Common Mistakes in Graduate Research Projects

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Finding an Advisor and Research

One's motivation to work on a project is proportional to one's personal interest in the topic.

- Find an advisor that matches your personality / working style
- Seek questions and research that interests you so you will be more motivated and self-starting
- Don't be constrained by the expertise of your advisor, branch out to find what you like

Planning and Time Management

Many problems in a complex project can be avoided by developing a long-term plan with your advisor at the beginning.

- Find a clear goal or question to be answered
- Determine the resources and tools that will be helpful
- Find and talk to experts in methods that you will be using (e.g. programming, software)
- Set milestones but stay flexible, don't assume anything is certain

Miscommunication

Conflict and disagreements are inevitable. However, this should not discourage you from communicating with your advisor or peers.

- Clarify what your advisor expects from you, and your work early on
- Don't be afraid to talk to your advisor or peers about mistakes and problems
- Stay in contact with your advisor and collaborators, and ask for feedback often

Taking Ownership of Your Work

There is no absolute path in research, don't expect your advisor to tell you what to do!

- Take initiative and learn to become self-sufficient
- Always know what you should be doing, and if you don't ask!
- Don't expect your advisor to have all the answers to your problems

Summary

1. Find an advisor and project that matches your interests and personality
2. Clarify from the start the goals and milestones necessary to complete the project
3. Communicate often and openly with your advisor and collaborators
4. Take ownership of your research