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Book review: "The Art of Making (Critical) Questions: Resilient Thinking and Scientific Craftsmanship" by Raúl Ochoa-Hueso, 2026

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OCHOA-HUESO, R. (2026). The Art of Making (Critical) Questions: Resilient Thinking and Scientific Craftsmanship. A Survival Kit for PhD Students, Postdocs, and Early-Career Researchers. [Kindle vs.] ASIN: B0HB4XF5V1. 115 pp.

Becoming a scientist involves much more than learning how to design experiments, collect data, and analyze them. It requires developing a way of observing, thinking, reading, writing, and relating to others and, no less importantly, learning how to navigate an academic world that is increasingly competitive, demanding, and uncertain. This book addresses many of these dimensions from a highly personal perspective, combining reflections on the scientific craft with numerous practical recommendations aimed especially at those taking their first steps in research.

One of the book's main strengths is precisely its breadth. Across its pages, it discusses many of the ingredients that contribute to building a successful and rewarding scientific career: observation, asking questions, reading, writing, and taking care of our health and relationships. The result is an engaging, well-written book packed with useful advice. While more experienced researchers will recognize and already be familiar with many of the ideas discussed in the book, I believe it will be particularly valuable for early-career researchers.

I particularly liked the section devoted to scientific writing. Writing well is one of the fundamental skills of our profession and, paradoxically, one for which most scientists receive little explicit training. The author provides concrete advice that can be genuinely helpful both to those facing their first scientific papers and to more experienced writers. This practical dimension is, in my view, one of the great strengths of the book.

I also strongly agree with the importance the author places on careful observation and extensive reading. At a time when hyperconnectivity and pressure to produce can push us rapidly from one task to the next, or lead us to rely excessively on large language models, preserving the time needed to observe, think, and read is particularly timely. I recognized myself in many of the reflections in the book related to these practices. I am less convinced, however, by the special importance given to reading the classics. Reading good literature can enrich our language, broaden our perspective, and help us think better, but these benefits can be found in many forms of literature, classical or contemporary. What matters most, in my view and according to my own experience, is to read widely, with curiosity and attention, and, of course, to enjoy what we read so that we keep reading.

Another aspect I especially welcomed is the attention devoted to wellbeing. Taking care of ourselves, caring for those who work with us, and maintaining a healthy balance between science and the rest of our lives are not peripheral concerns. They are essential for sustaining rewarding scientific careers in the long term. In this respect, I found the book's overall message both important and timely. However, I found this part of the book unnecessarily long, and some of the more specific recommendations on diet and lifestyle felt somewhat too prescriptive to me. What works for one person will not necessarily work for another, and it is important to distinguish between broadly applicable principles and personal choices that may be perfectly valid but are not necessarily generalizable.

My main reservation concerns the expectations created by the book's title. Critical thinking is arguably one of the most important abilities a scientist needs to develop, and I would have welcomed a deeper and, above all, more practical discussion of how to cultivate it. How do we learn to question our own assumptions? How do we recognize our biases? How do we distinguish a convincing explanation from one that is merely appealing? How do we teach our students to question prevailing ideas respectfully? The excellent practical treatment of scientific writing shows that the author could have offered a great deal in this area as well.

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Finally, the book includes autobiographical elements to illustrate some of its recommendations. These stories help explain where the author's ideas come from, but they also raise an issue that I consider essential whenever we use our own trajectories to advise younger researchers. Scientific careers do not depend only on talent, hard work, or making good decisions. We are also products of our time, of the places where we are born, of our family circumstances, of our gender, and of opportunities that often arise by chance. Working today in a highly international environment, surrounded by colleagues from very different countries and backgrounds, has made me particularly aware of this. Looking back at my own career, it is impossible to separate my decisions and effort from the enormous luck of having been born in a country and into a family that provided me with education, stability, and the resources needed to pursue first a university degree and later a scientific career. Many equally talented and hardworking people simply never receive comparable opportunities because they were born in a different place or into a different family context. I therefore missed a more explicit reflection in the book on the role of luck, privilege, and structural inequalities. Acknowledging them does not diminish the achievements of those who build successful careers. It simply helps us interpret those careers with greater perspective and humility.

