

# The A-Z of Indonesian Honours

## The Collective Wisdom of Ele Williams and Friends

### Assessment Tasks

There will be lots of assessment tasks in Honours that you might think you know how to do/don't need to do, especially if you've done well throughout your undergraduate years (e.g. literature reviews, critical readings, oral presentations etc...). I learnt more about my writing/ reading skills this year than in 5 years of undergrad studies, so don't underestimate how much you can *still* learn.

### Basics

Make sure you're on top of the basics – how to find articles, how to use Microsoft Word PROPERLY, how to use EndNote...

### Centrelink

Sort out Centrelink stuff early on, as you'll probably need Michele or at least the Arts Faculty to sign forms. Otherwise, definitely only deal with Centrelink when you're feeling patient!

### Conferences

If you get the opportunity to go, GO! There are lots of Indo/Asian related conferences/seminars on through local and interstate universities, as well as overseas. These conferences were a great opportunity to network with the broader Indo academic community and to get away from the desk for a while. Also, if your paper fits with one of the panels, submit an abstract. Ben and I gave papers at the 2007 Indonesia Council Open Conference and it was a great opportunity to field questions and really think about our work/be challenged by people on the spot.

### Dumb Moments

No, you are not dumb! But you probably will feel like you are every now and then. Just remember that many established academics tear their hair out every time they write, and are much less practised at receiving constructive criticism than you will be by the end of this year!

### Edit

The key to a polished thesis is making sure the editing process is ongoing. Editing others' work refines your own critical reading skills and helps you to find problems in your own work, and each person finds different errors, inconsistencies and contributes different ideas. Drafts should be edited more than once, and by more than one pair of eyes. We used our class mates, parents, friends. Also, organise someone to proofread your thesis before you send it to the bookbinders. Learn how to not take it personally when someone criticises or suggests changes to what you've written. It's hard to not get emotionally attached to your work but a certain level of detachment will give you a better perspective on how you're progressing. (As an aside, this was a good skill to learn for my current job, where everything you write will be edited and rewritten by at least 3 other people.)

## **Facebook**

While this represents possibly the greatest tool in the world for procrastination (for more details, look under 'p'), it is also great for networking. Check out the Indonesia Council, AIYEP, SISC and ACICIS groups... Great for finding out what's going on/speaking with other people doing Indonesia-related research.

## **Family**

If your family is around, let them look after you for a year... You'll repay them one day!!! Accept all offerings of family kindness: lunches, dinner, washing up, whatever. They are the only ones who you can yell at and who will still love you afterwards.

## **Fiction**

Don't ONLY read non-fiction related to uni. Make sure you have one book that has nothing to do with your thesis, and read it when you need a break from thinking-breathing the thesis. It might take you the whole year to get through the book, but I found that it was something to look forward to!

## **Formatting**

There are specific formatting requirements for your thesis which your supervisor should inform you of. Make sure you learn how to use the formatting functions in Word at least a few weeks before your thesis is due if not much earlier. One way to become familiar with formatting would be to try and format one of the essays you do during the semester using the style required for your thesis. This will help you become familiar with the process of formatting and alert you to some of the mistakes you might make – which are better to discover earlier rather than in the hours before taking your thesis to the binder!

## **Friends**

You're not going to see as many people this year as you want to. Friends might get grumpy that 'they never see you anymore' (so sick of hearing that), but once you get to the end of the year, your good friends will still be there. Cheesy, but true. In any case, the friendships you develop with the other Honours students in the department will be extremely valuable. They will be going through many of the ups and downs that you are, they can be a useful source of feedback on your and they can be very helpful in reminding you of deadlines and details that you may have forgotten.

## **Growing as a Person as Well as a Scholar**

(Yes, okay, Michele put this one in). Doing Honours will challenge you as a person as well as a scholar – particularly if you get me as a supervisor because they don't come any blunter. But what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. And I really am a softie underneath...

