

MANCHESTER  
1824

The University  
of Manchester

Faculty of Humanities  
Researcher Development

# How to get your PhD

a guide for students





# contents



<b>1 Approaching your PhD</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4 Career and life</b>	<b>11</b>
What is a PhD?	2	Conferences	11
Why get a PhD?	2	Publications	12
Topic	2	Teaching	12
University	3	Jobs	12
Supervisor	3	Life	13
Funding	3	Reflection	13
Reflection	4		
<b>2 First steps in research</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5 Final steps</b>	<b>13</b>
Standards	5	Submission	13
Time Management	5	Viva	14
Skills audit	6	Viva preparation	14
Research Ethics & Health and Safety	6		
Peers	6	<b>6 Case Studies</b>	<b>16</b>
Reflection	7		
<b>3 The core of your thesis work</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7 Resources</b>	<b>18</b>
Outline	8	PhD community & writing tips	18
Timeline	8	Career planning	18
More on supervision	9	Book	18
Writing	10	Reflections	19
Motivation	10	Your Notes	19
Action Points	11	Basic Checklist	20

# 1

# Approaching your PhD

This booklet is about successfully navigating the PhD process, from approaching and structuring your work to the thesis submission and the viva. Tips are also included on planning life outside and after your PhD.

### **What is a PhD?**

A PhD (doctor of philosophy) thesis makes a contribution to knowledge and demonstrates your ability to conduct scholarly research in a specific area of interest. Gaining a PhD consists of 99 per cent hard work and perseverance and 1 per cent genius. You can pass without being a genius but not without working consistently on your thesis for the equivalent of three year's full-time work.

### **Why get a PhD?**

It will help you to stay focused, positive and confident about your PhD to consider why you want to get one. There are many reasons for embarking on PhDs. Some people aspire to an academic career, others seek the intellectual challenge or want to satisfy their curiosity about a particular topic. Yet some students fall into it as a natural progression from their previous work or simply want to delay entry into the labour market. Knowing your motivations will help you when you face challenges on your journey to completion, but it may also influence which format you choose for your thesis and your involvement in activities outside your research.

### **Topic**

Enthusiasm and passion for your field of study are crucial ingredients for PhD success. If you are not excited about your topic, it will be difficult to enthuse others and to convince them of its fascination and importance. At the same time, the choice of your PhD topic might be linked to the availability of funding or the projects available when working at a particular university or with a particular supervisor. Whatever your motivations for choosing your topic, you will need to remind yourself of your intrinsic fascination with your research topic or the useful skills you are gaining in moments of doubt or lack of motivation faced by all PhD students at some point during the PhD process.

## University

If you are geographically mobile, it is worth thinking carefully about the institution where you wish to gain your doctorate. Considerations include the availability of prospective supervisors and funding, the size of the department as well as the prestige of the institution. Russell Group Universities generally tend to have the strongest focus on research and award about half of all doctorates in the UK. The best place to gain a doctorate in your field might be overseas with leading US institutions proving particularly popular.

## Supervisor

At least as important as the choice of topic is the choice of supervisor(s). Ideally, your supervisor will be close to your research topic, interested in your work and have time and energy to support, stretch and motivate you while allowing you to develop as an independent researcher in your own right. In reality, your supervisor may not gain top scores on all these criteria but you should not compromise on knowledge of the field and supervision availability. It is also a good idea to ask a potential supervisor whether they intend to stay at their current university – it is not ideal to have to change institutions or your main supervisor half-way through your thesis.

