Research Skills Workshops for Graduate Research Students

1. Kickstart your research

9.00-12.00pm, Friday 15th August 2008
Guild Seminar Room 1

Presenter:
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http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au
http://studysmarter.uwa.edu.au
Kickstart your Research

Objectives:

- to develop an understanding of the research process

- to provide skills and strategies to facilitate more effective progress through your candidacy
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<tr>
<td>9.00 – 9.10</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
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<td>9.10 – 10.15</td>
<td>Part 1: The nature of the beast</td>
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<td>10.15 – 10.30</td>
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<td>10.30 – 11.15</td>
<td>Part 2: Building an effective supervisor-</td>
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<td>3.30 – 4.15</td>
<td>student relationship</td>
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<td>11.15 – 11.45</td>
<td>Part 3: Planning for success</td>
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<td>4.15 – 4.45</td>
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<td>11.45 – 12.00</td>
<td>Evaluation and close</td>
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Part 1: The nature of the beast.

So what’s it like to be a research student?

A PhD is "so much more than three more years of student life. Your undergraduate degree was a package holiday; a jolly sightseeing tour of your field. Don your safari hat, because your PhD will be an uncharted jungle."  

“Prepare yourself for a shock. You are moving from doing exercises that you know have a solution to questions that no one knows the answer to. It could take you years of labour just to make a small chink in the armour.”

“A PhD requires considerably more drive and determination compared with the easy-going years of university life. You have no structure to follow, and only your supervisor and a couple of lab or office mates for guidance. You will be expected to present at conferences and hold your own with other academics. And at the end of it you will be asked to submit a substantial thesis and justify its contents in front of experts in your field.”

BUT

“For the first time you are coming up against the great works of your subject. The previous years have been like a musician confined to the scales and arpeggios of their discipline. Suddenly you are prepared and ready to listen to some of the great scientific opuses.”

“Because you direct your own search, you will gain knowledge that is important to you, that can even change your life – as, in varying degrees, all learning does.”

“Searching, exploring, discovering – we associate these words with excitement and pleasure, and for good reasons. We like the idea of uncovering what has been hidden, of turning the unknown into the known...Then after we have made our discoveries, we like to tell others about them.”

“If the results of research were predictable, there would be no point in doing the research”.

Source of quotes:

The Project:

Graduate Research School’s Examiners’ Recommendation Forms
http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/forms

The PhD thesis shall be a substantial and original contribution to scholarship, for example through the discovery of new knowledge, the formulation of theories or the innovative re-interpretation of known data and established ideas.

The Masters degree must be a substantial work generally based on independent research which shows a sound knowledge of the subject of the research, evidence of the exercise of some independence of thought and the ability of expression in clear and concise language.

Also:

- The candidate shows familiarity with and understanding of, the relevant literature
- The thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic
- The techniques adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are properly applied
- The results are suitably set out and accompanied by adequate exposition
- The quality of English and general presentation are of a standard for publication.
**The journey: a progressive reduction of uncertainty**
(adapted from Phillips, E. and Pugh, D. How to get a PhD. Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p.74)

*"A thesis is a proposition laid down or stated as a theme to be discussed and proved, or maintained against attack”*  

**The importance of defining and refining your topic:**

Theses have the dual purposes of **explanation** and **prediction**.

"Generalisability is the central interest of all theses... Without it, scholarly efforts amount to no more than factual findings and statements...”

Think of your thesis as a **model** i.e. a predictor, pattern, framework, prototype or a set of ideals that can guide practice in the field you studied. Models can help clarify and understand complex relationships, models function to reduce uncertainty in knowledge.

**Beware:**
"Overambitiousness in topic selection is one of the major problems I have experienced with students through the years. Remember that neither theses nor dissertations **totally revolutionize** thinking in their fields. Instead, they **collectively** expand the knowledge base of a field through **countless small additions** to that knowledge base. Furthermore, it is neither possible nor desirable to write about **every** aspect of a problem nor area of study.”
Stages and Targets

Stage 1: Research Proposal
(will discuss the proposal itself in more detail at the next workshop)
- negotiating research question
- managing supervision
- ethics approval
- identifying skills, equipment and data needed
- broad reading in the field of study
- developing structure and timeline for thesis
- writing research proposal

Stage 2: Confirmation
(check the specific guidelines for confirmation in your school, more on this next week)
- substantial progress on literature review
- moving from broad to specific reading
- drafting sections of the thesis
- beginning data collection
- building peer networks

Stage 2: Mid thesis
- finish data collection, begin data analysis
- even more drafting of thesis
- maintain regular contact with supervisors
- developing professional networks
- conferences? publication?

