variety of perspectives.

- Schedule regular face-to-face meetings with supervisors.
- Know your supervisor's schedule and how to contact them.
- When meeting with supervisors, come prepared with a list of discussion topics.
- Gather information on the different services available at the university, including writing support, internships, and advice on studying abroad.
- Make time to participate in events where you can interact with faculty and staff members.
- Communicate your research and career interests to faculty and staff members, both in and out of the lab and classroom.
- Alert your supervisor or other faculty and staff members right away if you are having difficulties with your academic or personal life as a graduate student.

## Suggestion 2

### Practice cooperative learning

It's important that you create opportunities to interact with your fellow students, both in the lab and classroom and beyond. This will go a long way towards enriching your life as a graduate student. Nagoya University is full of graduate students—those ahead of you, behind you, and in your same year. Regardless, you are all bound by common goals, with the opportunity to inspire one another to reach new heights.

- Be willing to question your own methods and conclusions, staying open to feedback from your peers.
- Create opportunities to discuss and practice your presentations with your peers before speaking at academic conferences.
- Discuss your opinions and offer each other feedback on written work and presentation materials.
- Actively plan and participate in research lab maintenance and seasonal events.
- Regularly participate in voluntary seminars or set up online discussion boards.
- Make a point to interact with a wide variety of graduate students, including those in other labs or seminars, other departments, and other universities.
- Use your knowledge and experience to support other students' learning in any way you can.

### Suggestion 3

## Take the lead in your studies

Most learning in graduate school takes place through research and associated activities. The capacity to be independent and proactive will be essential as graduate students work to build careers out of the knowledge and skills they have gained. However, you do not need to go about everything you do on your own. Cooperation and support are what pave the way for your independent initiative to flourish.

- Express your thoughts on the direction of your research and career with your advisor and others.
- Take steps to resolve any issues that come up during advisory sessions before the next time you meet.
- Consider your own perspectives objectively based on advice from your advisor and peers.
- Get a clear grasp of the kind of knowledge and skills required to be an expert.
- Present your findings at academic conferences and actively discuss them.
- Ask questions and delve deeper in order to make interactions and discussions with others more meaningful.
- Find out the ways how originality is approved in your field.



## Suggestion 4

### Keep an eye on your progress

Many people with graduate degrees look back at their time in graduate school and remark how quickly it flew by. It's important to keep a steady eye on your graduate experience as a whole and avoid getting caught up in the issues immediately before you. Carefully creating your plan of study is certainly important, but looking over and flexibly reviewing the plan is what will take your study to the next level.

- Get in the habit of taking detailed notes on your thoughts and discussions.
- Make a list of key points or topics you would like to discuss before meetings and seminars, then record the results of your discussions and file them.
- Regularly take the time to look back over your activities, revising your goals and schedule as needed.
- Do not focus only on producing research; also work on developing the knowledge and skills you will need as an expert in your field.
- Regularly review your activity log and other notes, reevaluating your objectives and approach.
- Look at your own growth process and the added benefits of your graduate studies in addition to progress towards your main goals.
- Give advice and guidance to junior students as a way of confirming your own knowledge and skills.

## Suggestion 5

### Use your time wisely

Graduate students have much more say in how to use their time for studies. This is valuable practice as an independent expert, when you will need to juggle a variety of tasks and priorities. Stay conscious of what you are doing and its relative value ask you consider what needs to be done to achieve your goals. It's also important to be mindful of others' schedules as well.

- Learn the tools you need to succeed in your studies as soon as possible—such as analytical methods and theories, languages, methods of surveying and reading literature, and presentations.
- Get into a daily or weekly rhythm that allows you effectively balance different aspects of your activities
- Schedule adequate time and effort for each task in advance, including studies of earlier written works, experiments, and writing papers.
- Allow room for unforeseen events in your activity schedule.
- Make sure to set aside time to think deeply and from a broad perspective.
- Take on roles and responsibilities in your labs and seminars that are necessary for your studies.
- If you must work part time while in school, choose something that relates to your academic field and/or consider how it will serve you in the future.

## Suggestion 6

### Set challenging and ambitious goals

Even if your immediate goal is to earn a degree, there are plenty of things you can do in the graduate school which will serve you as an expert and enrich your future life. Building a personal network, developing your abilities at every opportunity, raising your awareness of the ethical and societal issues around your field—all of these things enhance the depth and breadth of your graduate school activities.

- Look for and devote yourself to work or other activities that give you a chance to use your expert knowledge.
- Apply for research grants, fellowships, or awards for papers presented at academic conferences.
- Discover current trends in your field and how your own research fits within the academic context as a whole by reviewing various academic journals.
- Organize voluntary groups or conference sessions for graduate students and young researchers.
- Ask alumni about their work or participate in career seminars.
- Make active use of advanced research facilities outside the university/Japan, observing the real target of your research, and interacting with members of related organizations.
- Talk with people about the societal responsibilities that experts should fulfill.

## Suggestion 7

### Respect different ideas and backgrounds

Each academic discipline has its own culture, values and methodologies to produce and approve new knowledge. It is by valuing these different cultures that universities have progressed forward. It therefore is essential that you become thoroughly familiar with the culture of your own field as well as becoming familiar with other cultures so that you can apply your expertise from a broad perspective.

- Understand the particular culture of your chosen field, including its values, methodologies, and standards.
- Learn about the approaches and creative solutions that your faculty members and peers apply to scholarship and research.
- Learn how to consider things from a broad perspective that includes many different points of view.
- Read journals and attend lectures/conferences on topics outside of your own field.
- Look for successful examples of multidisciplinary efforts as a way to learn the different values and research approaches taken by different fields and the way they can be synergistically combined.
- Interact with sectors outside academia, such as corporations, governments, citizens' groups.
- Work to contribute to your community and region as a member of a group of experts.

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## Notes

Notes included in the original Japanese edition:

1. Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome. Please email your contributions to [info@cshe.nagoya-u.ac.jp](mailto:info@cshe.nagoya-u.ac.jp).
2. A website (in Japanese) is available for those who are interested in additional ideas related to this and other booklets.  
<http://www.cshe.nagoya-u.ac.jp/seven/>

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