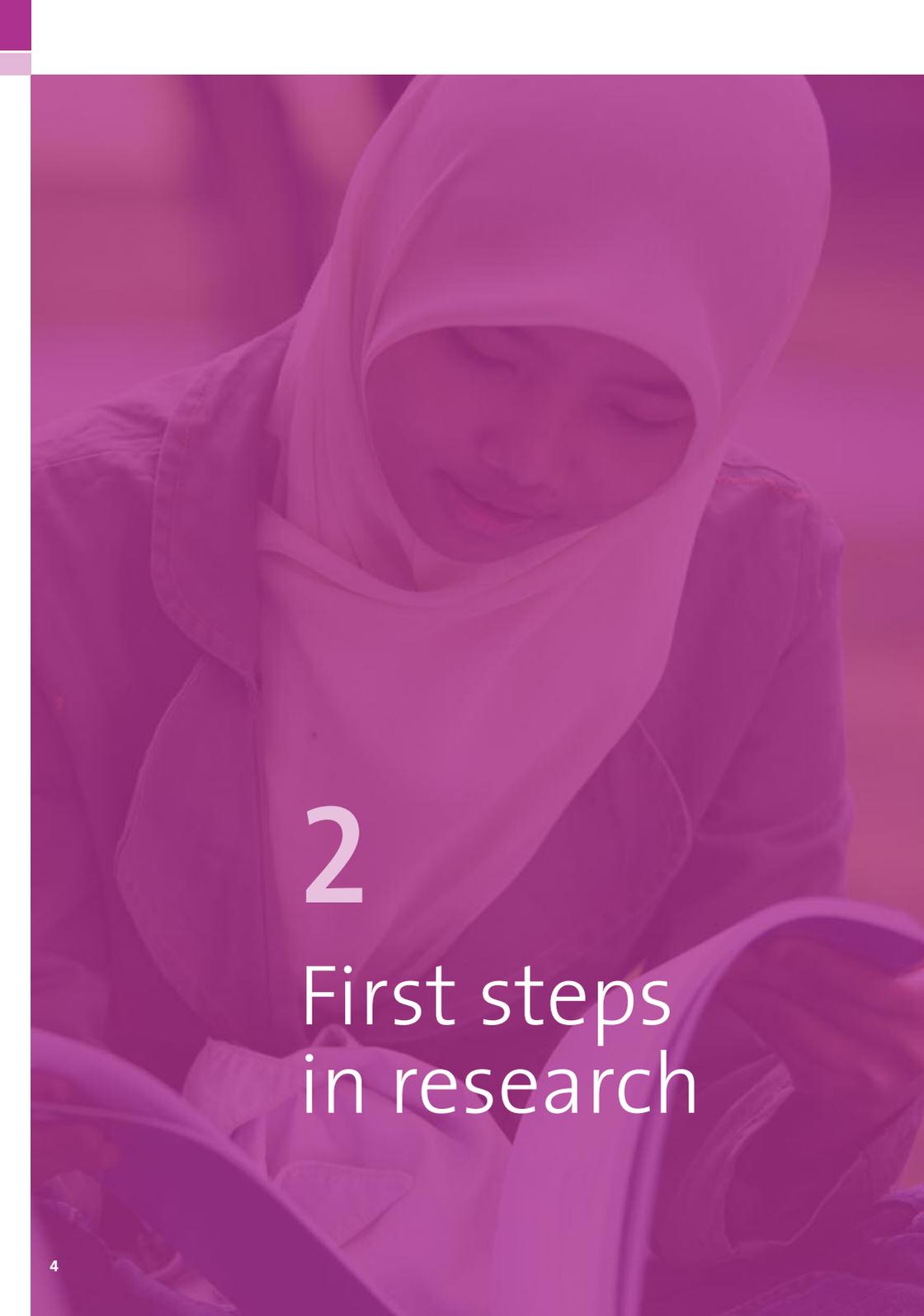
Unless you have worked with your prospective supervisor before, it is often not possible to establish what kind of person he/she is. Try and get a sense of possible supervisors from their academic or personal websites. You could also try to obtain some informal insights into the supervision style of a particular person from their current students or try and meet the person before making a final decision on where to undertake your doctorate. It is already common practice at US universities for students to meet prospective supervisors before making such decisions.

## Funding

Doing a PhD is an expensive activity, and funding considerations are often seminal in deciding not only where to study but whether you will undertake a PhD at all. Funding is usually fiercely competitive. British and European students can apply through their university for funding awarded based on attainment and potential by the British Research Councils <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk>. Your university or a third party (such as industry or a charity) may also have funds available – prospective universities should have a funding section for postgraduates on their websites.