Stage 3: A full draft
- develop routine for written feedback from supervisors
- distinguish between stages of writing and editing
- think about examiners

Stage 4: Submission and completion
- know the requirements
## Maintaining motivation

A: Maslow’s hierarchy of needs:
We will be free to concentrate on higher level needs only if lower level needs are met.


Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is shown above. The pyramid illustrates the five levels of human needs. The most basic are physiological and safety/security, shown at the base of the pyramid. As one moves to higher levels of the pyramid, the needs become more complex.

B. Motivation and goal theory:

While there are 3 extremes of goal orientation discussed in the literature (eg. http://www.aare.edu.au/02pap/yeu02281.htm) most people exhibit some features of each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mastery goal orientation</th>
<th>Performance goal orientation</th>
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<tr>
<td>- gain intrinsic satisfaction from attaining competence</td>
<td>- tendency to compare with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>- show persistence and resilience in the face of difficulties</td>
<td>- require extrinsic rewards such as praise, gain in status etc</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- self esteem may be threatened when performance falls short of expectations</td>
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Social goal orientation
- interaction with people crucial to psychological wellbeing
Why are you doing a research degree? What do you hope to get out of it?
(5 minutes free writing)
**What does the future hold?**

**Research/Academic path**

You need to build your track record in research through publication, awards and prizes, winning competitive grants of any kind.
Get your name out there - conference presentations, build networks,

**Key tip:** find good mentors

**Other options**

Value the transferable skills a research degree gives in written and oral communication, problem solving, critical thinking, project management, (eg organisation, time management, managing resources, complying with regulations) as described below.

**Generic Skills of Research Graduates at UWA**
Research students at UWA are expected to acquire certain attributes during their candidature...assess themselves and be assessed during their candidature in terms of their development of these generic skills.

I. **Doing – Undertaking research “The cutting edge”**
   1. think creatively, logically and critically
   2. investigate, analyse and synthesise ideas
   3. design, manage and complete projects
   4. question accepted wisdom by identifying assumptions, assessing their implications, testing them, and deciding on their appropriateness
   5. develop original ideas and concepts
   6. recognise excellence and how it is achieved
   7. recognise limitations at the personal, practical and conceptual level
   8. work collaboratively
   9. work independently
   10. solve problems, make decisions and work effectively under pressure
   11. manage time effectively
   12. identify and disseminate the impact and benefit of research within the scholarly discipline and the broader community
   13. communicate verbally, graphically and textually with specialist and general audiences
   14. publish research findings in high quality journals/books or appropriate formats
   15. comply with regulatory and statutory requirements (e.g. Ethics, Health and Safety, IP and Commercialisation)
   16. prepare an application for research funding

II. **Being – Professional attributes “The leading edge”**
   1. knowledgeable, informed and thorough
   2. positive, receptive and resilient
   3. self-motivated and able to motivate others
   4. considerate, helpful and respectful
   5. adaptable and innovative
   6. sensitive to ethical, social and cultural issues
   7. aware of the big picture and day to day issues
   8. proactive in career development
What are you entitled to?:

- 4 years (PhD) or 2 years (Masters) of financial support to your School from the Federal Government (Research Training Scheme) for Australian citizens and PRs and NZ citizens. NB All other students MUST pay fees (or have their fees paid for them by someone else)

- Suspension of candidature for up to 12 months
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/terms/suspension

- Maternity/parental leave (up to 12 months)
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/terms/maternity_leave

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Research training at UWA

Broader Uni community
International Centre, Student Support Services, PSA, Guild etc

Graduate Research School
Manages and supports candidature.