## **Health**

Student Services in the Education Building are really helpful: Counselling, Financial Services, Disability Services, Stress Management Workshops, Depression etc. If you're sick for a longer period of time (e.g. hospital), take your medical certificate to your supervisor - they keep it on file and it can be used later if you need to apply for Special Consideration or an extension.

Throughout the year, simple things like going for a massage or going to yoga can be great to unwind.

## **Holiday**

You're going to be craving one in second semester, so take one in 1<sup>st</sup> semester break or in the mid-year break. Absolutely, completely and utterly necessary. Do not take your laptop or any readings whatsoever with you. Do not check your email.

## **House/Housework**

Step away from the dishes. In my peak procrastination phase I realised I had become incredibly anal around the house and was using housework as a way to avoid my thesis. Original, hey? But surprisingly easy, especially when your home space is your work space. But there are other workspaces: uni, the library, family/friend's house. Getting out of my house was the best thing I did for my thesis and really got me writing. If you have access to an office space, even better.

## **Identify clear reasons for yourself early on as to why you're doing this**

Maybe just mark out some clear goals early on and keep them on the wall. They don't need to put pressure on you, just remind you why you chose to do Honours to help you through the hard times. For example, one of my reminders for me was to remember what I'd seen in the field – that was why I was writing it up, not because of what other people were telling me, or because of a mark.

## **Identify your argument early on**

This bit is the hardest, I think. Do everything you can early on to isolate a research question and try to work out what your answer to that question is (mind maps are good, as is revisiting your field interviews and interview answers). And keep talking to your supervisor – that's what they're there for!

## **Indonesian Language**

A lot of your assessment will be in Indonesian, so keep up your academic Indonesian by reading Indonesian journal articles, newspapers etc, and keep writing in Indonesian. Also if any tutoring/translation work comes your way, take it – it's great practice (and income).

## **Inside Indonesia**

*Inside Indonesia* is an online magazine ([www.insideindonesia.org](http://www.insideindonesia.org)) that focuses on human rights, environmental, social and political issues in Indonesia. Submitting an article about your thesis topic to this online magazine is a great way of getting published, developing your writing skills and consolidating your ideas about your thesis.

## **Isolation**

The hardest thing for me was feeling like none of my friends got what I was talking about, particularly since I'd done a 5 year undergrad degree and my Honours year was my *sixth* year of studying – all my friends had finished studying. It's hard, but you work out who you can talk to about it and if it's only people at uni, then it's only people at uni.

## **Just get started**

Start writing early on. It doesn't matter if you think you don't have enough knowledge or information, it doesn't matter if you haven't quite worked out exactly what you want to say, it doesn't matter if you feel like it won't be good enough... just get started. You won't finish if you don't begin.

## **Keep a research journal**

This is a particularly good tool during the early stages, and in fieldwork. I kept a fieldwork diary for everything research related – contacts, networks, email addresses, research goals, key acronyms (*very* important in Indonesia!!), and interview ideas. It's helpful not only to get all these things down, but also to look back in April at what you first thought in December and see what you still think about those original ideas. Are they useful anymore? Are you forgetting something now that you wrote down back then?

## **Letting go of the '1<sup>st</sup> Class' pressure**

This is not to suggest that you shouldn't be aiming to get 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours or just settle for second best – not at all. But I did find that when '1st class Honours' was my only motivation for doing well it didn't help and put a lot of pressure on me. Think about your other reasons for doing Honours instead and they'll motivate you much more than a mark.

## **Light (at the end of the tunnel)**

It's important to have something to look forward to after the thesis is handed in. For me it was an overseas holiday two days after I handed in my last assignment. A while into my holiday I realised I hadn't thought about my thesis at all for a couple of weeks – bliss!

## **Lists...**

...are so satisfying!!! Not everyone's a list person, but I found them very helpful. I broke them down into yearly/semester/monthly/weekly goals and then did daily task lists. 'Ticking off' is a fabulous thing.

