

# Balancing Graduate School and Personal Life



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Link to captions



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# Notes to presenters

- Envision this session to be highly interactive.
- Use the charts simply to drive a conversation with the attendees
- Get attendees to share their views and comments on the topics
- Share personal experiences as part of the interaction

## Questions

- Will we have a microphone with a runner?
  - From whose laptop will we present?



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# Agenda

- Introductions
- Importance of grad-school/life balance
- Self reflection
- Sources of imbalance
- Some suggestions to achieve balance
- Self reflection recap



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**Take a moment:  
Say hi to your neighbors**



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# Why is having a personal life essential for successful graduate studies?



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# Top Reasons

People with meaningful lives outside of grad school have:

- **Higher risk tolerance**
  - Support networks and self-esteem
- **Brain rejuvenation**
  - Required for creative brain work
- **Good citizenship**
  - Outside and in grad school setting
- **Broad skills**
  - People skills, unexpected idea cross fertilization
- **Perspective**
  - Long term thinking, combat narrow-mindedness



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# **Self-Reflection:** **How do we define a** **“balanced life”?**



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# How do we define a “balanced life”?

- No single answer; different people have different perspectives
- In general terms: ensuring your interests and priorities in life are properly tended to
- Definition changes for each individual throughout the years
- Healthy in one’s priority areas (e.g., family, spirituality, health, work)



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# Is your life in balance?

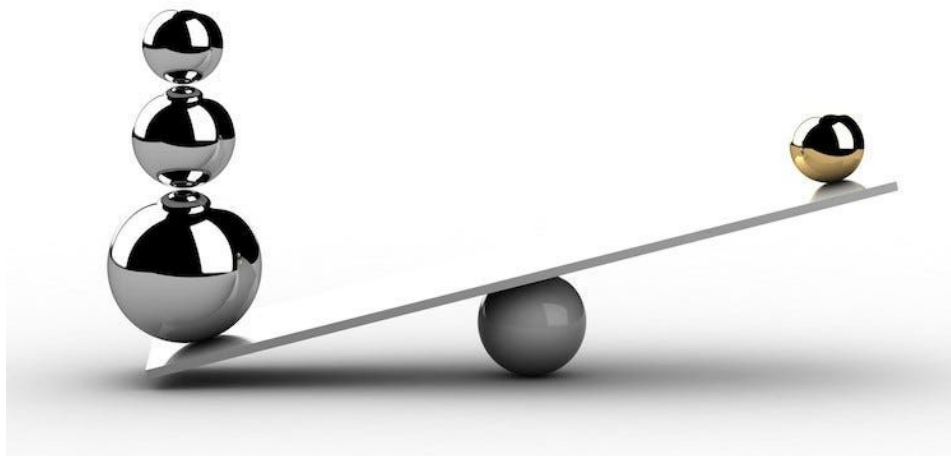
- Rate yourself: 1-imbalanced, 5-well balanced
- When do you feel most in-balance and out-of-balance?
- List three things that trigger you to go out of balance.



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# Sources of Imbalance



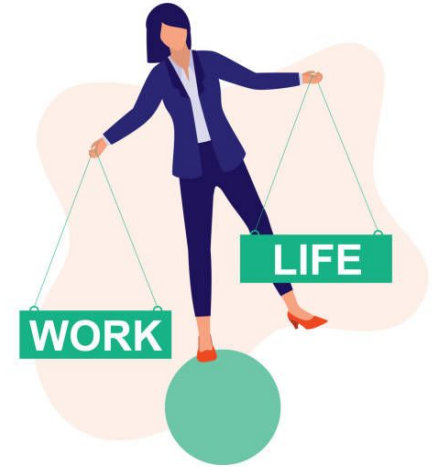
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# Identify external sources of imbalance

## Academic demands

- Courses: advanced topics, new skills required, ...
- Research: open-ended questions, creativity, vague definitions of quality, pressure to publish, no obvious finishing line, ...
- Work Relationships: (co-)advisor, lab-mates, collaborators, ...
- Logistics: focus on course work or start research earlier, choosing / changing advisor, ...
- Desire to do service for your community



## Personal life

- People in our lives: partners, parents, children, friends, ...
- Life commitments & health issues
- Finances as graduate student
- Logistics: caring for loved ones, home, transportation
- Homesickness



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# Sources of imbalance

## Grad Student Work Output

Unrealistic goals

Lack of realistic planning



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# Identify internal sources of imbalance

- Procrastination
- Impostor Syndrome
- Visceral responses to microaggressions
- Lack of self-care
- Chronic medical conditions
  - Anxiety, Depression, ADHD, etc.
- Temporary medical conditions



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# Getting back to balance?