## Reflection

- Why do I want to do a PhD? What motivates me to work on the topic for three or four years?
- Am I committed to undertaking research for the next few years? Which aspects will I enjoy most?
- What excites me about my prospective thesis topic?
- What are the pros and cons of different universities and departments for enrolling as a PhD student?
- Who could be my potential supervisor? How can I find out more about her/him?



# 2

## First steps in research

At this point you know your motivation for undertaking a PhD, you have found a university and a supervisor, and hopefully some funding. Now it is time to start the work.

### Standards

Familiarise yourself in your first weeks with the procedures and standards of gaining a PhD at your university and ensure you are aware of the main monitoring hurdles that you need to jump on the road to completion – for example, many universities now have some forms of annual review processes in place. Look at previously completed theses to see what standard of work you should aspire to. Your supervisor or your peers will be able to recommend a particularly strong thesis in your discipline and perhaps one that is particularly close to your own research interests. Searching an international thesis data base such as [www.proquest.co.uk](http://www.proquest.co.uk) illustrates the standard for PhDs at other institutions and allows you to find theses related to your field of interest.

In terms of format, the majority of British PhD theses continue to be a single long piece of scholarly work. But some students or fields of study prefer writing a series of journal articles or offer taught PhDs – there might be some flexibility in which format you choose. Discuss possible deviations from the standard format in your discipline with your supervisor early on in the process.

### Time Management

Many PhD students find it helpful to treat their research like a full-time job involving five to eight hours of concentrated work five days a week. A

routine can help – arrive in your study space or lab at the same time every day. Get stuck into your reading, experiments, analysis or writing. Allow time to read new literature in your field such as new journal issues. Limit time on procrastination activities such as e-mail and the internet. At the same time, no thesis is completed without breaks. Holidays and weekends are important. Take time off regularly.

Your final thesis product will be the accumulation of the equivalent of about three years' full-time undertaking of your small daily thesis tasks. The secret of the most efficient PhD students is to do every small task just once – let it be filing journal papers or research material, running a model or looking up a particular reference. You will be familiar with most of these small tasks but it is a good idea to audit your skills at the beginning of your PhD.

### Skills audit

A person with a PhD should demonstrate an ability to competently write and complete a thesis, to communicate in written and oral forms, to be a competent user of research techniques, relevant equipment and software. Interpersonal, team-working, teaching and mentoring skills are also rewarded in academic, government and industry employment. It is thus worthwhile to develop your portfolio of transferable skills, especially if your dream job is outside academia. Find out about the specialised – and frequently free or subsidised! – development courses for PhD students at your university. Such courses usually include IT training, teaching training, presentation skills workshops, language training, and advice on establishing an academic career. Skills portfolios can also be developed by attending a UK Grad School (see [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)).

Be prepared to find half-way through your PhD that you need to learn new skills which you did not anticipate at the beginning. Discuss your existing skills and training needs with your supervisor.

### Research Ethics & Health and Safety

If you do research, you will need to be aware of ethical and health and safety implications. In some

cases, such considerations will be obvious - science laboratories should not let you near any equipment before you have had your health and safety induction. But perhaps the greatest health and safety hazard is your daily writing and / or computer routine: Are you sitting comfortably? Are your computer screen and chair adjusted to minimise strain?

If your doctoral work involves human subjects, you will need to complete an ethics review process to prevent harm to participants and to ensure their confidentiality – it is important to start this as early as possible as you may have to change your ideal research plans according to the recommendations of the ethics board. Your supervisor will be able to assist you in this matter.

## Peers

Your fellow PhD students are a priceless but often underused resource for a successful and enjoyable doctorate. Take a more advanced PhD student out for a cup of coffee at the beginning of your PhD – you may just learn the real rules of how your department works and how previous students have worked with your supervisor. When you find yourself struggling with particular aspects of your doctoral work, more often than not other students will have struggled with similar issues – whether it be the technicalities of your doctoral work, the management of supervisors and other professional relationships, funding, or the challenges of maintaining mutually supportive relationships with your nearest and dearest when the thesis is developing a life of its own.