These reservations do not alter my overall positive assessment of this book. Raúl Ochoa-Hueso has written an accessible, thoughtful, and useful book about the craft of doing science. Not every recommendation will work for everyone, nor should it. Perhaps that is also one of the lessons that can be taken from the book: there is no single way to become a successful scientist. But observing carefully, reading widely, writing often, questioning our ideas, and taking care of ourselves and of those around us are undoubtedly an excellent starting point.

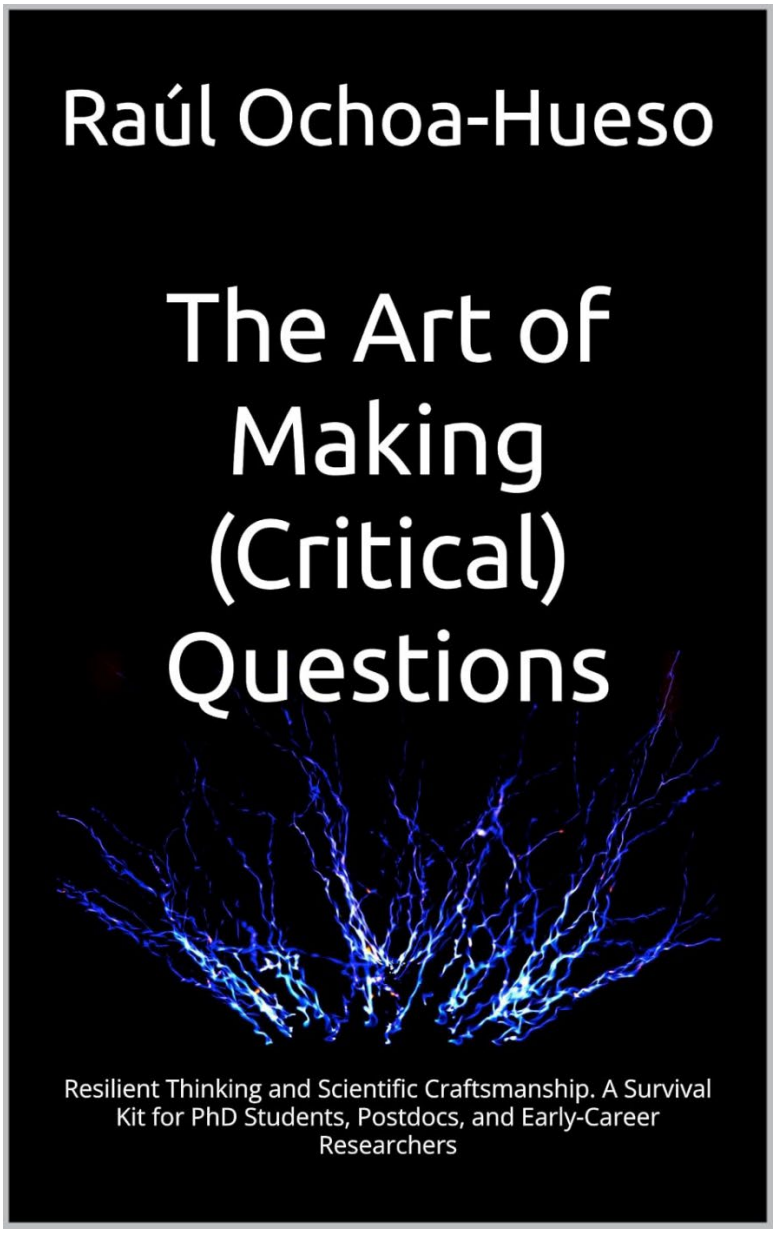

Figure 1. Cover of the book «The Art of Making (Critical) Questions: Resilient Thinking and Scientific Craftsmanship. A Survival Kit for PhD Students, Postdocs, and Early-Career Researchers».

Figura 1. Portada del libro «El arte de formular preguntas (críticas): pensamiento resiliente y destreza científica. Un kit de supervivencia para doctorandos, posdoctorados e investigadores en los inicios de su carrera».