

Advice for honours students – Part 1  
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General advice

1. Try to have fun!
  - Keeping a sense of humour / perspective is hard but important. It's a gruelling year, but it's not the most important thing in the world, and a lot of it is really interesting, challenging, & groovy.
2. Do not hide from your supervisor. If you miss deadlines or meetings, immediately get on the phone or e-mail to work out the way forward. Whenever you don't know how to do something, or are unsure, ask someone – ideally your supervisor (e.g., via e-mail or at our weekly meetings).
3. Every extra hour you work in S1 you'll be grateful for in S2.
4. You can never have too many mentors. Try to make friends w/ other honours students, your supervisor's postgrads, & other postgrads in the area you're working in. Keep them briefed on what you are doing so they can offer helpful advice.

Time management

I always tell students that the difference between a IIA and a first is usually about 40 hours at the end of the year. Time / time management is the key to honours! The reason my students tend to do better than other students in outcomes is because I try to keep them to a speedier schedule than other supervisors (see below), leaving more time for writing and thinking at the end of the year when you really, really need it.

- Try to front load your courses so you have more in S1 – 5 and 3 is better than 4 and 4.
- Try to minimise your paid work during the whole honours year – esp. if you are working towards a scholarship or a competitive postgrad program (First class).
- It may be worth going into debt this year to try to secure the scholarship for future years. Every hour you're working on paid work is an hour other students have to work on their thesis or to relax & rest their brains. If you can't not work all year, try to work extra in S1 so you can cut back or stop altogether in S2 (August – Oct).
- Horrible personal crises do happen in the honours year – do not hide these from your supervisor stoically. Mention that your brain is melting so they can help you assess the best way forwards re rescheduling or seeking help.
- The thesis is worth 40% of your year, so ideally you should spend about 2 full workdays a week on it (16 hours).

**Stern words of warning**

- Please note. I'll be away at the end of May and for all of June. I come back in July, and then I'll be teaching three courses in S2 2007, not to mention presenting @ 2 conferences, supervising postgrads, & helping my 3 other honours students. Take as much advantage as you can of the time and attention I can give in March-May and in July.

- I never work the weekend before the thesis is due, no matter how desperate the student.
- The latest I will accept written drafts is 10 days before the thesis is due.
- Don't miss deadlines for written drafts if you can avoid it. I have to schedule time to read your work. If you miss the time I've scheduled, it can take up to 2 weeks for me to find more time.

### Schedules

A desirable schedule for completing the thesis is:

- Finalising design – End of March
- Production of questionnaire – early April
- Ethics – Submitted before mid-semester (mid-April) break
- Data collection – April-May. Finished in S1.
- Data entry – as you go. Finished in S1.
- Keeners: Draft method section in S1.

\*It is best to take at least 1 week entirely off during the break to rest your brain. However, you should plan to work heaps on writing during the rest of the time if you can.

- Draft intro & method – By July 14
- Scale construction, reliability tests, & preliminary data checking – By July 23.
- Draft results – By August 17
- Second draft intro, method & results – By Sept 14
- Discussion draft – by September 28.
- Honours conference presentation (elicits helpful feedback)
- October – polishing & printing.

### Meetings

- I like to meet weekly with students for up to an hour.
- Meetings are valuable resources and should not be wasted.
- Be on time. If you are late ring ahead. If you miss one apologise profusely. If you need to reschedule, that's cool, but do so ahead of time if you can.
- Take written notes. Your notes should clearly indicate (e.g., circle) tasks that you are supposed to be doing and when they are supposed to be done.
- If you don't take good notes it may be advisable to borrow a recorder.
- For meetings to discuss statistics and / or the discussion section, it may be advisable to borrow a recorder.
- Don't rely on me to remember things for you – a) I have a terrible memory b) I have dozens of projects on the go, @ any point in time c) it's your responsibility ultimately.