Another under-used source of help is non-academic staff members such as administrators, librarians, IT support and laboratory assistants. These people can ensure that you obtain special books, access to printing, and information on conference support for PhD students. Building up supportive relationships with these people early on in your PhD will yield rewards over the years.

## Reflection

- What does a good PhD thesis in my field at my institution look like?
- Do I have a long-term career plan? If so, what skills will I need to succeed? How can I acquire these skills during my PhD?
- Have I discussed ethical implications of my work with my supervisor?
- Where is the careers service at my university? Can I take IT and other training courses in my department or at the university?
- Do I know at least one more advanced PhD student in my field? Have I taken them out for a tea/coffee/drink?
- Are there formal or social activities for PhD students? What could I organise with my peers to contribute to the social life?

# 3

## The core of your thesis work

## Outline

Approaches to writing differ somewhat across disciplines. In the natural sciences it is still common to 'write up' your thesis at the end of three years once you know all the outcomes of your experiments. You will usually be advised to keep a log-book throughout your doctorate. In arts and social sciences subjects, however, an outline is the key to breaking your thesis down into manageable chunks and a rough idea of where your journey to completion is heading is still useful in laboratory based subjects. Ideally, you should start an outline document in the first months of your PhD and update it regularly as you progress in your work. Your first outline, for example, might just have a rough structure of the type and number of chapters you think will form your thesis (example: introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis chapters, conclusion). As you flesh out the contents of your thesis, this outline will become more detailed: you will have chapter headings and, where applicable, sub-headings and some titles for figures and tables.

You may have to refocus your research question during your PhD as the knowledge in your field advances. Chapter outlines and the order in which you tackle your research questions can change. Stay focused by remembering that the ultimate goal is to complete coherent and interesting work worthy of being awarded a PhD.

Individual chapters also need an outline and often thesis chapters have their own chapter introduction, middle section and conclusion or learning point from the chapter. If you are writing empirically based work, you may find it useful to assemble the figures you wish to use in the chapter and put them in the order that you would use them in an academic talk. Note down the key findings from each figure and use those as skeletons for the chapter outline. Your supervisor will be a useful resource for feedback on your proposed thesis and chapter structures. You may also wish to workshop your thesis structure with other PhD students. Your department may already have a PhD workshop in place but if not, why not organise your own? This will also look good on your CV in terms of organisation and leadership skills.

## Timeline

As you are writing your first outline, you should also assemble your first timeline. Both will change as your research advances, but it doesn't hurt to have something

to work from and to keep you on track. Especially at the beginning of your research, you may underestimate how long certain tasks take and it is important to learn early on to set realistic timeframes for small tasks so that you will ultimately complete your thesis on time. Also, you will almost certainly experience a scenario where an experiment does not work as planned; where your ethics review, access to your data, an archive or a library book is delayed; or where new considerations or developments lead to changes in your research design. Allow some time for 'unexpected events' in your timetable and plan to finish at least three months before your funding runs out – so even if you do over-run, you have some buffer time for completion.

Some students find it helpful to have several headings in their timeline – for example, research targets, research dissemination (conferences and publications), training and development and teaching. Don't forget to factor in holiday time.

Review and update your timeline regularly and evaluate how you are doing against your expected completion time - it is a good idea to have your timeline in a dominant place such as next to your computer screen. Ensure your supervisor has a revised copy of your timeline so you have help monitoring your progress.

## More on supervision

The relationship with your supervisor is key to PhD success. The supervision scenario you encounter is likely to vary depending on your university's policies for supervision, your departmental set up and the style of your particular supervisor. Some supervisors conscientiously read and plan your work with you perhaps to the point that you are feeling constrained in your creative thinking, while others may disappear from sight and e-mail contact and skim read any work in progress until they see completed chapters. Your university will have guidelines about what you can expect from the supervision process, but you may still need to ensure actively that your supervisor is giving you the attention and support you need.

