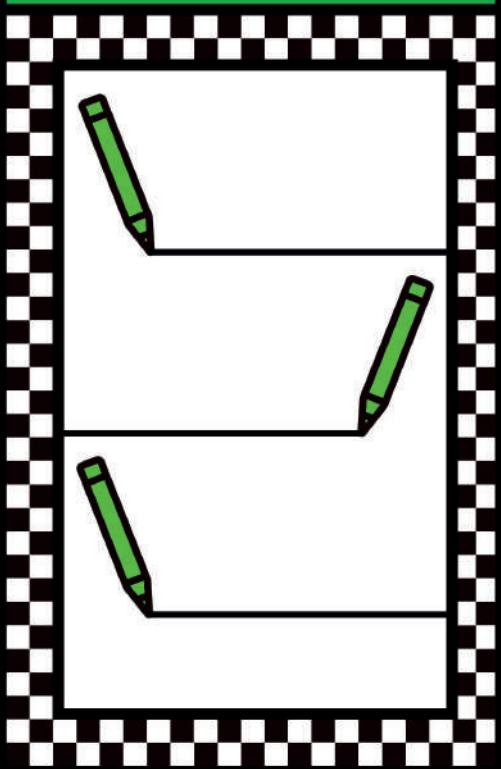
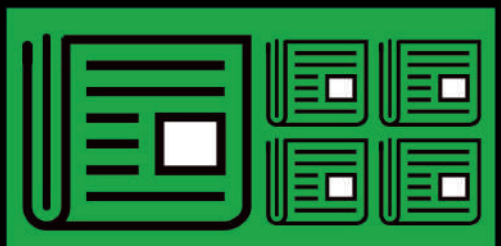
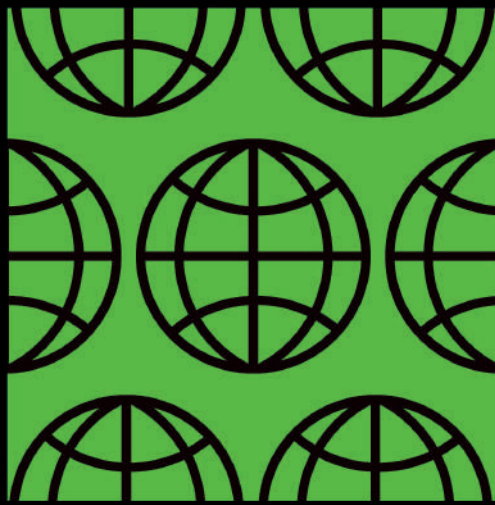




# **RESEARCHERS GUIDE**



*This guide includes academic advices from the researchers of the Berlin School of Economics.*

*Special thanks to the BSE Insights Team, Researchers of BSE, Agne Kajackaite, Aleks Zaklan, Alexander Kriwoluzky, Ally Xin Lin, Annekatrin Schrenker, C. Katharina Spieß, Christian Basteck, Ciril Bosch-Rosa, Dorothea Kübler, Francis de Véricourt, Georg Weizsäcker, Gyula Seres, Hande Erkut, Hannes Ullrich, Jana Hamdan, Levent Neyse, Lisa Bruttel, Lutz Weinke, Mira Fischer, Müge Sürer, Nikolaus Wolf, Peter Haan, Robert Stüber, Sebastian Schweighofer-Kodritsch, Simone Maxand, Vincent Meisner, and Pablo Brañas-Garza.*

# **TOP 10 TIPS**

## **for junior researchers**

Attend seminars and talk to speakers!

Focus on your current research and try to finish old projects.

Be authentic!

Communicate your research with everyone, in every occasion.

Be prepared to enjoy the research itself, not only the moments of glory.

Take long walks.

Familiarize yourself with different search tools

Have a good work-life balance.

Ask yourself what topic you find really interesting, then work hard on it.

Be social: Meet and discuss with peers, other researchers and seminar speakers.

# CHOICE OF TOPIC



What is the fire which burns in you? Research questions related to this fire are the ones you are good at.

Ask yourself what topic you find really interesting, then work hard on it!

Work on topics that interest you and that also interest people in the discipline at the moment.

Do not work on topics which seem to be strategical useful but do not interest you. The papers will be mediocre only.

Trust your Intuition, if you find some common/ Mainstream assumption or Approach strange. Nothing is good just because everyone does it.


Do not dismiss good and relevant ideas easily because some research already exists on a research question. There is much more space for research output than it seems.

It is necessary to think carefully about the pros and cons of starting a certain research project. Also sunk costs should be considered as sunk costs and one should be willing to end projects that are leading nowhere. On the flipside, sometimes it also helps to slide into a research project, i.e. to start with what one is able to do and to take it from there.






# READING

Join a reading group 

✓  
Do not read all papers back to back, be selective.