### Useful tasks for the start of the year

#### **Book lab space for later**

- There is often a crunch on social psych lab space. Book rooms for yourself for 2 hours a day from the week after the mid-semester break – you can always release the rooms if they're not needed. Try to pick 2 hours that are immediately before or after the 1<sup>st</sup> year psych classes. You can check the time table for 1<sup>st</sup> year online. Don't book more than 2 hours on any day because

you must share with other students. Don't book non-social lab space without asking.

### **Reading**

- Read a heap of previous 1<sup>st</sup> class theses from the library. Read previous theses by the supervisor's students. Don't take detailed notes – just try to absorb the big picture.
- Reading articles is good, but it's actually very hard to get useful info out of them until you know a bit more about what you're doing. That's why reading theses is better – gives you a grasp of what the end product looks like.
- Return to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year social psych textbooks and read the chapter(s) that cover the IVs and DVs you're tentatively interested in.
- If you must read articles, first read about 50-100 abstracts so you get a sense of what people are doing overall. Try to sort into categories based on types of IVs or DVs examined, and to identify key authors & labs working in the field (based on frequency of publication and high impact journals).
- Then read articles selected on the basis of being recent, in top journals, and by key authors working in the field. Also ask your supervisor to recommend articles.
- Work backwards to find highly-cited classic papers eventually, but focus on recent work at first.
- When you read articles, don't rely on highlighting or your memory. Try to take notes regarding what the IVs and DVs were and what was found. It may be useful to have summary files where you list the studies that have examined each variable that comes up.

### **Brainstorming for a new project**

- I often create a study based on disagreeing with the results of a particular paper and trying to address a confound I see in the design.
- Most students with novel ideas start from a DV that they like. A cool DV is not enough though – you then have to ground a project in theory by looking at existing work on the DV and coming up with something novel. This is where you do a heap of reading of theses, textbooks, abstracts, and articles (in that order ideally).
- You can make a separate list of points from the discussion sections of the papers about “future research” needed and pick one of these.
- Also the discussion section of previous theses.
- New moderation (a hypothesized interaction that will qualify results in the literature) and / or new mediation (a process that will account for what's been found that hasn't been studied) are always good.
- The key to a successful project is usually:
  - An experimental component (UQ is an experiment-oriented school).
  - Correlational measures in case the experimental manipulation fails.
  - Simple design – e.g. a 2 by 2.
  - Enough power / participants – a realistic sample.
  - One old IV (so you can replicate past research) and one new one (so you're contributing to theory-building).
  - A DV you find groovy (otherwise it's a long year).
  - Controls for other variables as revealed by the literature.

- Manipulations and scales that are either sourced from published work or pilot tested to work.
- You come up with an idea, then we jointly design a study that meets these criteria.

### **Drafting the Q**

- You can often source material from previous theses – be sure to note down where you got it from (whose thesis) and where they got it from so you can later check with the original publications / sources.
- Use published scales in the literature by preference.
- Ad hoc scales are a last resort – often don't hang together well. If nec, use 3+ items and include positively and negatively worded items (e.g., 3 each).
- Once you've drafted the Q, draft the info and debriefing sheet.
- Then draft the ethics application.

### **Ethics**

- Ethics in social psych often requires special guidance from your supervisor re how to handle all the concerns arising from the sensitivity of the topics, deception, etc..
- Ask for previous examples of student ethics to work from.
- Once you've submitted the ethics, revise / finalise the Q, info & debriefing sheets.

### **Preparing the Questionnaire**

- Wait for ethics approval to proceed.
- Ethics approval received, then put Q, info & debriefing sheets in for photocopying from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor – need to bring pink forms up for supervisor to sign. Allow 3 working days for photocopying.
- Get form for Sona system, submit w/ ethics approval code.
- Once you have your sona login, log in and create session times for the rooms you have booked.

### **Administering the Study**

- Having the participant be ok is your top priority. Avoid making them feel dumb or embarrassed. Be nice. Be polite. If they are late & delinquent, still be nice & polite.
- Credit them.
- Don't use more than your hours.
- Having participants learn something is your second priority. Take debriefing seriously. I feel strongly about this point and I expect my students to do a good professional job!
- Getting your data cleanly is your third priority. You want the study to work and the data to be reliable – but not at the expense of points 1 or 2.