Student

Academic School
Supervises and provides resources for research
Some useful web-links

- Policy on minimum allocation of resources for research students (some general guidelines given, individual Schools offer different levels of support and resourcing)

- Guidelines for Graduate Research Supervisors
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies-supervisor_guidelines

- Statement of expectations on supervision and thesis writing

- Role of the Graduate Research Coordinator
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/contacts-coordinators
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies-good_practice

- Travel Awards

- Grants for Research Student Training
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home-current-GRST

- Whitfield Fellowships
  http://www.scholarships.uwa.edu.au/home-fellowships_postdoc-whitfeld_fellowships

- Completion Scholarships (School nominates students)
  http://www.scholarships.uwa.edu.au/home-postgrad-general/completion

- myResearchSpace
  http://myresearchspace.grs.uwa.edu.au

- PSA membership
  http://www.psa.guild.uwa.edu.au
  (in particular, sign up for PSA newsletter and Postgrad Talk)

- Publication prizes

- Information on training and seminars
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/events

- Professional development resources
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home-current/proposal-writing (Training modules in writing research proposals)

- Links to policies relevant to many aspects of studying and working at UWA
  http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies
What is expected of you?
- To spend **at least** 30 hours a week (if full time) on your research.
- To act in accordance with the policies and standards of ethical behaviour expected at UWA ([http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies)).
- To comply with visa requirements if relevant.
- To acquire the generic attributes of UWA research candidates (see list on p. 9).

What are the reporting requirements during your candidature?

What advantages can you see in having to report regularly?
Part 2: The Student-Supervisor Relationship

What are your responsibilities to your supervisor/s?

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/supervisors/policies/good-practice#candidates

9.1 Regulatory Obligations and Quality Assurance
(c) Candidates must present to the supervisor a research proposal and an annual progress report at periods specified by the Board and/or faculty and in accordance with the relevant rules and guidelines.

(e) Candidates are expected to advise the supervisor of any significant change in their commitments likely to affect the progress of the research course, and if required ensure that this is communicated to the Head of School and/or Board of the Graduate Research School in the form of an application for variation of candidature.

(f) Candidates who have been advised by a supervisor that they need assistance in communicating orally or in writing in English using the vocabulary and conventions of the discipline must seek assistance as directed or otherwise discuss the recommendation for assistance with the supervisor and Head of School.

9.4 Supervision and Candidate-Supervisor Relationship
(a) Candidates should make every effort to build and maintain a supervisory relationship in line with the principles outlined in the Guidelines for Graduate Research Supervisors.

(b) Candidates must make every endeavour to adhere to agreements as set out in the Candidate - Supervisor Checklist (if one is used) or as otherwise negotiated and agreed at the commencement of candidature.
**Exercise**: Complete the following expectations of supervision

Read each pair of statements below and then estimate your position on each. For example with statement 1 if you believe very strongly that it is the supervisor’s responsibility to select a good topic you would put a ring round ‘1’ and if you think it is definitely the student's responsibility to select a topic, put a ring round ‘4’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Option 1 2 3 4</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.  It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Students should decide which theoretical framework or methodology they wish to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.  The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>The supervisor should leave the development of the program of study to the student</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.  The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is introduced to the appropriate services and facilities of the department and University</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>It is the student's responsibility to ensure that she/he has located and accessed all relevant services and facilities for research</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.  Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Supervisors should feel free to accept students, even if they do not have specific knowledge of the student's topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.  A warm, supportive relationship between supervisor and student is important for successful candidature</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>A personal, supportive relationship is inadvisable because it may obstruct objectivity for both student and supervisor during candidature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.  The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>The student should decide when she/he wants to meet with the supervisor</td>
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<td>8.  The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>The student should work independently and not have to account for how and where time is spent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.  The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support &amp; encouragement to the student</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Personal counselling and support are not the responsibility of the supervisor - students should look elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.  The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Students should submit drafts of work only when they want constructive criticism from the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.  The supervisor should assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>The writing of the thesis should only ever be the student's own work</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.  The supervisor is responsible for decisions regarding the standard of the thesis</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>The student is responsible for decisions concerning the standard of the thesis</td>
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This scale was adapted from a version developed by Margaret Kiley and Kate Cadman, from an original scale developed by Ingrid Moses, Centre for Learning and Teaching, University of Sydney.

**Students Perceptions Of Research Supervision** (www.catl.uwa.edu.au/etu/spors): a UWA-based tool to facilitate discussion with your supervisors about the process of supervision.
Some models of supervision:


- **Psychological**
  (supervisor a caring, expert professional whose role is to act as a mentor and to guide the student’s professional development)

- **Traditional-academic**
  (the supervisor’s key contribution is intellectual and little attention is given to pastoral care. The relationship may be quite formal and include an element of intellectual “sparring”. The student is seen as being responsible for working through difficulties.)

