Postgraduate Research Induction

What to expect / how to do a PhD

Prof. Judith Masthoff
Dean of the Postgraduate Research School
What steps are there in a PhD?
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Depends on the Discipline. But often:

Step 1
Reading, development of research questions and methods

Step 2
Data collection and analysis

Step 3
Writing up, editing and submission

Step 4
Mock viva and viva

Step 5
(Corrections and) Submission of final bound copies
How do supervisors differ, what issues can you encounter, and how to deal with them?
Types of Supervisor Style

• Directive
• Facilitative
• Indirect
• Distant
• Vague
• Incompetent!
• Busy

• Too friendly
• Friendly
• Stand-offish
• Hostile
How do students differ?
How do students differ?

- Tentative
- Lack initiative
- Unwilling to learn new things
- Lethargic
- Stubborn
- Unfocussed

- Enthusiastic
- Self-directed
- Able
- Motivated
- Able to take direction
- Busy
Phases of Student’s Subject Knowledge Relationship with Supervisor

- Student - / Supervisor +
- Student / Supervisor
- Student + / Supervisor -
What to expect?
Pressure points

- Getting a routine for meetings
- Determining the research questions
- Understanding the required methods
- Learning to write with the requisite style and clarity
- Deciding when the dissertation is finished
You can expect

- Regular meetings –
  - minimum once a month
- Monitoring sessions
  - by your School and the Graduate School
- Feedback –
  - from supervisor and other staff members
- Training when required
- Opportunity to present your work to others
- Opportunity to present at a conference
- A mock viva or suggestions from your supervisor about what to expect in the viva
You *can’t* expect

- Your supervisor to be at your beck and call
  - Plan regular meetings, arranged in advance
  - If you hand your work in on time, fine – if not, you might have to wait a while for your supervisor to look at it

- Your supervisor to teach you English, teach you academic writing or edit your writing
  - Non-native speakers can get help from the Language Centre
  - Native-speakers should ask for writing support
  - If you have to you can pay someone to edit your English – but you are solely responsible for the thesis and its content and you cannot get a ghost writer
What is *normal*?

- It is normal to have ups and downs
- It is normal to have to learn new things in order to do the research
- It is normal to find a PhD HARD WORK – if it were easy, everyone would be called Dr!
- It is normal to have periods when you are at odds with your supervisor – that’s part of the learning process and the progression from student to academic – keep communicating and it will pass
- It is normal to be scared about failing!
What if something goes wrong?

- Talk to your supervisor – sooner rather than later
- Talk to the PG officer in your School or Discipline
- Talk to your Head of School
- Talk to the Graduate School team
- Talk to a counsellor
- TALK!

- If illness, depression, family crises etc. arises, suspend until better – the ticking clock only causes more stress – taking a break often works wonders (however, be aware of Tier4 visum rules)
International students

• Cultural differences
  • Face
  • Questioning
  • Asking for help
  • Taking the initiative
  • Taking direction
  • Physical contact and proximity
What else should you be doing?
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• Minuting meetings with your supervisor and sending them to him/her as a record of the meeting and a chance to verify that you have understood the interaction in the same way

• Networking – talking to other students, going to conferences and workshops, taking advantage of training sessions etc.

• Thinking about publishing before you graduate – discuss this with your supervisor

• Testing your ideas out by presenting them in research group meetings, Postgraduate events, conferences, etc.

• Developing yourself
What else should you be doing?

• Resting – doing a PhD is hard work
  • Importance of balancing life and research
  • Managing time is key, especially if PhD is part time or partly off campus

• Taking time to have fun