## **Monthly deadlines: don't be slack**

Give yourself realistic deadlines and stick to them. Because Honours is so dependent on self-discipline, it's easy to say, 'Oh I'll get it in next week/month' etc. But if you keep to a serious monthly deadline, it makes everything easier down the track. For example, we were supposed to have a chapter done each month in 1<sup>st</sup> semester and then just edit in second semester. But I didn't quite make these deadlines and 2<sup>nd</sup> semester was much more stressful than it should've been...

## **Networks**

As with the conferences, join all the email lists, Facebook groups etc that are Indo related. There are always things on and there are always exciting job opportunities.

## **Opportunities**

There are good opportunities, opportunities that would have been good if they'd come at a slightly different time, and opportunities that look good but really aren't worth it (I'm talking work opportunities as well as academic opportunities here). If in doubt check with your supervisor to see if that shiny, shiny thing has any place in your life right now...

## **Partners**

Be patient with them. It might feel at times like they're not getting what you're talking about, but include them: give them copies of your chapters to read as you're going along, invite them to Indo seminars, etc. And spoil them, too – it's a lot for someone to support you through this crazy year.

## **Paying bills/renewing your license/dry cleaning (READ: stupid trivial jobs that you have to get done that never seem to go away)**

Save them all up and do them all in one big hit. Oh it feels so good. One big list-ticking day of fixing things is a good break from your thesis and feels so productive!

## **Plans**

Important, but even more important that they be flexible. Plan out your thesis, plan out your chapters and have them on your wall to keep you focused. When writing, keep your chapter plan next to you so you know which direction you're going in.

## **Procrastination**

I don't know why we do it, and some of us do it more than others (ahem), but it's important to realise when it's gone on for long enough and you need to get started (See 'J' for Just get started). Breaking down the task into smaller chunks is helpful (e.g. 'I'll just do the Intro to that chapter today', or 'I'll just work on the first theme of that chapter today'). Another strategy for overcoming procrastination is to commit to spending just half an hour on a task and promise yourself a treat at the end (checking emails, a coffee etc). Don't be rigid about what you want to get done in that time, just focus on your task for half an hour and give yourself the reward at the end. You'll be surprised at how focused you can get in that time and how easy it becomes to keep going after the half hour limit.

## **Reading**

Start reading now!! I regret not starting reading early on – especially as there was a lot of material I could have been reading in Indonesia when not doing interviews. Definitely read over the holidays.

## **Record recurring themes/trends/patterns in the literature (this will help you form your argument if you haven't got one yet)**

What's standing out in the literature? What are some of the key themes and why? This will help you critique the literature much more clearly and to isolate areas that have been heavily researched already, and areas that remain under-researched.

## **Resources**

ANU library and the National Library had heaps of up to date Indonesian language sources on contemporary politics (and probably lots of other topics too). Another good resource to tap into are the Honours workshops at the Learning Centre at Usyd in both semesters. (If anything I felt reassured that I was months ahead of a lot of the other students there.)

## **Scholars**

Once you start reading widely, it'll soon become quite clear who the main scholars are in your area. For example, with NGO stuff I kept seeing Keck and Sikkink, Edwards and Hulme, Clark etc. Stick up some bits of paper on your wall with these groups of names so when it comes to writing up your thesis and you want to say, 'The growing trend on NGO literature' (see AUTHOR A, AUTHOR B, AUTHOR C) you don't have to look through all your notes again, you can just look up at your wall and write the names from there.

## Scholarships

Check out the Sydney Uni Scholarships and Prizes page: (<http://www.usyd.edu.au/scholarships/>). It's great and has lots of links to scholarships I'd never even heard of. There's also prizes within the faculty, and one-off bursaries/prizes outside uni (talk to Michele and Adrian).

## Socialising (the 'I don't have anything to talk about anymore' dilemma)

As with the friends stuff, you just need to pick certain people who you know will be able to talk about your thesis and who can engage with what you're doing. Researching, writing and putting together your thesis can be incredibly intense, but it's also exciting – you're discovering new theorists, new bodies of literature, new ideas, everything. So when you're at birthday drinks, catch ups etc, it can be pretty tedious talking about gigs, boyfriends and *Australian Idol*. My advice is to enjoy your hermit moments of studying and work out who you can talk to about your work. Have patience with the *Idol* conversations.