- **Technosupervision**
  (predictable and orderly process of research skills training. Supervisor observes, judges and instructs and the student listens, tries and reports)

- **Com-supervisor/Com-student**
  (providers and consumers of a service, students expect value for money)

B) Michael Azariadis model:
Good supervision includes all of the following elements:

- **Contractual** – supervisor/s and students discuss and agree on things, and keep to their agreements

- **Pastoral** – the student’s personal welfare is taken into account

- **Developmental** – the supervisor/s act as a mentor for the professional development of the student

- **Intellectual** – an appropriate balance is found between criticism and encouragement
Some things to get clear at the start:

- expectations of supervisors
- expectations of self
- set up regular meeting schedule
- discuss progress and reassess needs
- set and review goals

N.B. It is important to look after your supervisor:
The more responsibility you take for the day-to-day progress of your research and for keeping your supervisor informed of your progress in achieving your research goals, the better the supervision will be.

Read the following account of one student’s approach to keeping his supervisor informed of his progress.

Working with your supervisor by Darren Lomman

Introduction.
A lack of communication between a previous supervisor and myself, resulted in me finding out how strongly the student-supervisor interaction can affect an outcome of a project.

After this experience, I developed a model which I now use to successfully communicate with my supervisors. Hopefully by sharing it with you, you may have some ideas with which to strengthen your student-supervisor relationship.

Develop your own interaction method
Find a method that suits your individual needs
- Every project is different (eg student dominated or supervisor dominated)
- Every supervisor/student has a unique personality. Some people will respond well to one method, others won’t.

Organise regular meetings
The most common method is a one-on-one meeting
- Depends on your situation. You may have to rely on correspondence via email or telephone depending on your relative locations.
- I prefer to make my meeting fairly formal. You may prefer a more casual meeting.

Whatever method you choose, effective communication during these meetings is a major key to successful interaction with your supervisor.

Set up a regular meeting time
Find a regular timeslot which is convenient to both yourself and your supervisor
- Reserve this time solely for your meetings
- Make sure you and your supervisor mark this as a permanent addition to your diaries

Start a ‘supervisor file’
Keep a record from all the meetings
- Document as much as possible in writing
- Be sure to date everything

Keep a minimum of 2 sets of notes, one for yourself and one for your supervisor.
Before the meeting
1. Prepare a progress report
   - This should cover the work you have completed
   - Also should cover any new developments, ideas and problems

2. Write an agenda to cover the issues/topics you want to discuss with your supervisor

3. Send the agenda to your supervisor before the meeting
   - It allows them to prepare their thoughts before the meeting
   - It also gives them a chance to add anything they want to the agenda
   - Don't send it at the very last minute, leave sufficient time for some consideration

During the meeting
1. Use the agenda as a guide
   - This helps your meeting to stay on track
   - Also ensure that no topic is overlooked

   2. Write brief comments about any discussions/suggestions etc that arise
      - Doing this during the meeting ensures nothing is left out

After the meeting
1. Convert your notes into 'official' meeting minutes
   - Add any additional thoughts and comments

2. Send the minutes to your supervisor

3. Follow up on these minutes
   - This is the most important step
   - Simply filing your minutes away into a folder will not be of any advantage
   - Valuable information and ideas can come from your supervisor (there really is a reason we have them after all!!)
   - Add your documents to your ‘supervisor file’.

Good supervision is about establishing a good working relationship.

It is in the student’s best interests to make this relationship as effective as possible. This means making it as easy on your supervisor as possible by:

   - Submitting work on time and in the format arranged, i.e. point-form, draft conference paper, chapter, etc.

   - Agreeing on time frames for feedback

   - Being proactive in your research and related activities

The importance of good communication

Take responsibility for maintaining communication. This means:

   - Arranging a regular schedule of meetings, i.e. fortnightly/ every 3 weeks
   - Being on time for meetings
   - Make the meetings work for you, i.e. preparing points for discussion/ clarification etc.
   - Advising your supervisor of any problems as or when they arise.
Following up

After meetings you might like to:
  o email your supervisor with your understanding of what was agreed at the meeting, and
  o check whether she/he has the same understanding.

