Yerkes-Dodson Law:

Surviving your thesis means finding the right balance of “arousal” to motivate you to work at your optimal performance level.

Many graduate students struggle with too high of arousal due to balancing multiple graduate work demands or expectations of creating a perfect thesis.

Remember to check-in with yourself periodically to determine where you fall on the arousal level.

Too high? It’s probably time to get support from others, have some relaxation time, and consciously combat negative thinking.

Too low? It’s probably time to remind yourself why you want to graduate and that your research does matter to your discipline.

Tricks To Completing Your Thesis

The Georgia Tech Counseling Center is a unit of the Division of Student Affairs. The Center is dedicated to enhancing the academic experience and success of all students by providing a variety of counseling and psychological services to individuals and the campus community. We provide short-term counseling services to address a wide range of personal and career concerns. Our services are available at no charge to currently enrolled students.

For more information, contact us at:

Georgia Tech Counseling Center
353 Ferst Drive, Suite 238
Student Services-Flag Building
Atlanta, Georgia 30332
404-894-2575
www.counseling.gatech.edu

Office Hours
Monday-Friday 8:00am-5:00pm

Rev. July 2012
The Imposter Phenomenon:

Graduate students often struggle with feeling like a fraud in their field. This is partially inherent in the graduate school process where one is “almost” a doctor. Just how much one is supposed to know and how much guidance one is allowed to still receive often feels like a mystery. In addition, the thesis is often elevated in graduate students’ minds to be the hallmark of their work; rather than a reflection of their first independent research project. Many graduate students end up blaming themselves versus appreciating the complexity of a graduate student identity. To help challenge feelings of phoniness:

♦ Keep a record of positive feedback you receive. Note when you prevent yourself from accepting this feedback.

♦ Recognize when you over-value trait(s)/area(s) you are not as strong in and under-value trait(s)/area(s) you excel.

♦ Discriminate between the importance of various tasks. Set time limits on work, especially for tasks deemed as not that important

♦ Turn in work that you know is not perfect so others can give realistic feedback. You may come to see you set higher standards than are necessary.

♦ Recognize that you have just as much right as the next person to be wrong, have an off-day, or to ask for assistance.

♦ Develop a new response to disappointments or mistakes. Such as, “A life without failure means a life played too safe.”

♦ Develop a new script when challenged. Instead of thinking, “Wait until they find out I have no idea what I’m doing” try, “I may not know all the answers but I am smart enough to find them out.”

Overcoming Perfectionism:

♦ Give up the fantasy you’ll have a perfect thesis & that your committee will have no comments. Remember, their job is to come up with comments!

♦ Think about your performance on a continuum versus just “good” or “bad.” Review a variety of theses in your department to see the large width in this continuum

♦ Whatever the results, credit yourself for having the courage to try hard.

How to Stop Procrastination:

♦ Manage your time well by keeping a written schedule.

♦ Set behavioral, concrete, step-by-step goals (e.g., “I’ll outline five articles from 8am until 10am today” versus “I’ll get a lot of writing done today”)

♦ Set up a distraction free environment – find the internet free areas!

♦ Force yourself to face the thesis for at least five minutes several days a week. On low energy days, do less mindful tasks like formatting or typing in references.

Thesis Writing References

♦ The Dissertation Journey by Carol Roberts

♦ Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day by Joan Bolker, Ed.D

♦ How to Complete and Survive a Doctoral Dissertation by Dr. David Sternberg

♦ Getting What You Came for: The Smart Student’s Guide to Earning a Master’s or a Ph.D. by Robert L. Peters

♦ Tomorrow’s Professor:

♦ Preparing for Careers in Science and Engineering by Richard M. Reis

The Imposter Phenomenon by Pauline Rose Clance, PhD, and Suzanne Imes, PhD