As in any relationship, communication is the key to success. It is useful to have regular meetings with your supervisor, to raise challenges faced in your research early on and to ask for help when you get stuck. Supervisors can also be a useful source of advice on career planning and tips on conferences, publications and funding.

Some universities formally allow or require you to have two supervisors. This can frequently be helpful and fruitful as long as communication is maintained between the three of you. You may also find it useful to investigate the opportunities for asking members of staff who are not your supervisor about advice on specific aspects of your work.

## Writing

'Writing is thinking' is the motto followed in many humanities and social science subjects. Writing is a crucial aspect of the conceptual development of your work in these fields and your thesis will go through many drafts of writing and rewriting. This process should start in the first few months of your doctorate and you will keep writing throughout your doctoral work. In natural sciences, you will frequently be asked to keep a log-book throughout your doctorate to help you write up at the end.

Many writers find it helpful to write, leave and rewrite work. If you are stuck or simply bored with editing a particular paragraph or section of your thesis chapter, you may find that a few days or weeks later, you suddenly know how to do it. Some supervisors are happy to read drafts of your work while others want to see polished versions. Whichever approach your supervisor takes, try to get feedback to improve your writing and the focus of your work. Friends and peers can also be useful for reading work in progress and assessing the flow of your argument – and you can learn from reading their work too.

Follow general advice on good writing and your disciplinary etiquette of writing. If you explain something, be twice as explicit as you think you should be. Write clearly and coherently. Most subjects favour simple sentences using simple words. Ensure that you are familiar with the way of writing expected in your subject at your university.

When you edit your work, make sure that individual sections and paragraphs are easy to read and that there is a good flow between sections. Proof-read your work meticulously and pay attention to stipulated minimum and maximum word or page limits. Learn how to use Word or some other software for structuring your thesis chapters into sections with different sub-headings and master how to insert and refer to graphics or tables in your text – hopefully your university IT support offers a training course on the topic for PhD students. Manage your

bibliography while you write. It might be worth spending time to familiarise yourself with a referencing software such as Endnote early on in your PhD. Finally, back-up your work regularly and in different locations. You could also keep the latest version of your thesis on your e-mail server to minimise the risk of losing your work in progress.

## Motivation

Motivation to stay focused and continue the work is a challenge many PhD students face during their theses. It helps to stay focused to have at least fortnightly targets of what you want to achieve. A work log of your progress allows you to see how you are doing and may help you when asking peers or your supervisor when you get stuck. Unfortunately, some students have been known to disappear off the planet when problems occur – do not do it, it will only magnify problems. Reward yourself for staying on track.

Study groups, your peers and your supervisor can also help you to stay motivated, but it is also worth reminding yourself of your initial fascination with your topic and to realise that a PhD is a time-bound activity. If you are in a serious motivation crisis, do something completely different for a few days - for example, take yourself on a weekend break – and you may just find that you have recharged your motivational batteries. Stay confident – you have got this far and you can complete this thesis. Just remember that you really want to.

## Action Points

- Look at a successful PhD thesis in your department – how is it structured?
- Write a first draft outline and timeline of your proposed thesis.
- Learn to use a referencing tool for your bibliography
- Put a back-up system for all your files in place
- Limit e-mail time to three times a day
- Designate a folder to keep agendas for supervisions and notes after your supervision meeting

... and just remind yourself how exciting and fascinating your PhD topic is!



# 4

## Career and life

If you undertake your PhD with the aim of staying in academia, you also need to think from the beginning of the requirements for job entry in your discipline in addition to completing a thesis – typically universities like to appoint new staff who have published in peer-reviewed journals and who have some teaching experience. It is still possible to obtain a first academic post without either experience but why not put yourself in the strongest employment position possible?

### Conferences

To obtain an academic job, it is worthwhile to become acquainted with the great and the good in your field, the latest research developments, and to raise awareness of your work. The way to do this is by attending conferences and giving talks in your department / university. In your first PhD year, you might only attend major conferences without presenting your work or you might present at a postgraduate conference. Aim to present at least one paper at a good conference during your PhD. Find out whether your university, the conference organisers or your scholarship provide you with extra funds for conference travel. Have a business card ready and participate in and enjoy the social activities at the conference – new research collaborations and even friendships can be forged over casual food and drink as well as formal talks. Besides, what other occasions are there to meet so many brilliant people interested in similar issues and ideas?

