Tasks to which you hold yourself solely accountable usually come last, and, as a graduate student, you are accountable to many people. This means that you are, most likely, taking very little time for you.

**Why it is important to make time for you**

Making time for you is an important component not only of surviving grad school but of being successful in your graduate work and professional life. Furthermore, the benefits of taking time for yourself go beyond both the academic and professional realm and extend into your personal life. After all, you are not solely a graduate student. You may be an employee, a parent, a friend, a child of a dependant parent or grandparent, a volunteer, a spouse, a sibling, or any other role that requires responsibilities outside of school. With the combination of all of these responsibilities, you may feel like there is no room to take time for you. However, although it may seem contradictory, setting aside time for you will help you better fulfill each of these responsibilities.

In an article describing the high frequency of depression among graduate students, Fogg (2009) argued that “keeping balance is essential to avoiding the kind of single-mindedness that graduate school fosters” (p. B12). Part of maintaining balance comes from taking time for you. This helps ensure you stay healthy, both in mind and body. Taking breaks from your work to take time for yourself helps suspend the stress that, without interruption, can easily snowball. While a reasonable amount of stress can serve as motivation, excessive stress (inherent in grad school) can actually encumber your ability to function both academically and personally (Peters, 1997). It is therefore vital to your success to learn how to make time for you.

**How to get started**

Making time for yourself goes hand-in-hand with an effective time management plan. If you procrastinate your responsibilities (for any number of reasons), you will find your you-time quickly sucked away by what has become the most pressing and urgent issue. Try any or all of these ideas to help you better manage your responsibilities so that you can find more and make the most of time for yourself.

*Get a calendar.* Electronic or paper, it does not matter as long as you are willing to write things down and refer back to it on a regular basis. An hour-by-hour calendar is an invaluable investment in grad school. You can
schedule in your permanent appointments (i.e., work, class, picking kids up from school) then, around those, plot in your variable weekly activities (i.e., doctor's appointments, errands, larger blocks of homework time). Then after you have done this, you can see where your schedule reveals small blocks of unassigned time. These small blocks of time are perfect for rereading your notes, reviewing an article, writing for a short period of time on a larger writing project, or relaxing.

*Keep a to do list.* To do lists can help you prioritize your tasks. After writing down your tasks for the day (or week if you prefer a longer list), number the tasks in the order they should be completed in or worked on. Be honest with yourself about which duties have the greatest priority. Do not simply give priority to the ones you would rather work on. Also, creating an extra lengthy list can be more overwhelming than helpful. Be reasonable with yourself and realistic in your expectations.

*Plan for (and write down) your you-time.* When filling in your calendar or creating a to do list, set aside and write down time for you. Without this step, you are likely to never “make” time for yourself—there will always be something that seems more important. However, if you open your calendar and see time set aside for an activity you are looking forward to, you will be more likely to take a break and do that activity.

*Keep the guilt out of you-time.* By assigning specific times for your leisure activities, you are telling yourself that you planned this time in and it is accounted for: “Because I have made time for this activity, everything else will still get done. I am not taking time away from ‘a more important’ task, and I am not wasting my time.” At this time you should stop thinking about the obligation awaiting you after your you-time. Do not let that stressor ruin this time you have set aside—that would only be wasting your time.

*Take a day off.* This probably sounds impossible to most graduate students; however, try arranging your schedule and blocking in your academic time so that you can have a day off. Achieving this takes hard work and a devotion to time management. Taking a day off may not always be possible, but if it can be done, try. This day off will help you feel less stress and remind you that “you are more than a graduate student” *(Fogg, 2009, p.812).*

**What to do in you-time**

We all have activities that we look forward to or that relax us. Try creating a list of activities that you enjoy. You might organize this list by time requirements. For example, have a few activities that you could do for just five minutes, a few for a half and hour, and a few that require hours. You might even put an all-day activity on your list.

*Short breaks.* Try doing one of these activities between reading articles. Giving yourself this short break will help refresh your mind and make a distinction between the articles you are reading. Without this distinction, your readings, unproductively, become one giant, blurred article of which you have only a vague memory.
Medium to long breaks. These breaks are useful when you are switching between tasks, from researching to writing, for example. They are also helpful when you feel worn down and need a bigger boost than a short break can provide. When you decide to take a break, make sure to stick to the time you allotted yourself. A one hour break turned into a three hour break can leave you feeling regretful and stressed if it takes away from your planned study time. Set a timer if you have a hard time sticking to your plan.

All-day breaks. You could set this aside as a reward for completing something especially challenging, such as your Qualifying exams or a class presentation that you had been dreading. Maybe there is a day trip you have wanted to take. Plan for it and put it on your calendar. This will give you something to look forward to.

Make taking time for you a priority. You may need further convincing or some re-convincing as time goes, but just try and remember that you are more productive and do better work when you are not burned out.

References