Read papers. A lot of papers. A 100 per year. At least. 

Read (occasionally) famous papers or books in their original. Often, we know only their second-hand Interpretation, which might be biased or incomplete.



# RESEARCH

[Recommended Read Click here](#)



Be prepared to enjoy the research itself, not the moments of glory, which are too few.



Do not hesitate to ask questions and reach any person that might be helpful for you.



Be authentic!



When you have a research question and you are doing a literature review, you may be drawn to different strands of literature than you initially aimed for. Let it happen and be lost for a while! Yet, always come back to your initial research question in the end, and think about how you can make it better in light of the new things you learned.



Be curious about the world, come up with puzzles you find relevant and engaging, and do not be afraid to question the (seminal) literature. Existing research is not the truth set in stone.



Do not underestimate simple tasks. Finishing seemingly simple tasks carelessly can cause you problems. Take simple tasks seriously too.



Focus on research and writing papers. Everything else is less important at this stage.



Focus on one project in the beginning and do not stop until it is a working paper.

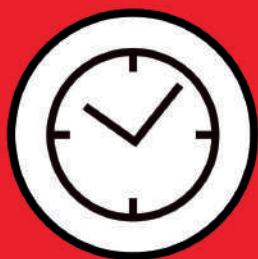


On Theory: I used to spend too much time reading and thinking, relative to actually trying things out. I learn most from playing with existing models and working out examples as a way to ask the model the questions I am interested in. My experience is that this is how vague/informal ideas become operational as research projects.



No idea is a crazy one. Write them all down and discuss with your peers.

[Recommended Read: 'A Guide for the Young Economist' by William Thomson.](#)



# TIME AND TASK MANAGEMENT

Do not try to learn everything: It is impossible. Instead. Decide what is necessary to learn and what should be outsourced. For example, if you find yourself in a neuroeconomics paper, it doesn't make sense to learn brain image analysis if you do not aim to pursue a career on this. Otherwise collaborate.



Try to draw clear boundaries between work time and non-work time. Make time for leisure. Make sure to sleep plenty. Leisure, sleep and general wellbeing and happiness will make you far more productive in the time you are working, so it is wrong to think of it as time "taken away" from working.



Reduce your online time.



Focus on your current research and try to finish old projects



Choosing the correct paths at forks in the road in your research career is extremely important. While there is no substitute for effort, taking the time to choose what you devote your time to is essential. Individual decisions that avoid dead-ends and poorly conceptualized projects can save you huge amounts of time. It is therefore important to think carefully before embarking on a new path.



Carefully select your projects and keep the number of projects you are working on to a reasonable amount. Of course, there is a trade-off between quantity and quality, i.e. there are both costs and benefits research-wise when it comes to participating in more projects. To me, it is however not only the case that good research simply takes time (spend time on finding an interesting research question, on finding a good design, and on writing your paper), but also personally much more satisfying to work on fewer projects and to work more careful and hence better on them.



Submit your current work first, before starting a new project





# PRESENTATIONS, SEMINARS, CONFERENCES

Attend research seminars.

Present in internal seminars at early stages

Participate in Workshops, if possible as one of the organizers. This is a great way of getting involved.

Seek out a seminar series and visit it every week. Research communities are formed around regular events. Present your research there if the event is internal.

When giving a talk: It is important to acknowledge what other people did before but the most important is your own work. Do not use 10 slides for literature review.

Participate on online seminars, take an active role, ask questions, talk to seminar presentors if there is the chance

Present your ideas in the brown bag.

Follow colloquiums and seminars as much as possible.

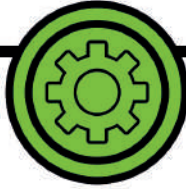
Sign up to present you work – not the least to motivate and focus yourself as you work towards the deadline.

Try never to present even before having a draft paper.

Always attend seminars, even though your prior is that it will not be of much interest for you.



# ACQUIRE NEW SKILLS



Get familiar with project management skills and tools; effective project documentation and structuring can avoid much duplication of effort and facilitate replication; some material on this by Economist is available online, much of it based on computer science tools.

Check out the coding workshops offered by [datacarpentry.org](http://datacarpentry.org)! They have live-coding workshops teaching Python, Git Bash, Stata etc., with some resources being freely available online that you can use to learn how to code at your own speed.

Familiarize yourself with different search tools

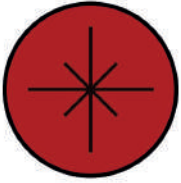
Think out of the box in terms of datasets. Search for data no one has ever analyzed before. Even paid data. Ways to fund

Consider participating in the co-organization of (small) workshops on topics that interest you

Make yourself an expert in a topic and be interested not only in the academic research, but also in applications, policy trends, legal framework around it.

Do not try to avoid learning things: For example, if you are importing your stata regressions to your papers manually, do not. Learn how to do it automatically. It takes 10 mins and saves you hours and even days.