### Publications

Your academic career will also depend on your publication record. Your supervisor will be able to advise you on how much is required for getting a position as a post-doctoral researcher or junior university lecturer. Generally, you should aim for publications in well known international journals. Review processes frequently take many months to complete, so try sending a paper for considerations by the middle of your second year. In some humanities subjects, the gold standard is still a single authored book. Your academic employment chances are enhanced if you are one of the few outstanding students who secure a book contract with a good publisher before completing your thesis.

### Teaching

Undertaking limited teaching will not only enhance your employability after your doctorate but it can also be fun, provide some variety to your working week and increase your income. But remember that your top priority is your thesis – spend at most one day a week on all your teaching activities, including preparation, leading seminars, lectures or lab experiments and marking. You are a step ahead of

the academic careers game if you undertake a PGCHE or apply for membership of the Higher Education Academy [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk) while still doing your PhD – this signals your commitment to teaching.

## Jobs

Be aware that deadlines for some post-doctoral research positions and lectureships as well as other employment such as consultancy can frequently have nine months' lead time – start the academic job search in August / September before completing your PhD. Sign up to automatic alerts should the job section page from your favourite employers change (for example [www.changedetection.com/monitor.html](http://www.changedetection.com/monitor.html)). Subscribe to [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk) to receive the latest job alerts in your academic field and get on your careers service's distribution list for new vacancies in industry. Your career service will be able to help you in preparing your CV. Keep your CV only one mouse-click away – you never know when you will spot jobs you wish to apply for. Practice interviews and job talks, your careers service may also have some mock interviews in their DVD collection that are worth watching.

## Life

Life continues while you are busy writing your PhD. The support from family and friends will be as important as the academic support in helping you succeed in your doctorate. Stay connected and involved with your nearest and dearest, especially if your thesis seems to take over every aspect of your life. Visits and joint time off may help you stay connected.

Many PhD students find that involvement in some extra-curricular activities keeps their energy levels high. Your enthusiasm for other things will give you more energy for your thesis and you may pick up further transferable skills on the way as well.

Follow general common sense in managing your physical and mental health. Make sure you are registered with a GP and dentist. Universities generally have a counselling service that you should be entitled to use free of charge as well as a student

nightline. Your supervisor might be able to provide some pastoral support but not all supervisors are equally happy to be involved in issues around your personal life and you yourself might prefer keeping your personal life separate from your thesis. In any case, use the available support services early on rather than allowing potentially manageable problems to spiral out of control.

## Reflection

- Have I visited my careers' service? Am I on the mailing list for jobs – academic or otherwise?
- Is my updated CV just one mouse click away?
- Am I staying in touch with my nearest and dearest?
- Have I got a holiday or weekend break plan?
- Do I have a current GP and dentist registration where I live?

# 5

## Final steps

## Submission

Ultimately, a good PhD is a finished PhD. A potentially outstandingly original piece of work that is never submitted will neither earn you a PhD nor gain you the recognition you deserve. Your final thesis product will never be perfect but will mirror an appropriate academic accomplishment for three years of research. As a general rule, the final writing and proofreading process will take at least twice as long as you expect, so allow plenty of time for the final polishing stages. Ensure that your thesis complies with institutional submission guidelines (spacing, spelling, word limit, structure, binding, submission forms) and is neatly presented. Consult with your supervisor about possible examiners for your thesis. You will want to appoint someone who is sympathetic to your line of enquiry and who is realistic about the requirements for conferring a doctorate. For an academic career it can also be helpful to appoint a distinguished professor as their networks and references could help you get jobs. If possible, avoid appointing someone who holds a personal grudge against your supervisor(s) or your institution.

