

Developing your Research and Professional Interests, and your capstone project:

This may seem the most daunting part of what you have to do but it is among the most fun. It involves trawling through the literature, reading, writing, and asking yourself a million times “What am I interested in?”

To address that question you will have to ask yourself further, & multiple times:

- What are the different ways in which this topic has been approached?
- What’s been said about it? What do I think about those positions?
- What ideas do I find exciting? What arguments convince me? Why?
- How do I fit into those conversations? What do I want to say?
- How will I substantiate my claims?

The research process can be frustrating but fun (really!), and there’s help and support to be had. Use the readings, advice, and instructions you get through your classes, your professors, and peers. Participate in the life of the institution outside the classroom (e.g. attend talks organized by your program or department, etc.) in order to develop your research interest, professional networks, and friendships.

Academic and Professional Etiquette or the Mutual Support Network: You already know that the tasks you have to undertake in your program of study will be challenging (and fun!). Know also that you should seek and receive support to address these challenges. Learning what support is appropriate to seek, from whom, and how to ask for it is what I call “Academic and Professional Etiquette.”

In any university or professional setting, you are part of a network and a community. This includes faculty, staff, and peers all of who are also facing their own set of challenges. They want you to succeed and they want to succeed themselves. The network of support is supposed to be mutual. So, learn to navigate it by being curious:

- What do others around you do? How can they help you?
- What’s the best time and way to approach them?
- What are you expected to do?

Answers to these questions are everywhere—in your syllabi, in the graduate handbook, on the university, department or organization’s web pages, on office doors, in the emails you receive, and on notice boards. Some answers may seem hidden or cryptic. Be a good sleuth and find the answers!

Etiquette is about learning how to find out what you want to know while respecting other people’s learning process.

Managing your Time and Pacing yourself: Ah, time. My advice:

- Don’t wish for more, as you will only fill it up with more tasks.
- Instead, learn to manage your time and tasks. (Yes, yes easier said than done).
- Be patient with yourself with this challenge as with the ones above.
- Take breaks – both mental and physical.
- Discover your rhythm and style. Then be true to them.
- But also be true to your networks and communities (professional and personal) by respecting deadlines and fulfilling your responsibilities.
- Then take a deep breath and enjoy the university ride! It can be fun.