

Things Every Math Grad Student Should Know

Dear Student,

This is an evolving and not necessarily complete list of items that are important in your pursuit of a master's degree. Check my web page from time to time for updates of this list. If you have suggested additions or subtractions, or if you notice that some links don't work, please let [me](#) know. Good luck,

R. P. Kubelka, Graduate Coordinator

1. Read the Rules and Regulations in the Catalog and on Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations' (GAPE's) Web Pages: some of these rules are at the CSU level or above, so don't expect flexibility or exemptions. See [Catalog R&R](#) and [GAPE's R&R](#). Also, pay attention to important [dates](#).
2. Current E-Mail Address: make sure the [Graduate Coordinator](#) always has your current e-mail address. Also, check [my.sjsu.edu](#) frequently for important messages from the University or your instructors.
3. Graduation Requirements Flyer: keep a copy of the Department's flyer ([MSMath](#), [MAMath](#), [MAMathEd](#)) listing your degree program's admission and graduation requirements for the term in which you start your program. If you maintain continuous enrollment until you graduate, you will have the option of satisfying either those graduation requirements or the requirements in effect at the time you graduate.
4. Keep Records: keep a copy of every form you turn in. Write down the name of anyone in the Department, GAPE, or the University who tells you something important. It doesn't hurt to let the person see you writing down his or her name. Make sure you record the date and time of the conversation and the gist of what was said.
5. Scholarships and Awards: be aware of scholarships and awards you might be eligible for. GAPE has a webpage on [financial information](#) that includes a [funding opportunities](#) page as well as links to other resources; the Department also posts announcements in the spring calling for applications for its awards.
6. If a Course That Interests You Is Being Offered, Sign Up for It Right Away: many graduate courses, and some undergraduate courses, are offered only every other year. If you don't take a course at your first opportunity, it may not be offered again during your time at SJSU. Also, classes are often cancelled because not enough students signed up for them in advance. So, if you are interested in a course and have met the prerequisites, register for it as soon as you can. Tell your friends too.
7. Courses you took as an undergraduate may not be repeated for credit toward your master's degree: exceptions require the Graduate Coordinator's prior approval.
8. Take the Basic Qual Your First Year: students must take the Basic Qualifying Examination during their first year in the program and, if they don't pass, must thereafter take the exam each time it is offered until they pass. See [Quals Overview](#), [Basic Quals Syllabus](#), [Practice Basic Exam](#), etc., for information about the Basic Qualifying Examination.

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9. Quals Seminar: there is a one-unit Math 298 course offered each semester to help students prepare for the Basic Qual. See [Quals Seminar](#), or contact the [Quals Czar](#) for more information.
10. Quals Before Thesis Work: it is the long-established policy of the Mathematics Department that a student must pass both qualifying exams—the Basic Exam and the Specialist Exam—before beginning formal thesis work. Specifically, the Graduate Coordinator will not approve Math 299 or thesis-related Math 298 proposals until a student has passed both exams.
11. Quals Before Candidacy: a student must pass both qualifying exams and be a Classified Graduate Student before GAPE’s Petition for Advancement to Graduate Candidacy form can be signed.
12. Competency in Written English: satisfy this University requirement as soon as possible—you cannot file for candidacy until you have done so—and learning to write better before starting your thesis just might be a good thing. *Warning*: do not assume your upper-division writing class from a non-CSU university will satisfy the requirement; such classes are evaluated by GAPE on a case-by-case basis and many are deemed *not* to be sufficient. As the above link says, many students satisfy the requirement by first passing the WST (Writing Skills Test) and then passing a 100W course, e.g., Math 100W, with a grade of “C” or better. (You must take 100W for a letter grade; you may not choose the “CR/NC” option.) If you fail the WST, you can enroll in LLD/ENGL 96S, the passage of which will allow you to enroll in 100W, i.e., you won’t have to take the WST again. Another alternative, also discussed in the link above, is to circumvent the whole WST/100W route by signing up for an appropriate 200W course.
13. File for Candidacy: after you have finished most of your coursework, fill out and file with GAPE the [Petition for Advancement to Graduate Candidacy](#) form. (See above for prerequisites.) The form must be filled out carefully. (A [sample](#) may be found on my web page.) List coursework totaling exactly 27 units in Part A. Give the course titles as found in the Catalog.
14. The Candidacy Form is a Contract: if your candidacy has been approved and you decide not to take a class that you listed on the form, you must file a formal [Request for Course Substitution in Master’s Degree Program](#) to replace it with another class. That’s why it’s not such a good idea to file your candidacy request until you’ve finished most of your coursework. Pay attention to the deadlines, though. Note: you may not substitute for a course in your program that you’ve already taken.
15. Open University Credit Limitations: no more than six units of Open University course credit may be applied to a master’s degree program at SJSU. See [Open University](#).
16. Transfer Credit Limitations: no more than six units of course credit from other universities may be applied to a master’s degree program at SJSU. In fact, the maximum combined amount of outside transfer credit and SJSU Open University credit allowed is six units.
17. No Credit By Examination: it is not possible to test out of any course—graduate or undergraduate—in your master’s program.