- List five things that are most important to you.
- List three non-academic activities you enjoy the most.



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# Tips to balance work and life



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# Nine Work-Life Balance Tips

**#1:** Manage your time wisely



**#2:** Accept and make tradeoffs



**#3:** Pay attention to your self-confidence



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# Nine Work-Life Balance Tips

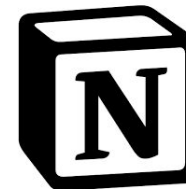
**#4:** Make time for yourself



**#5:** Make time for your interpersonal relationships



**#6:** Get organized

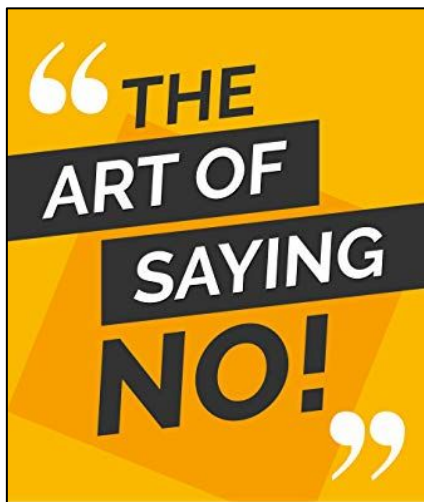


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# Nine Work-Life Balance Tips

**#7:** Learn how to say “no”



**#8:** Ask for help when you need it



**#9:** Live your enjoyable and sustainable life now!!



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# Self-Reflection Recap



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# Self Reflection

- How do you define balance?
- Recognizing when you're in/out of balance
- Recognize the importance of stress triggers
- Mitigating Imbalance
  - Identify steps you will take to avoid your triggers
  - Identify activities you can do to reduce stress when out of balance



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# THANK YOU

Questions???



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# Tip 1: Time Management

Unstructured nature of research, and long delayed rewards

Enduring myth of work-aholism being correlated with success

Solution: Practical and Philosophical (Reject the Myth!) – **Time management helps a lot!**

- Find personal “best time” in the day, block it (find your best work style)
- Block one day or hours-per-day for grad-work only (no email/social media)
- Schedule “activities”
- Schedule fixed hours for “stuff”, be ok with that
- Reward yourself
- Read books, find one that “fits” your nature



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# Tip 2: Manage Tradeoffs

**Admit it: we cannot do it all, we cannot have it all**

## Trade-offs

- Between goals and expectations
- Between ambitions and reality
- Between what you want to do, what others want you to do and what you can do

## Saying “NO” is a valid choice you can make

- Take time to decide
- Consider trade-offs
- Avoid guilt-driven decisions
- Have a “NO” buddy, someone who helps you prioritize & say NO when appropriate

**Accept and adjust to imbalance**



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# Tip 3: Self Confidence

## Admit that

- We can succeed in the long term, but may fail on some things on the way
- Some insecurity is normal
- We exist in a society that has a certain social normal
- We are being evaluated by others--peer review is hard!

## But we can

- Enjoy and be proud of our successes, even small ones
- Think positively, always, even in difficult times
- Extract confidence from within, exhibit it
- Seek out support, when needed



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# Tip 4: Make time for yourself

## Why?

- Creative and highly technical work is hard on our minds and bodies
- Burn-out is a real thing that effects creative and talented people

## Brain rejuvenation

- What do you like most? What do you love?
- Happiness is strongly correlated with “small” things
- Schedule “rejuvenation”(gym, concert tickets, community service, friends, weekends)
- Take time off!



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# Tip 5: Make time for your interpersonal relationships

## Why?

- an important part of your life and happiness
- personal happiness affects creativity
- conversely, unhappiness negatively affects creativity

## Explicitly Include interpersonal time in your schedule

- Helps your partner know what to expect
  - e.g., Saturday date night
  - Sunday playtime
- When you have a deadline, don't cancel, reschedule interpersonal time (make up time)
  - Lets your partner know they are important too



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# Tips 5 & 6: Get organized / Ask for help

- Tip5:
  - Use productivity software (e.g. trello, Notion, etc.)
  - Get things out of your head and onto paper (or digital files!)
- Tip 6:
  - Utilize your internal and external mentor network



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