Exercise:
What can I do to make sure I am communicating effectively with my supervisors? What can I do to help us work effectively as a team?
**Peer Networks:**
Fellow research students can be invaluable sources of advice and assistance in your studies.

Formal peer networks can be developed through:

Informal peer networks are also useful.

**Professional Networks:**
Professional networks extend within and outside the university. What kinds of professional networks exist in your area of study? How can you tap into them? What are these networks useful for?
Part 3: The 3 key components when planning for success

1. Effective relationship with supervisor
   - Regular meetings
   - Discuss and negotiate your progress regularly
   - Understand your different (or similar) styles of being/working
   - If it’s not working, do something about it!

2. Starting the dissertation early:
   - Write and show as you go (this is “show and tell” not “hide and seek”)
   - Make writing a regular part of your routine and make good use of informal as well as formal writing
   - Use a “draft” stamp to reduce the fear factor, especially for work you are showing to your supervisor/s
   - Use the following “top tip” from Evans and Gruba (2002) How to write a better thesis. Melbourne: MUP

   *Buy an attractive folder and a set of dividers that will become your dissertation draft folder.*
   *Put your plan in your folder, along with any other material relating to your dissertation.*
   *Start writing your dissertation NOW. Put something into your thesis document each week (or more frequently). Make each piece of writing you do count towards the final document.*
   *Take your folder to meetings with your supervisor.*
   *One day you will realise you have a complete draft thesis in your folder!*

Know what you’re aiming for. Be realistic in your expectations and check out some theses in your field to gauge the standard expected (http://adt.caul.edu.au).

‘Writing a thesis should be an enjoyable, creative activity – and it often is.’

**Exercise:**
At this stage, I think my thesis will be about...
3. Managing time effectively

Creating a routine:
Think of your thesis as a marathon, not a sprint.

- set fixed hours (time to work and time to play)
- set up a proper workspace
- set deadlines and targets
- think carefully before taking up new opportunities
- make time for family and friends
- keep healthy

‘All I can really do is take it one day at a time and just get done what I can, when I can.’

**Exercise:** Describe your typical working day or week. Identify where you might make changes to be more productive.
Some basic tips:

1. Make active decisions about your long term priorities
   (if your Masters or PhD is not in one of the top 2 or 3 priorities in your life, it probably won’t get done)

2. Learn to say “no” if something is not contributing to the highest (long-term) priorities you have.

3. Be fastidious about your time. Keep a time log for 48 hours, and know how you actually spend your time. When planning work, think in 10 minute blocks; the (10+2)*5 technique may be useful here.
   (http://myresearchspace.grs.uwa.edu.au/blogs/karenhalls_blog/archive/2006/12/05/10-2-5.aspx)

4. Remember the “80/20” rule. 80% of your results come from only 20% of what you do. Identify and give high priority to the “20%” tasks. Distinguish between what you MUST do, what you should do and what it would be “nice” or “interesting” to do. Identify tasks that can be delegated to someone else and eliminate tasks that don’t contribute to your priorities at the moment.

5. Use time management tools
   a. Have a master list of all the things you need to do. Buy a spiral notebook, and use it as your catch-all system. You can then prioritise tasks and allocate them to different times, days, etc in your calendar and daily list.
   b. Calendar (yearly planner, diary)
   c. Daily list – this is your blueprint from the beginning to the end of the day. Check it against your priorities, 80/20s etc. Never work without a daily list, and prepare it the night before so that your subconscious can work on it while you sleep.

   **NB People who work from lists are 25% more productive than those who do not.**
   The time management matrix below is a useful template on which to build your daily list.

