Tips for excelling as a PhD student

1. Master some core tools of your chosen discipline (e.g., price theory, causal inference) and develop an awareness of other available tools.
2. Know the frontier of your chosen subfield (e.g., labor economics) and pick a few literatures to delve into deeply (e.g., immigration).
3. Learn what's missing in those literatures and look for opportunities to make progress.
4. Develop an understanding of what gets published or becomes influential and why.
5. Follow your love and curiosity. Use those energies to learn voraciously about your chosen research topics.
6. Spend as much time doing research as humanly possible, subject to the constraints that (1) you have already made substantial progress on steps 1-4, (2) the research pace must be physically and mentally sustainable, and (3) you fulfill your other moral obligations.
7. Always be asking research questions and trying to answer them. Always be imagining papers that you might write.
8. Take lots of notes. Record everything so that you will be able to replicate your work if needed. Write things down also as a means to discipline, structure, and improve your thinking.
9. Track your hours. This way you can learn over time whether you are using your time well.
10. Aim for the minimum viable paper: a paper with just enough material to answer an open research question and to start getting feedback for refining the paper and developing more details.
11. Fail fast and pivot when you fail. If you have a research idea, look for the most major obstacle to success and tackle it first. If you learn that you cannot overcome it, move on.
12. Upgrade your communication and writing skills. Read books on how to write and take classes on public speaking. Get a coach. Practice, practice, practice.
13. Seek frequent feedback. Don't work in a vacuum. Your work will get better only if you seek and respond to feedback.
14. Stay disciplined and focused. Put in steady, regular hours. Be very persistent. Leave no stone unturned.