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18. Seven-Year Rule: “No more than seven years may elapse between the time the candidate completes the first course in his/her program and the date the candidate actually completes (not registers for) the last item on the program and completes requirements for the degree.” See [7-Year Rule](#) for details.
19. Re-apply After Missing More Than One Semester: a student who misses two or more consecutive semesters must re-apply to the University, adhering to the same rules and deadlines for application as all other prospective students. Note: the Seven-Year Rule applies to the original matriculation date. See [Re-apply](#).
20. Candidacy Deadlines & Graduation Deadlines: students must complete and file the Petition for Advancement to Graduate Candidacy form with GAPE before the posted deadline (usually at least 8 months before the proposed graduation date). Students must file the [Application for Award of Master’s Degree](#) form before the posted deadline (usually at least 3 months before the proposed graduation date). See [Deadlines](#).
21. Allow Plenty of Time for the Thesis Endgame: your thesis must be defended, signed, and delivered to Graduate Studies by the end of March (for May graduation; see [Deadlines](#) for August and December degree conferrals). Figure how much time you will need by working backwards from the deadline. You *must* give the members of your committee plenty of time to read your thesis. They are entitled to demand changes, and you will need time to respond. They must then have time to read your responses and decide if they are adequate. All of this must happen before your thesis defense. And this *always* takes longer than you think it will.
22. Consult Graduate Studies’ [Master’s Thesis Requirements](#) page: in particular, be sure to check out the latest version of Graduate Studies’ [Thesis Guide](#).
23. Nowadays Almost All Printed Mathematics is Produced Using LaTeX: if you are interested in using LaTeX, powerful software for mathematical word processing, consider the shareware version available at [MiKTeX.org](#). A LaTeX [template](#) developed specifically for mathematics theses at SJSU is available. This template has been approved by Graduate Studies, and it will serve as an acceptable style guide for your thesis.
24. Math 298, although not required, is customary in the first semester of thesis work. [Proposals for Math 298](#) must be submitted well before the add deadline. At most three units of Math 298 can be counted toward your degree. [The only exception is if you are doing a writing project instead of a thesis, you may count three units of elective Math 298 and three units of “Culminating Experience Math 298” (see below).]
25. Math 299 (Thesis) is a Required Class: [Proposals for Math 299](#) need extra lead time because they must be approved by the Graduate Curriculum Committee. [If you are doing a writing project instead of a thesis, you must take a “Culminating Experience Math 298” instead of Math 299; use the same form, but check “298” instead of “299.”]
26. Remind Your Instructor to Use the “RP” Grade Instead of “I” for Math 299: if you don’t finish your thesis during the semester in which you take Math 299, your instructor should give you a grade of [“RP”](#) (“report progress”) instead of “I” (“incomplete”). With an “RP” you have a longer period of time to finish than with an “I.”

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27. If Necessary, Remind Your Instructor to Change the “RP” (or “I”) to “CR”. VERY IMPORTANT: although an “NC” will not count in your GPA, a lapsed “RP” or “I” will become an “IC” and will count as an “F” in your GPA!
28. Verification of Culminating Experience: after you’ve successfully defended your thesis (or writing project) and turned it in to Graduate Studies (or the Department), let me know so that I can sign the Verification of Culminating Experience form that tells Graduate Studies that you’ve completed all your Departmental requirements.
29. No Grade Forgiveness: there is no such thing as [“grade forgiveness”](#) for courses—graduate or undergraduate—in your master’s program. So protect your GPA. You’ll be on probation—and you won’t be able to graduate—if your GPA drops and remains below 3.0, and, without academic renewal, it’s hard to resuscitate a gasping GPA.
30. [See My Web Page](#) for links to GAPE and also for Department forms, etc.
31. Don’t Compare Your Insides with Everyone Else’s Outsides. Graduate school is tough—for everybody. (Well, okay, not *everybody*; a few people do make it to the NBA or the NFL.) Don’t assume that everyone else is sailing along and you’re the only one struggling; that’s just not true. You don’t know the agonies your fellow students are going through, and they don’t know yours. And remember, if things get *really* tough, there’s [Counseling Services](#), and it’s free.
32. Don’t Overload Yourself, Especially Your First Semester and Especially Your First Time Teaching.
33. When In Doubt, Ask Me: my phone, 408-924-5132, takes messages 24 hours a day. Or send me an [e-mail](#).