6. Always allow yourself 30% more time than you think you need for any task. Very productive people are not in a panic, but allow enough time to do the job right.
   The “implementation intentions” technique is very useful to help get things done.
   More information at:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Important and Urgent:</th>
<th>Important but not urgent</th>
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<tr>
<td>e.g. deadline-driven projects</td>
<td>e.g. planning,</td>
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<td>crises</td>
<td>prevention</td>
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<td>pressing problems</td>
<td>relationship building</td>
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<td>(If most of your time spent on these tasks you will be stressed)</td>
<td>communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>recognising new opportunities</td>
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<td>personal development</td>
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<td>recreation</td>
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<td>(maintain balance</td>
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<td>vision,</td>
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<td>discipline,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>control,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>few crises)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Urgent but not important</th>
<th>Not urgent, not important</th>
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<td>e.g. interruptions,</td>
<td>e.g. busy work,</td>
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<td>some emails and phone calls,</td>
<td>some photocopying,</td>
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<td>some reports</td>
<td>some emails,</td>
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<tr>
<td>some meetings</td>
<td>some phone calls,</td>
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<tr>
<td>some personal matters</td>
<td>some personal matters</td>
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<td>(spending much of your time on these sorts of tasks:</td>
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<td>leads to short term focus,</td>
<td>(associated with too much dependence on</td>
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<td>undermines your ability for control,</td>
<td>others,</td>
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<td>undermines ability to achieve goals,</td>
<td>irresponsibility)</td>
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<td>undermines ability for developing a satisfying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life)</td>
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</table>

**Danger!**

1. Procrastination:
   “I can’t do anything worthwhile unless I have lots of free time.”
   “I can only work to deadlines.”

2. Perfectionism:
   “I don’t know enough yet to write anything.”
   “It’s so important that I’ve got to have everything just right before I can go on.”

3. Believing “I’m the only one struggling here, everyone else is doing fine.”
   Persistence is a significant factor for successful completion of a research degree! Emotional peaks and troughs are a normal part of the experience, so believe you can do it, build your emotional resilience and learn from setbacks and criticisms.
### Overview Exercise: Where are you now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you aware of the assessment criteria for your thesis?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you checked out other theses in your field?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you critically examined other theses in your field and noted their strong points and their weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you becoming familiar with the background literature?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you developing a research question?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you developing hypotheses?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have a plan for analysing your data?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you done a skills audit to determine whether you need training to complete the various components of your research project?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have a system for keeping track of references and data?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you made an appointment with your reference librarian for EndNote training or for training in database searching?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have a year planner and diary to help keep you organised?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you thought about how to achieve a balance between the demands of your research and your other commitments - including having a life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you aware of the requirements for a proposal in your discipline?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you know the requirements for formatting your thesis?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know the style requirements for theses in your field?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how to set up a template for your thesis using Word or other software?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do this NOW.</strong> Start your thesis document today, both electronically and in hard copy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you begun working on the project? What <strong>specific aims</strong> do you have for the work you are doing at the moment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a strategic plan for completion of the research and your other commitments?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you negotiated arrangements about meetings with your supervisor?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have a system for keeping your supervisor/s regularly updated on your progress?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you negotiated respective responsibilities with your supervisor/s?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Exercise:
Personal productivity checklist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a proper workplace in which to do my research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use an orderly system to sort and plan my work before starting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I use management tools such as a daily planner to keep myself on track</td>
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<tr>
<td>I always work from a “To Do” list prepared in advance of beginning a task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once I begin a task, I work steadily until it is complete</td>
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<tr>
<td>I always put things away after I am finished with them</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have an organised filing system that enable me to retrieve information quickly when I need it</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I do most important work during my “prime time”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek help when needed and draw on resources available to ensure I work efficiently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others who know me would describe me as efficient, effective and organised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some words of wisdom from Karen Hall

Five Things I Never Expected To Learn As A Postgrad

Some things you are told to expect in brochure, at induction, or somewhere in the mountains of paperwork. Some things you pick up from popular culture, or from stories about someone's cousin's friend who did this PhD thing. So coming into postgrad life, you expect to learn a whole lot of things - this is, after all, a 'learning experience.' This is a list of five things that I didn't expect to learn as a postgrad:

1. That being pragmatic about what you need to know is more important than knowing everything.

When I began my PhD, I had visions of spending a lot of time in a coffee shop, spending hours on end reading - and finally understanding - Lacan and Butler and Deleuze, etc, etc. Maybe Paris was involved somehow. I had my one month of Sir Walter Scott obsession, I found out more than I really needed to know about pre-Federation South Australian politics. Now, I try to identify what I need to know, flick through and index or skim-read till I find it, chuck it into the chapter and Endnote and move on. I still don't fully get Lacan but I think I get what I need to know, and that kind of ruthless pragmatism might get me to the end of this thing.

