
2. Starting a research career

Dave Backus

The biggest challenge in a PhD program is making the transition from taking exams to producing original research. This typically takes some time, so start early, no later than your second year. It's best to start small: don't try to win the Nobel Prize with your first paper. Some thoughts about processes that should help:

Seminars. When I started, I never understood what they were talking about. Maybe it will be easier for you. I'd suggest you do the following, adapted as necessary:

- Write a 3-4 sentence summary right afterwards. This goes beyond 3-4 sentences, but you might consider these questions: What was the paper about? What question did they (the authors) address? Did you find the question interesting? What answer did they propose? Did you find it persuasive?
- Think about these secondary questions: What data did they use? Where did they get it? What theory tools? Are they new or standard? Would you have approached the question differently? Are there obvious follow-on projects?
- Describe the paper to one of your classmates. Be concise, but get to the heart of what the paper does. This is hard to do well, worth practicing.
- Discuss the paper with your colleagues. See if they have the same ideas as you. Often people have very different takes on seminars, and exchanging ideas about them can be useful and interesting.

Papers. Read at least one paper a week -- then explain it to someone else. This could be part of your course work. Or you could work through a reading list you put together yourself on a specific line of research. Do the same as the seminars: summarize the paper, answer questions. This is automatic if you're in Sargent's reading group, which I would say is a must for anyone interested in macro. On the micro side, the structure is a little different, but this kind of exercise can be helpful.

Apprenticeships. Work for someone as an RA, a junior member of a research team. Some of this is built into our practicum, but you can set it up yourself if you know who you want to work with.

Presentations. This is a learned skill: the more you practice, the better you get. Get as many chances to practice early on as you can. Often in classes you'll have a chance for short presentations of papers you've read. Over time, you'll get a chance to present your own work. Both are useful.

Another version of this (shorter!):

http://www.econ.brown.edu/faculty/David_Weil/Econ%202840/PEPTALK.pdf

3. Links about writing papers and giving talks

Dave Backus

We're in the communication business -- it pays to do it well. On talks, I'd say: get as much practice as you can, watch others and imitate things you think are effective, then practice some more.

Writing papers

http://andrewgelman.com/2009/07/advice_on_writi/
http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/john.cochrane/research/papers/phd_paper_writing.pdf
<http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/john.cochrane/teaching/writing/>
<http://sanjivdas.wordpress.com/2012/12/26/so-you-want-to-do-a-phd/>
<http://secondlanguage.blogspot.com/2013/01/a-writing-assignment.html>
<http://conversableeconomist.blogspot.com/2013/09/elmore-leonards-ten-rules-of-writing.html>
<http://scatter.wordpress.com/2014/06/14/the-most-sociological-thing-we-do-is-write/>

Giving talks

<http://www.econ.umn.edu/~tkehoe/classes/TipsOct05.pdf>
http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/jesse.shapiro/research/applied_micro_slides.pdf
http://faculty.haas.berkeley.edu/lettau/student_tips/piazzesi_presentations.pdf

Deirdre McCloskey (amusing and mostly useful)

<http://www.deirdremccloskey.com/docs/aunt.pdf>
http://www.deirdremccloskey.com/docs/pdf/Article_316b.pdf

Research in general

<http://www.cs.virginia.edu/~robins/YouAndYourResearch.html>
<http://youtu.be/a1zDuOPkMSw>
http://people.stern.nyu.edu/lpederse/papers/How_to_Succeed_in_Academia.pdf

Writing referee reports

<https://github.com/jtleek/reviews>

Job market advice

<http://simplystatistics.org/2013/12/04/advice-for-stats-students-on-the-academic-job-market-2/>