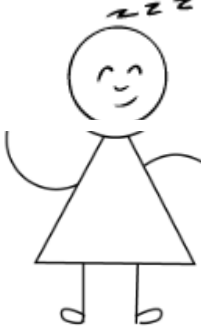


Drawing	Name	GR-Unc (Grad Unc lol)	Evidence + Confidence
	<b>Activated Role</b>	Grad student/early researcher	High: Separate from other student personas due to goal
	<b>Goal</b>	Rather than doing max work, the goal is <b>maintenance</b> and fulfillment or <b>burnout prevention</b> .	Medium: Noticed through diary study, interviews, and day-to-day reflections.
	<b>Motivation</b>	They are much more concerned about enduring through programs like a PhD, which is now often 6 years.	Low: throughout our interviews, this was not an explicit question. We pulled this differentiating insight from other answers in the interviews.
	<b>Conflict</b>	Unproductive breaks lower work fulfillment as well as create harsh deadlines due to lower productivity levels	High: "If I stop now, I'll lose the thread and then I'll be behind." -IA on record
	<b>Attempts to Solve</b>	Social breaks, hybrid work schedules, getting sunlight, etc.	High: Physical/social/mental breaks, according to interviews.
	<b>Setting/ Environment</b>	Lab/office, home office	High: grad students spawn in literally like 3 places lol
	<b>Tools</b>	Phone apps, cohort members that could support e/o	High: Some keep trying focus apps, others depend on roommates or labmates in similar situations to "gamify" and hold each other accountable, to varied success.
	<b>Skills</b>	A higher level of self-motivation than average, nearby parks/places to walk around in, nearby coffee shops	Low: This varies the most to people, especially across campuses.
	<b>Routines</b>	Lunch breaks at the same time every day, and often 1-2 physical hobbies (climbing, dance, gym)	High: Every grad student we spoke to, PhD or master's, had these.

## Journey Map: Taking a pause during a grad workday

A useful journey map to us is less external (e.g. buying a product) and more internal. In other words, we're mapping how someone might navigate through an internal state change. So the stages are built around how breaks get chosen, taken, and recovered from.

Stage	THINK/DO	FEEL	Breakpoints/Failure	DO (Improvement)	Support Areas
1) <b>Work sprint starts</b>	Starts writing/coding in the lab/home office. I just need to make progress.	Motivated → quickly becomes tense	No clear done point; tasks are open-ended, so stopping feels like quitting.	Define a <i>micro-finish line</i> before starting (e.g., stop after figure draft / 3 pages / one bug fixed).	Pre-pause plan: pick break type <i>before</i> you're depleted.
2) <b>Strain signal appears</b>	Cognitive fatigue (fog), emotional friction (stuck), or boredom.	Fog / frustration / numb	Treats all strain the same → defaults to phone/social as escape.	Identify strain type: <b>fatigue vs stuck vs avoidance vs overload</b> .	A quick state check prompt: <i>What kind of tired am I?</i>
3) <b>Decision point: should I pause?</b>	Internal debate: Break = relief vs break = lost time + guilt.	Ambivalent	Guilt makes breaks either too short to help... or long/avoidant to numb guilt.	Permissioned pause: A break is part of endurance training.	Reframe language: maintenance break / recovery rep rather than wasting time.
4) <b>Choose break type</b>	Picks social break, sunlight, hybrid schedule, etc.	hopeful	Mismatch: chooses stimulating/social break when what's needed is decompression; or chooses passive scrolling when what's needed is momentum.	Pick from a <b>break menu</b> mapped to strain types.	Break matcher: If stuck → change context; if fatigue → downshift; if anxious → structure + breathing.
5) <b>Take the break</b>	Walk, coffee shop, chat with cohort, lunch at fixed time, hobby later.	relief	Break expands (no boundary) or becomes half-break (still thinking about work + phone).	Break has a <b>container</b> (time, location, rule).	Lightweight containers: timer + end ritual; phone friction (leave at desk / focus mode).
6) <b>Re-entry ramp</b>	Returning to task. Needs to reload context, remember next step.	resistance	High re-entry cost → I don't know where I was → procrastination spiral.	A 60–120s on-ramp with next action pre-written.	Breadcrumb note before break: <i>Next tiny step is...</i>
7) <b>Post-pause evaluation</b>	Judges the break: Did that help or hurt?	self-critical	Only metric is productivity → restorative breaks feel unproductive, so they get avoided.	Multi-metric success: energy, clarity, mood, time-to-focus.	Tiny reflection: rate break 1–5 on <b>Restore / Return / Regret</b> .

8) <b>Day-level loop</b>	Later deadlines loom; hobbies anchor identity; lunch fixed.	pressure vs fulfillment	When behind, breaks become forbidden, increasing burnout risk.	Treat breaks as <i>load management</i> like training cycles.	Weekly patterning: plan hard days vs maintenance days, normalize both.
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What we learned:

1. **Breaks are mostly about guilt management.**

When a break feels “earned,” it restores energy. When it feels “undeserved,” it adds pressure and makes the next break harder.

2. **Open-ended work makes stopping feel risky.**

With research tasks, there’s rarely a clean finish line, so pausing can feel like losing momentum rather than taking care of yourself.

3. **Re-entry cost is the hidden dealbreaker.**

The hardest part often isn’t taking the break—it’s getting back into the work. If re-entry is messy, the break gets labeled “bad.”

4. **Break type matters more than break length.**

A short walk can reset focus, while a short scroll can keep the brain noisy. The key is matching the break to the state you’re in.

5. **Social support works best with a clear container.**

Quick check-ins can lift motivation and belonging. A simple boundary (time, purpose, end cue) keeps it restorative.

6. **Lunch is a reliable anchor you can build around.**

Since it already happens daily, it can serve as a dependable reset point and shape the afternoon into smaller, easier-to-manage blocks.

7. **Physical hobbies protect identity beyond productivity.**

Regular movement-based hobbies create a second “win condition” for the day, which supports endurance through long programs.

8. **The environment is already rich in options.**

With parks, coffee shops, and cohort access nearby, the main challenge becomes choosing well and returning smoothly—not finding ideas.