Thesis supervision is probably more rewarding than teaching, try it.



# KEEPING PEACE OF MIND



Good documentation (including ideas, analysis plans, do-files, code of programs, instructions) is key and helpful.

Write the "do" file before getting the data. It is important to fix in advance what type of analysis you wish to do.



Build your bibliography library as early as possible

Keep a journal and weekly to do lists.





# SOCIAL

Try to have informal contact with other researchers. Lunch etc.

Try to collaborate with many people to learn different styles, approaches and to have a better network.

Be close with your cohort and younger researchers around working in your field.

Choose co-authors you trust and like - you will spend a lot of time with them.

Talk to as many researchers as possible inside your field. It will help you understand how research and academia work.

**Be nice!**

Talk to as many researchers as possible outside your field and discipline. It will give you new ideas and you will learn how different the rules and norms are outside your field.

Build a network, from Day 1. Talk to your fellow PhD students and postdoc researchers, faculty, seminar guests, visiting researchers etc.

Don't be afraid to approach senior people you are interested in at conferences or to write them an email. Throw some smart ideas at them to get them interested in you.

**Make friends!**

Choose kind and positive people as your supervisors, coauthors and peers. This will make all the difference in tough times.

Learn from the best. Reach out to the researchers you admire and when the possibilities will be there again, go and do a research stay with them.

Talk to people about your ideas and your projects. Even non-economists. Your work will be much more enjoyable if you are excited about what you are working on. Talking to others can help to remind you why you are doing what you are doing. It is a way to take a step back and reflect and summarize the bigger picture of your project. The process of zooming out is important; one can get lost in the details.

Collaborate with other junior scholars

Talk to senior researchers and join their work as early as possible. The course work you had is essential, but you can only learn doing independent research with learning-by-doing.

Pitch your ideas and present your work whenever you can. Your expertise is unique, don't expect colleagues to reach out if they don't know your interests.

Find channels through which you can 1) learn and 2) receive information. The answer depends on your field a bit, but check out social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook) and go to conferences and specialized workshops.

Connect and exchange also beyond your research field. If possible, find a 'neutral' mentor who can advise you with non-technical questions and potential problems with your supervisor.

Keep in contact with other researchers



# SELF MOTIVATION

Find out what motivates you, may it be people, positive/negative feedback, research questions, public presentations etc, and use this source of motivation.

Do not compare your CV with those of your peers and get disappointed with yourself: some are short-distance runners and others are long-distance runners. You might be surprised when you check the CVs of the top people in your field and find out that they started slow as well.

When you are stuck ask yourself "What have I achieved since last year today"

A career in research has many ups and downs, sometimes more downs than ups. So you must be really willing to go through such a phase, never forgetting what your motivation is.

Have a look at the papers that get presented in the seminars of the best universities in the world. This gives you a lot of inspiration.

Be kind to yourself. Many researchers consistently fall short of their own expectations because they repeatedly set infeasibly high goals. It is good to aim high, but then to be empathetic to oneself when evaluating one's progress. Focus on how far you have come and what you have achieved, not on how far you have fallen short of where you imagined you'd be.

Creating a personal website is fun and ensures you decide what others see when they google you. Using Google Sites, building a website is free and takes less than two days!



# WRITING



Start writing early and do so regularly; share your writing with others. Research is as much about clear writing as it is about wrangling data, finding identification strategies, forming theories etc.

Try to write papers with a positive or constructive message. If you write a negative paper then the editor will ask you for 1000000 robustness checks before your work may get published.

The time of our peers in the scientific community is scarce. By far, most of the time of working on a paper goes into carefully thinking about its contribution to (various issues/literatures in economics) and writing it up concisely and convincingly. Investing in this early in your career (unlike me) provides you with a key skill for a research career.

Keep always in mind: What is the research question?  
why is relevant?  
what is the contribution?

**Recommended Reading:** Economical Writing  
by Deidre McCloskey

**Recommended Reading:** How to Write Applied  
Papers in Economics by Marc F. Bellemare



# GETTING PUBLISHED

Have fast paper turnover. Do not have them lying around; submit, revise, submit, etc.

Always aim to publish in the top journals. Don't be scared of rejections!

Submit your work and don't be perfectionist



# BEING STUCK

Sometimes the outlook as a PhD candidate can be overwhelming and one is not sure whether one can make it over the hump. I think it is helpful to take it step by step and to realize that the progress during research and the PhD in particular is not linear in time. There are times with less progress, but sometimes one makes progress quickly again.



Think outside the box: If you do not enjoy the task, maybe you do not like the topic, that particular people, your co-authors, your field or even academia. Do not make your life miserable blaming yourself. Just find what you do not like and change it.



If you get stuck on one project, take a break and come back later – just make sure you document properly where you left off.