## Viva

A few weeks or months after your thesis submission you will be called to your viva, the final oral PhD examination. The purpose of this examination is to confirm that it was you who actually wrote the thesis and that you fully understand the work you have done and the significance of your work within your research field. A viva is an open book exam. Not only do you have an opportunity to prepare but you can even take a list of anticipated questions and answers into your viva. Take this list into your viva as well as chapter summaries, a list of errors you found when re-reading your thesis and, if applicable, work you have undertaken since submission.

If you want to continue with your academic work, the viva is a good opportunity to improve your work for further publications and to get advice on the suitable journals and publishers for research dissemination.

## Viva preparation

Your viva will contain some predictable questions. Ideally, you will have thought about these questions while you were writing your PhD. Practice your answers with fellow students and friends or write down some bullet points to remind you of your response.

- Summarise your thesis in one sentence / 3 minutes / 10 minutes. What is the take-home message?
- What have you done that merits a PhD?
- What are your main contributions to knowledge?
- How applicable is what you have done to other contexts?
- What are the recent developments in your field? How does your work link to those developments?
- What would you do differently if you were to start the project again?
- Where do you see this kind of research moving in the future?
- What is the strongest criticism of your work? What would your worst critic say about your thesis?

Depending on your subject areas, questions may also include implications for policy audience, end-users or industry; ethical considerations in research involving human subjects; and technical, methodological and mathematical questions.

Some questions are asked because the examiners are genuinely interested and want to know the answer, so set a friendly rather than adversarial tone. Remember – you are now the world's expert on your topic! You know more about it than your examiners. Use general answering techniques to shine in your viva. Phrases such as 'Thank you for that helpful comment...'; 'That is a good question'; 'Now, the answer is not straightforward...'; go a long way. Acknowledge when you are faced with a challenging but justified question - 'You have identified a serious limitation of this approach/method/technique and the results/findings have to be interpreted in the light of this observation'. Score points by mentioning specific details of names, titles, journals, date of publication – but the greatest way of winning over your examiners remains your continued enthusiasm and excitement for your research.

The most usual outcome of a viva examination is a requirement to make some changes to your thesis. If you make these changes to the satisfaction of the examiners within a specified period, then you will be awarded a doctorate. A great reason to celebrate.

## Enjoy your PhD!

# 6 Case studies

## Sarah

Sarah embarked on a PhD in particle physics knowing that her interests were equally divided between physics and languages and politics. During her PhD she kept her interests alive by learning a new language and being involved in a political society at her student union while giving 100 per cent to her research from 9 to 5. Sarah started employment with the foreign office after completing her PhD – she has found that her physics background has given her very precise thinking and analytical skills that help her succeed in her new career. 'I am glad I did the PhD. It taught me so many things I wouldn't know otherwise – and you can just tell who among my new colleagues has got one and who hasn't.'

## Bhavna

Bhavna's decision to undertake a PhD in the social sciences was inspired by her friend's decision: 'We decided to do a PhD together because we couldn't think of anything else to do and I had a topic in mind that fascinated me.' Funding was not forthcoming and Bhavna held down part-time jobs and a wardenship in a hall of residence throughout her PhD. Nonetheless, not only did Bhavna succeed in her PhD, she also gained a prestigious post-doctoral fellowship and soon afterwards a permanent academic job at a top university. 'I could not possibly advise my students to start a PhD with such little idea of where they are going and no funding. But, yes, it worked for me and it is the second best thing I have done in my life (after meeting my husband). The tough road to completion also made me appreciate my current job and the security that comes with it more.'

## Don

Don undertook a PhD in Mathematics. He enjoyed the academic side of his PhD but also the freedom to pursue his interests in cycling. At the end of his PhD, he was offered a post-doctoral position in Canada. But two weeks before taking up his new job he decided not to go. 'The prospect of going overseas was exciting but I decided that my roots in the town where I undertook my PhD were more important to me.' Having discovered that his priority was to stay local, he secured lucrative employment at a private financial consultancy firm. 'The PhD allowed me to have maximum choice in my life – and I am happy it has given me an opportunity to stay in a place I like with the people I care about.'

