



**Book of the Month 05: *Grad School Essentials: A Crash Course in Scholarly Skills*  
By Zachary Shore, Oakland: University of California Press, 2016**

Reviewed by Carla Orvis Hunt

Rare is the how-to book that exemplifies its own instructions! NPS Professor Zachary Shore's *Grad School Essentials: A Crash Course in Scholarly Skills* does exactly that, providing professional clarity and an engaging, conversational writing style. "The tips you are about to read," he promises in the introduction, "and the skills you are about to learn, are seldom taught." Not only does Professor Shore—a historian and Fulbright scholar who applied public school education toward success at Harvard and Oxford—share real-world insights, he also models two essential, practical strategies for excelling in graduate school. While bringing the "passion to the page" that he recommends, Professor Shore gets straight to the point and advises that you do likewise.

The book dissects and lays bare the fundamentals likely to make or break your ability to thrive in any graduate program: reading, writing, speaking, behavior, and research. Professor Shore gives explicit guidance for success; he presents each topic in a clear, readable way, suggesting solutions before expanding and synthesizing, not unlike a solid persuasive essay. Crucially, he guides without being obnoxious, long-winded, or making readers search for the point. For example, he advises reading a journal article's last paragraph early since it's likely to contain the most succinct statement of the author's thesis. Take Professor Shore's advice and read *his* last paragraph, a lively celebration of the joys of scholarly research which will entice you to review all of the book's strategies.

If there's one thing I am tempted to tattoo on my forehead so as to ensure writing student attention, it's the wisdom of clearly expressing the main point right off the bat. Rather than baiting your reader as if you're Sherlock Holmes, making them wait until the end for the big reveal, Professor Shore suggests bottom-line-up-front (BLUF) strategies. While our inner mystery writers often reveal themselves in a first draft, Professor Shore advises letting the narrative suspense instead arise from revealing your thought process point by point. *Grad School Essentials* explains several strategies for good writing, including how to "laser in on a topic" and "spring-load your sentences," and several more for strategic thinking, including what to do "if you cannot say why your investigation really matters, if you cannot link your question to a larger puzzle."

Shore goes beyond writing and research to acknowledge the realities of grad school. He may be the first professor I've seen put the reading reality on paper: "you will not have enough time to read everything." Even if you do, his tips on how to read strategically will save you substantial time. Read for the thesis, he emphasizes. Then, armed with the thesis, you'll know quickly how well the reading applies to your research interests. Additionally, he addresses an often overlooked aspect of student life: grad students are rarely prepared for how to act. Too often, even savvy students end up trapped in

unnecessary ego debates that distract from the mission at hand. Throughout, Professor Shore's passion for keeping things both real and lighthearted shines through, including his guidance on avoiding common threats like becoming a Book Zombie or a Bartender's Burden.

Rather than treating grad school as a burden, Professor Shore threads useful content with engaging writing, reminding readers of the inherent adventures of scholarly research. He has employed his theory of strategic empathy to produce a "little book with a lot of power" that any reader will likely find a fast read and want to keep close on their reference shelf. Thanks, Professor Shore, for reminding us how to show and tell in our writing and also for teaching us how to save ourselves from becoming Book Zombies!