Talk to peers when you get stressed. We are going through similar experiences.



You may find inspiration for your research at the most uncommon places such as a novel, a painting or a movie. So, when you are stuck, get out of your office and go to a museum!



When you are stuck:  
a) ask Google. It usually knows.  
b) Ask colleagues (seniors and juniors). They usually know.



Do not overthink about the difficulty of a task. The more you think, the more difficult it gets.





# YOUR SUPERVISOR IS THERE FOR YOU!



Choose your supervisor wisely.



If you are lost, tell your advisor. Do not waste your time sitting



Do not join a department or a supervisor for the money, or "a better contract". You will not earn much in your PhD anyway. Work only with people you like on projects you love.



Contact your supervisor if you face time problems or problems with your contracts.



You are responsible for your project, but your supervisor also has a share of the responsibility, especially when it comes to topics as working hours and feasibility of the topic.



# WORK-LIFE BALANCE



Take a walk. A long one. Many of them actually.



Whenever you are frustrated with your research: Step back, go jogging, take a day off, re-group and give it another go. Doing sports is essential!



Try to find a Balance between joint and own work. You will need cooperation, but I recommend at least one single authored paper in your PhD.

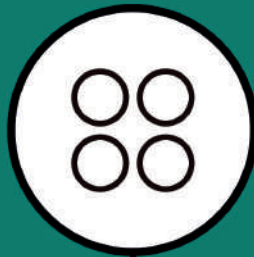


Work out and eat healthy.



Have a hobby/sport. Even better, have two hobbies!

# TIPS FOR EXPERIMENTAL ECONOMISTS



Before running any experiment discuss the design with senior colleagues. Recall that once conducted there are not second opportunities.

I easily get excited by my ideas for experiments. It is then tempting to run them before carefully thinking through how the data generated exactly relates to the yet informal hypotheses one has. This is not the best research practice, and my experience is that it is also inefficient. Find ways to commit yourself to doing this beforehand, say via a pre-analysis plan.

If you are a behavioral economist, don't just run lab experiments but also acquire skills in at least one other method, e.g. analysis of administrative data (advanced skills in econometrics), formal modelling, or large-scale field experiments. Acquire institutional knowledge in at least one area of applied economics, e.g. health, labor, IO, public, ... Your combination of skills and knowledge will help you find your niche (and unique selling point) and allows you to relate to people from different research fields. The combination of both will help you to become a successful researcher (and to convince others that you are worth hiring).

Pilots! Running 1-2 rounds of pilots is very important to understand how well the experiment works.

Less is more. Complicated designs (many treatments all together) usually do not provide clear insights.

When running lab experiments, it is very helpful to have a team present and not be by yourself. It is much less stressful to manage 20+ lab participants if there are two researchers and two student assistants around working together as always something comes up.

Ask fellow researchers for their z tree files or similar to understand how to program a lab experiment with this tool for which little documentation is available. It is much easier to work with once you see how others programmed it!

Give your experimental instructions to non-researchers to check how understandable it is. Also keep it as brief as possible.



# JOB MARKET



Think of the expertise that you can mention in your CV: Maybe it is worth to acquire a certificate? Apply for a small grant? Or write a quick policy report? Or even a newspaper article? Do a project with an international organization? It all may not directly contribute to your dissertation, but turns out to be super important at some point in time.

Unless you have a tenure-track position, you will go to the JM again. Plan well ahead, get ready with a JMP paper and a list of 3-5 potential letter writers. This time you will be under less time pressure, use it.

Every talk you give is a job talk. So, prepare very well!

# LEAVE ACADEMIA?



Research is a field for people who are highly intrinsic motivated. Without such a motivation do not start

On Academia vs. Private Sector: I think life as a researcher is characterized by waves of excitement and frustration, due to the long duration of work on projects together with uncertainty about their ultimate value/success. In the private sector, projects are shorter, it is more about satisfactory completion than perfection, and you get much more feedback. As a good friend put it (she said it to her partner who was getting quite depressed towards the end of his PhD): If you need someone who always pats you on the shoulder and says well done, then academic research is probably not the right job for you. (They are now married, and he is a happy top-earner in economic consulting.)

Try your best to stay but leaving the academy is not the end of the world. You will still be happy and probably richer.



# MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

Never forget that also other researchers are humans.

Report any type of discrimination you witness. Do not hesitate, as being open is an efficient way to decrease discriminatory behavior.

Only start corona research project if there is clear value added, discuss this ex ante with fellows



# TRAVEL

Try to organize an exchange with a renowned university - great experience in networking, applying for grants, and time spent abroad.

Go to as many workshops related to your research as possible. They are more important than the big overseas conferences for building your network. They are super helpful for finding co-authors, getting invited for research stays and receiving unsolicited job offers (at least they were for me).

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