Student Success

In the Mises Graduate School, students are expected to conduct research for term papers and their master’s thesis, demonstrate critical thinking skills and economic knowledge through examinations and assessments, and complete the coursework and overall program in a timely manner. For many students, study habits and time-management must be developed as they progress through the program. This page, developed by Student Services, provides students with assistance on successfully accomplishing graduate-level coursework and obtaining a master’s in Austrian economics at MGS.

Study Tips

1. Time Management

As a student, you may lead a remarkably busy life, juggling coursework, your career, family responsibilities, and social activities. This means that you should

- Plan out your term

  Some weeks require a discussion board posting while others may include the term paper or an exam. Schedule your time accordingly. If you know that you need to set additional time aside for time-consuming assessment activities, schedule your other responsibilities lightly that week. All courses include a Syllabus page in Canvas which lists important deadlines at the bottom. An 8-week term goes very, very quickly!! Use these due dates to schedule the next eight weeks accordingly.

- Prioritize

  Perfection is not the goal but prioritizing your required tasks needing to be accomplished will help you become a high achiever. For example, if the term paper is 30 percent of your course grade, logic would suggest scheduling ample time for researching, writing, and revising the assignment. Similarly, if a discussion board posting is 3 percent of your overall course grade and you have other pressing tasks that must be accomplished (such as a term paper the following week), do not strive to perfect the discussion board posting. Beyond coursework, there may be important work or family obligations. Learning the art of prioritizing early will help students get the most out of coursework and benefit from personal development.

  Along similar lines, learn the art of focused reading when there exists a lot of material. The goal is to take a book and x-ray it so you can get the main points and critique theory, method, and interpretation in class. It is not like reading a novel and reading every word will take time away from research time, where the details matter much more. Focused reading will help you cover more ground more evenly so that you are prepared for class.
• Recognize your ideal learning periods

Many students read and write best during the early morning while others are natural night-owls. Plan your study periods accordingly. Similarly, while some students may prefer to load up their coursework for the weekend, students should consider allocating time daily to engage in their studies, even if only an hour or two during weekdays. Studying in this way will help the student familiarize themselves with course material and enhance absorption of material. Setting hours for studying and coursework will also help committed completion of classes and the Program and prepare students for their respective careers.

2. Notetaking and reading skills

• Retain the main points

Take notes during lectures and readings. This may mean investing in highlighters or copying down key summarizing sentences or lines from your readings. Often, if a point is essential, the speaker will emphasize it or repeat it. Similarly in reading, review introductory and concluding paragraphs in a section for the key takeaway.

• Review your notes frequently

Although note-taking is beneficial for improving listening and reading skills, the act serves to help you as the student retain key points from readings or each week’s lectures.

• Write or print physical notes

For courses that allow closed book, open note exams, students should retain physical copies of their notes. Most courses in the program utilize Respondus® Lockdown Browser for online exams. This software limits students from opening tabs other than the assessment so students wanting access to their notes should either write or print their notes on paper.

3. Writing and research

Writing and research are key activities students will accomplish in every course in every term. To help master this skill, students should

• Conduct focused research

When researching a particular topic, stay focused on the issue at hand. It is easy to get sidetracked and learn more about related topics without ever thoroughly researching the one you are focused on. Use a combination of databases specific to the discipline, such
as Econlib, and broader ones, such as JSTOR and Google Scholar, to find quality sources. Weed out sources by looking at their titles (specific titles increase the likelihood that a source will be helpful to you), abstracts, and tables of contents or even consulting book reviews. Don’t try to read every word. Read introductions, chapter summaries, and the parts of books and articles that cover your topic most closely.

● Keep track of your notes

Depending on how you work and how many sources you are examining, it may be helpful to type up your notes or hire someone to do so. Typed notes can be searched and needed quotes can be added to your essays in one move. Taking pictures of important passages (and the title and copyright pages, if applicable) if you are unable to take notes can also save you time flipping through a book or wading through twenty tabs to find the source you meant to cite. Keeping a PDF, Kindle, or EPUB version of a book on hand—even if you like to read physical books—can allow you to search for key passages and terms quickly later. These techniques will help you keep writing rather than getting bogged down in deciphering messy notes when time is of the essence.

● Do not stress if your topic changes or becomes more nuanced or specific

The sign of a developed paper is that the topic is specific and thoroughly investigates a particular issue. For example, a paper needing development might have the title “Underwater Basket Weaving,” whereas a more developed paper could be titled “Underwater Basket Weaving in Remote Peruvian Communities, 1950–Present.”

● Allocate time, more time, and even more time for writing

The writing and researching process is extremely time-consuming. Students should schedule more time than is seemingly necessary in busy schedules to write for term papers, discussion board postings, and the master’s Thesis. If you believe you need 30 minutes to write a discussion board posting for an assignment, consider doubling or tripling the time allotted as assignments tend to take longer than previously assumed. Emulate your favorite scholars to develop your scholarly voice. Pay attention to how they approach their topic as you read.

● Expect multiple drafts:

The term paper in a course or the master’s thesis which you turn in for your grades may look drastically different compared to your initial draft. As you write and research your topic, you will come across commonly cited references for a particular topic, but you may also include citations of lesser-known works as your knowledge grows. Your subsequent drafts will be impacted by the cumulative knowledge you obtain. Remember to always reread your drafts for structure, grammar, and typos.
• Consult help

The first individual you should consult is your instructor or thesis advisor for research guidance on your topic. Often, he or she will point you to resources or authors with similar research questions. Similarly, the instructor or your thesis advisor may give you advice on focusing your research question so that it is achievable in the appropriate timeframe and the resources/data needed are accessible.

Other individuals such as the Institute librarian and archivist, Suzy Westenkirchner, may help you find the resources you need.

• Do not miss opportunities to present your work

Submitting your research for presentation at research conferences (such as the Austrian Economics Research Conference and Libertarian Scholars Conference) is a terrific opportunity for other faculty members and researchers to give you advice. They may recommend pertinent citations or recommend you read authors you were not previously aware of, especially ones outside your field of study. Use these opportunities to be receptive to critique and learn from experienced scholars.

4. Focus on Yourself

The final tip Student Services advises is becoming self-aware of your own needs. Focusing on studies becomes increasingly difficult if you have circumstances impeding your time.

• Personal health in body and mind matter

Juggling the courses, work, and life circumstances can be challenging. This is where prioritizing your physical and mental health is crucial. Eating well and exercising can do wonders for your overall well-being, and you do not need to become a gym fanatic overnight to do so. Breaking up study time with short strolls around the neighborhood may help you refocus and think more clearly. Eating fruits, veggies, and healthy fats and proteins in the form of easy meals or snacks will also help feed your brain so that Austrian economics may feed your soul. If you need assistance with regards to personal matters, whether that be counseling or a physician, prioritize yourself and seek out professional help.

• Do not overload yourself

MGS’s Master’s Program is highly rigorous and intellectually challenging. This means that you need ample time to devote to your studies. If you go through short periods of time where your job or other circumstances need your full attention, first consider if there are excursions or social activities which you can limit to make more time to dedicate to your studies. If this is already the case, we allow for short, leave of absences upon request in case you need to take a term off. Ultimately, you should be committed to your studies and dedicated to living your life to its fullest!