## Sport

I probably should have done more! But riding my bike to uni and longer rides on the weekend seemed ok. All the websites and stress books in the world will tell you sport is a good thing.  
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For me this was vital for relieving stress and clearing my mind of all thesis-related things, I would definitely agree with the books! (If books don't work, Michele suggests trying large doses of West Wing.)

## Support

Don't expect everyone in your life – friends, family or partner – to really understand what you need or how to be supportive during the Honours year. And try to remember it's not their fault for not quite getting it! I often got quite frustrated that the people I cared about most seemed to be making impossible demands of me and my time when I clearly had my hands full with the thesis, balancing work and so on. Try and explain to those closest to you what you are going through but don't blame them if they don't take it as seriously as you. This is where your supervisor, and especially fellow Honours students, are really important. The time you spend with them doesn't necessarily have to be thesis-related – catch up for a coffee, have a vent and you will feel so much better!

## Time for yourself

Make sure to schedule in a bit of 'me-time' every week. I often let myself fall into the trap of stressing out over any time I spent doing non-thesis related activities, so I would cancel catching up with friends, not buy tickets to see bands, miss art exhibitions and movies I wanted to see etc. Don't do this! It is really important give yourself a break – you'll be more motivated to get back to the desk afterwards. Sometimes when I was really busy I would catch up with friends for an early breakfast, or go for a walk together, so I could fit it in better. I also had to give up whole weekends every now and then as I was travelling interstate regularly for a long-distance relationship. I made sure I really kept my head down in the weeks before a weekend away, and then just let it go for 2 days. It was hard to do, but very good for my mental health!

## **Value**

There is a lot of value in what you are doing, which at times might be hard to see. What you get from writing a thesis is not only knowledge of your topic, great networks and the opportunity to learn independently but very useful skills in research, analysis and time management. These skills are valuable in whatever next step you take. Keep this in mind when you hit a day, week or month where you can't see the point of putting yourself through the slog.

## **Work**

When I started Honours I was volunteering one day a week but had to stop as it was a very intense position, and usually took up 2 days a week. This is where the scholarships come in – try to apply for as many as you can to minimise the hours you spend each week working. In the holidays I did some freelance writing and translation work again which didn't tear me away too much from my thesis and kept me thinking in Indonesian. Minimise your expenses (phone, alcohol etc) so you can minimise the hours you have to spend in paid drudgery.

## **Writing**

The most important thing is just to start (easier said than done, I know). Write the bits that come to you first then fill in the bits that don't come so easily later (e.g. authors, frameworks etc). Also bear in mind that you don't have to write your thesis in its final order: you can write Chapter 3 first, then Chapter 2, etc. I wrote the Introduction and the Conclusion in my final week (which I don't recommend, but just as an example!)

## **Xtra effort**

Although marks shouldn't be your primary motivation, near enough isn't good enough. Don't wear out the goodwill of your supervisor or classmates by handing over something that is sloppy. Although they sometimes get it wrong, supervisors generally know when someone is working hard but struggling, and when they're just ticking boxes (or not quite ticking them). This doesn't mean that you have to have all the ideas there yet – and it never means you should sit on something when you have writer's block (that's when talking about your ideas comes in). But if you're presenting something that is supposed to be academic writing, take the time to run through the spellchecker and make sure your references are right. And leave yourself a day to do something else before handing it over so that you can read it with a fresh pair of eyes, and check for logic and flow.

## **Yes!**

Say yes to opportunities to write articles or to do presentations on aspects of your thesis (but see 'o' for opportunities), to people offering to proof read your work, to people offering to cook or clean for you, to people who ask for your opinion on aspects of your thesis, to people who want references that you have collected.

## **ZZZZZZs**

Get enough sleep. Honours is a marathon, not a sprint. Look after yourself (see 'h' for health, 's' for sport and 't' for time for yourself), and you'll be a happier and more productive scholar!

***Good luck, and enjoy!***