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It may seem a little early for school supply shopping, but as Ph.D. hopefuls begin to receive their first acceptances, it's a good time to talk about graduate school essentials. While "GradHacker" has offered a [holiday gift list for graduate students](#) ^[2], this article is for early-career students (as well as first-generation students who, like me, learned about many of these items only after feeling their absence) and focuses on essential basics for thriving in graduate school.

Assuming that you're only as prepared as your gear, don't feel guilty about using this time for some back-to-school shopping.

Technology

A solid computer or laptop is a worthwhile investment for graduate school, but you'll also want to consider investing in a personal printer if your university doesn't offer free printing on campus. You'll also want to make sure that you have all necessary dongles and adapters for teaching and presentations. A worthwhile set of headphones can also save you from commute and work distractions. And, of course, a bag to easily transport your gear from home to classroom to office and back -- if you'll be moving between multiple spaces frequently, you might want to prioritize portability and ease of use over style (no matter how much you want that leather messenger tote).

Writing Programs

Try a variety of writing software to see what makes the most sense for your projects. [Microsoft Office](#) ^[3] suite is free and discounted for students with a .edu email address, and [Google Drive](#) ^[4] and [Scrivener](#) ^[5] are also popular choices for long writing projects.

Backups

Perhaps most essential on this list is a reliable method for backing up your work. Whether you prefer external hard drives; portable thumb drives; online options like [Dropbox](#) ^[6], [the Cloud](#) ^[7] or [Google Drive](#) ^[4]; or even just the old-fashioned method of emailing files to yourself, it is essential that you have some way of saving your work from being lost.

Citation Managers

Citation managers allow you to generate citations and bibliographies, as well as save and link to articles online, and keep track of short annotations and notes as you read and compile a working list of resources. [Zotero](#) ^[8], [Mendeley](#) ^[9] and [EndNote](#) ^[10] are the most frequently recommended. See [a comparison of all three](#) ^[11] to determine what fits your needs.

Remember to check with your university's technology services to see about discounted or free access to writing programs, online storage solutions and

citation software.

Books

Though this is not an extensive list by any means, the following books come recommended for tackling various Ph.D. hurdles:

- *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* ^[12] by Joan Bolker
- *Air & Light & Time & Space: How Successful Academics Write* ^[13] by Helen Sword
- *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* ^[14] by Wendy Laura Belcher
- *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job* ^[15] by Karen Kelsky

Organization

Even if you aren't quite as Type A as many graduate students, you'll still want to invest in a solid calendar and planner. If you're struggling to find a calendar system that meets your needs, I recommend trying out bullet journaling ^[16] to create lists, trackers and agendas specifically tailored to you (bullet journals can also be great artistic outlets ^[17] as well).

You'll also want a blank journal (or 20) for tracking your thoughts and feelings as you move through various graduate school requirements, particularly during the dissertation stage. A good journal can serve as a necessary catch-all for ideas, to-do lists, to-read lists and potential paths of inquiry that may turn out to be crucial in later stages of writing and planning your dissertation. I recommend something portable for jotting down thoughts on the bus or keeping on your bedside nightstand.

While admittedly a bit old-school, files and a physical system for organizing those files can be useful for keeping track of taxes, academic papers or any official documents you'll collect over your graduate school career.

Office Supplies

If you're able, a desk and office chair, or even just a dedicated space for at-home writing, can make all the difference in your desire to be productive while

off campus. Some basics you might want to keep stocked include staplers, sticky notes, whiteboard markers, paper clips and pushpins, pencils, pens, and highlighters, as well as a corkboard or whiteboard for organizing to-do lists, due dates and stray thoughts.

Clothes

Clothing can be both incredibly personal and incredibly fraught (particularly for first-gen, low-income or gender-nonconforming students), but it is important to consider what staple pieces you might need for teaching, meetings, lab work, job talks or conferences. I recommend a pair of closed-toed shoes; a watch that you can read easily during meetings and class; at least one professional skirt, dress or pair of slacks; a buttoned or collared shirt; a tie if applicable; and a suit jacket.

As a tip, it's cheaper to buy professional clothing secondhand and have it tailored to fit than buying a new wardrobe. These articles -- "[Dress the Part](#) ^[18]" and "[Business Genderqueer](#) ^[19]" -- can provide insight into what professional attire means in the context of grad school.

Self-Care

The most important task you'll need to contend with during graduate school is taking care of yourself as best you can and establishing healthy boundaries between your academic work and your life off campus. While not all of these will be accessible for everyone, it's nonetheless worth considering what you can add to your current self-care tool kit before heading to campus.

Invest in some cheap self-care items like plants, candles, bath bombs, art and other small treats for yourself and your space. Don't be afraid to dedicate some space and funds to things that make you feel happy and productive. If you're able, consider larger self-care investments like a gym membership, a local therapist, a new hobby (preferably unrelated to your academic work) and a support network of family and/or friends who can offer perspective outside of academia.

"Gradhacker" also offers a variety of articles on how to care for yourself

through your Ph.D.: "[I Need Some Space](#) ^[20]," "[Everyday Self-Care](#) ^[21]," "[How to Battle Burnout](#) ^[22]" and "[Life Outside the Lab](#) ^[23]."

What items have you found essential for surviving and thriving in graduate school?

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