2. That supervisors aren't psychic - and this is both a Good and Bad thing.

Hands up all those people who have quaked in terror at the idea of passing their supervisor in the corridor, convinced that from a 'hi' and a head nod they will instantly be able to discern how much work you have (or haven't) done. It doesn't actually work like that (though turning around and running away may be slightly suggestive). As a supervisee, you have to say what is going on, have to say when you are having problems and what those problems are. The fact that your supervisor can't tell this by looking at you is good (because you can occasionally get away with having a take-it-easy week) and bad (because you have to take responsibility for communicating in verbal or written form rather than just sending out vibes).

3. That warnings about taking breaks from staring at the computer screen and stretching do actually apply to you.

It isn't just other people who get stuffed up necks and eye strain and headaches. So step away from the computer once an hour, stretch, refocus, remind yourself that there is this thing called outside and daylight. You are not the one special person these warnings don't apply to. Trust me on this. Trust my physio on this.

4. That procrastination can take you to very strange places.

So far, I've become an instant expert on the Tour de France, watched all of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, compiled way too many iTunes playlists, started two vegetable gardens and much more. I'd like to call this becoming a more rounded person, but it's just procrastination. However, if you can find something you want to do even less than your thesis, doing the thesis becomes procrastination - so procrastination is really work. Really.

5. That finishing is as scary as not finishing.

Not finishing - that's obviously scary. Failure and having to face the 'real' world and all that badness. But finishing means putting three or four years of work up for judgement. It means that bit you meant to get absolutely perfect might have to be left at okay. It means job searches in a limited market. It means facing life after the thesis, and when you have reached the point where that is one of the major ways you define yourself, that is scary.
## Additional resources:

**Graduate Research School**  
**Graduate Research and Scholarships Office.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enquiry</th>
<th>Who can help and where to find them</th>
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</table>
| **Australian & NZ students:**  
**Ph.D. and Masters by Research:**  
New applications, Annual Reports, Terms of Candidature, Research Proposals, Thesis Examination, Scholarships, Travel Awards | Graduate Research and Scholarships Office, Hackett Hall  
Ph: 6488 2807 (reception) |
| **International students**  
**Ph.D. and all Masters degrees:**  
New applications, questions about fees, visas | International Students’ Officer (Postgraduate)  
Hackett Hall  
Ph: 6488 7226 |
| **International students**  
**Ph.D. and Masters by Research:**  
Annual Reports, Terms of Candidature, Research Proposals, Thesis Examination, Scholarships, Travel Awards | Graduate Research and Scholarships Office, Hackett Hall  
Ph: 6488 2807 (reception) |
| **Ph.D. and Masters by Research:**  
Academic advice about supervision, sensitive or confidential matters, assistance with resolution of conflict, appeals, general difficulties | The Dean of the Graduate Research School  
Hackett Hall  
Secretary: 6488 7134 |
| Statistics                                                                  | Statistics Clinic, School of Mathematics and Statistics, Ph. 6488 1838 |
| All aspects of Masters degrees that have any coursework component             | The Administrative Officer in your faculty |
| **Advice about research and academic skills:**  
*E.g.* preparing a proposal, writing assignments or a thesis, effective reading | Graduate Education Officer, Learning Skills Advisors; Student Services, Guild Village  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Campus cards, enrolment forms                                              | Student Administration, Hackett Hall  
Ph: 6488 3235 |
| Careers                                                                   | Careers Advisors, Student Services, Guild Village.  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Counselling                                                                | Counsellors, Student Services, Guild Village  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Courses and workshops for all students                                    | Learning Skills Advisors, Student Services, Guild Village.  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Courses and workshops for Postgraduate Research Students                  | Graduate Education Officers, Student Services, Guild Village.  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| English language development                                              | English Language Skills Advisor, Student Services, Guild Village.  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Financial assistance                                                       | Financial Aid Officer, Student Services, Guild Village.  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Housing                                                                   | Housing officer, Student Services, Guild Village.  
Ph: 6488 2423 |
| Postgraduate Students’ Association                                         | Guild Office, Guild Village. |
| Changing enrolment from a Masters to a Ph.D. or from a Ph.D. to a Masters | Graduate Research and Scholarships Office, Hackett Hall Ph: 6488 2807 (reception) |