## Rosalind

Rosalind enjoyed her laboratory based work in Biology as it gave her a supportive peer-group during her PhD. Furthermore, she had always wanted to travel and had missed out on this experience due to her family's financial situation when she was growing up. 'The best thing about my PhD is the funds to go to international conferences. And a professor I recently met at a conference has invited me to join his research team for a year – so I am looking forward to moving to the US after my PhD. Without the PhD I would not be able to catch up on all these experiences I have previously missed out on. I also enjoy being outstanding at what I do.'

## George

George had always known he wanted to be an academic historian. But after submitting an unsuccessful application for PhD funding to his research council, he decided that it was too risky to embark on a self-funded PhD followed by uncertain job prospects. Fortunately, George's revised and improved PhD proposal secured funding a year later while he was working as an accountant in the City. 'I am now half-way through my PhD and I am enjoying it. I do a lot of teaching and marking, and I still know that there might not be an academic job at the end of it. Still, I feel privileged to have a chance to pursue my academic interests for three years.'

## Janina

Janina had put her career ambitions aside to follow her husband's job and to care for their newborn baby. But four years later, she found herself divorced with poor job prospects and a community that felt uneasy with a single mum in their midst. She plunged her savings into a down payment on the tuition fees for a PhD in politics in a different town and her life changed from there. 'I could finally do something I felt passionate about and was defined by my own ability rather than my ex-husband's accomplishments. The PhD gave me my confidence back, I have just accepted a job in local government and I am getting married again in autumn. Life with the PhD is good.'

# 7 Resources

[www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/acase/rv/pgresearch/skillstraining/](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/humnet/acase/rv/pgresearch/skillstraining/) - for more information about training and development for researchers in the Humanities Faculty at The University of Manchester

## PhD community & writing tips

[www.proquest.co.uk](http://www.proquest.co.uk) - search completed doctoral theses

[port.igrs.sas.ac.uk/supervision.htm](http://port.igrs.sas.ac.uk/supervision.htm) - advice on PhD planning, supervision and writing.

[www.phys.unsw.edu.au/~jw/thesis.html](http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/~jw/thesis.html) - advice on the writing part of your PhD

[www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk) - UK national organisation with information and resources to support the development of researchers

[www.purelyPhD.com](http://www.purelyPhD.com) - information about PhD study, progression, networking and getting a job afterwards

## Career planning

[www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk) - for academic job search after the PhD, sign up for weekly job alerts, mainly UK but some international postings

[chronicle.com/jobs/100](http://chronicle.com/jobs/100) and [www.higheredjobs.com](http://www.higheredjobs.com) - for job offers in the US academic market, sign up for weekly alerts

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) - resource for graduate careers

[www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk) - membership of the higher education academy may enhance your chances of securing an academic job after completing your PhD.

[www.rcuk.ac.uk](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk) - find the UK research council responsible for your area of research and find funding and post-doctoral opportunities

[www.changedetection.com/monitor.html](http://www.changedetection.com/monitor.html) - allows you to monitor websites and be notified when they change. Very useful for monitoring job websites at particular institutions.

## Book

Estelle M. Phillips and Derek S. Pugh 'How to get a PhD: a handbook for students and their supervisors', 4th edition, 2005, Open University Press.

## The author

Anna Zimdars completed her doctorate in Sociology at the University of Oxford in 2007. She is now working as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Manchester. Reflecting on her own PhD experience, Anna felt that there were things she wished someone had told her when she embarked on the PhD journey and the idea to write a short booklet for future PhD students was born.



We hope you have found the booklet useful – your feedback, comments and suggestions are welcome here: [humanities-training@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:humanities-training@manchester.ac.uk).

The University of Manchester June 2010

## Reflections

*What do I hope to get out of the PhD experience?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*What excites me most about my PhD topic?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Researcher Development Team  
Faculty of Humanities  
Devonshire House  
The University of Manchester  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL

tel +44(0)161 306 1113  
email [humanities-training@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:humanities-training@manchester.ac.uk)

Royal Charter Number RC00097  
J2897 05.10

