Kickstart Your Research
Getting the most from your PhD program

Academic Writing Workshop
Dr Michael Azariadis
**Kick-start your Research**

Objectives of the workshop:

- to develop familiarity with the processes and milestones associated with Higher Degree by Research programs
- to develop a broad understanding of the research process
- to identify a range of support mechanisms for research students
- to provide skills and strategies to facilitate more effective progress through your candidacy
- to enable students to recognise the importance of developing research skills and identify those critical to their study

Workshop content:

- Motivation and time management
- Examination process
- Planning research stages and milestones
- Thesis as a series of papers
- Research impact and significance
- Communicating a research
- Supervision
The Research Process

**What is your motivation for undertaking a research degree?**

Do you have an answer to this question? Have you discussed this with those close to you, with those who are most likely to be affected, directly or indirectly, by your studies? Do you have their support?

What is your personal motivation? Is this a career-enhancing thing? Or are you seeking a post in higher education, for which this is usually a required qualification? (Are you aware of the very small percentage of doctoral graduates who actually find a position in academia?) Are you interested in learning more about a subject that you are passionate about?

These and many other questions are relevant to the writing of your thesis, because it is the answers to these questions which will ultimately sustain and motivate you through the long doctoral process.

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There are many **internal** and **external** drivers which motivate people to begin a research degree. Take a moment to jot down some of the reasons as to why you have embarked on this journey. It is often these reasons that will ultimately motivate and inspire you over the coming years.

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Waiting for the motivation fairy

It's easy to give in to procrastination — but Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner offer some tips for getting your drive back.

"I love deadlines. I love the whooping sound they make as they go by." — Douglas Adams

If you were trying to set up ideal conditions for procrastination, conducting a research project would provide them. Such projects tend to be large and time-consuming, completing a doctoral research project, for example, often takes three years or more. Deadlines and endpoints are often fuzzy and ill-defined. Then there's the reward structure: you can put in a lot of effort with little to no positive feedback along the way, and the rewards, if there are any, take a long time to come. Add to this the fact that scientists are often perfectionists with demanding, if not idealistic, expectations, and it is little wonder that procrastination is the most discussed topic in our graduate student and researcher workshops. Many researchers simply take for granted that they are at the mercy of the forces of procrastination, doomed to increased stress levels and stretched deadlines. But there are simple strategies for pushing yourself to get engaged. The first is to recognize the patterns that you're falling into.

Advanced Displacement

Some procrastination activities are pretty obvious. There's the morning coffee break that creeps into lunchtime, or watching videos on YouTube and sending them to all your friends, or updating your Facebook status when you should be updating your lab book. But most procrastination is far more subtle, and can even be mistaken for productive work. For example, you might try to track down that elusive reference, even though you've already got more than you will ever have time to read. Or you could start a new experiment instead of analysing the old one. Or take stock of the glassware in the lab. Or check your email. These activities make it seem as though you're doing something useful, and you may well be, but it's not the thing you should be doing right now.

So why is housekeeping, for example, so much fun when you're supposed to be working on your dissertation or a paper? It's a displacement activity, used to dispel the self-reproach or discomfort that we feel for not doing something else. Reading a novel or taking a nap that difficult task look any more appealing.

That's just not how motivation works.

Most people have a fundamental misunderstanding: we like to think that motivation leads to action, or, more simply, that when you feel like doing something, you'll do it. This model might work for things you enjoy doing, such as watching a film or going for a walk. But it's not particularly good for huge tasks with fuzzy deadlines. The problem is that you may never feel motivated to revise and resubmit that paper — at least not until a hard-and-fast deadline appears. You need a different model.

Motivation Mojo

Some psychology research shows that action leads to motivation, which in turn leads to more action. You have to start before you feel ready; then you'll feel more motivated, and then you'll take more action. You've probably had this experience yourself. You put off running an analysis for ages; eventually, you decide to do it, and once you start, you say to yourself, "This isn't as bad as I thought. Why not keep going while I'm at it?"

Of course, starting before you feel motivated is difficult. But certain strategies can directly tackle the conditions that lead to procrastination in the first place.

First, big projects need to be broken down into steps. Not just small steps, but tiny steps. Instead of saying you'll make the revisions to the paper — which probably seems overwhelming — the tiny step could be that you'll read the reviewer's comments or you'll make the first two changes. Second, you need to set a time or deadline by which to perform that tiny step. Saying you'll do it later or tomorrow isn't enough — the deadline needs to have an 'ouch' attached to it. Third, you need to build in an immediate reward. If you finish reading the comments by your deadline at 10:00 a.m., you can allow yourself to have a coffee, a brief chat or a quick e-mail exchange. It's highly likely that once you start the task, your motivation will kick in and you'll find yourself wanting to spend longer at it.

So if the motivation fairy hasn't been stopping off at your lab or desk very frequently, perhaps you should give her a hand. The next time you catch yourself engaging in displacement activities, remember that there's a way to recover that elusive drive. Follow our three rules and watch your motivation grow.
**Time management**

Different people have different systems for managing their time. It’s important that you give some thought to the way you are going to structure your time so that you can maximise your productivity in relation to research, and also balance this other demands you have for your time, such as for family. It’s also important to ensure that you have a balanced approach to your research that allows for adequate time for socialising, exercise, and to pursue other interests besides your research.

1) What are some of the specific issues involved in effective time management for someone undertaking a high degree by research?

2) What particular aspects of research might we want to look at in our development of strategies for effective time management?

3) What are some of the resources that you could use in your own time management system?

**Hand-out** – Hugh Kearnes & Maria Gardiner *The balanced Researcher: Strategies for busy researchers*, careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) UK.
**Manage Your Time**

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. Try to identify any forms of procrastination and try to eliminate these as much as possible.

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 note-book, 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.
**Thesis examination process**

While supervisors provide feedback all the way through the research and thesis writing process, the final assessment takes the form of an examination. In the Australian context, this examination is based entirely on the evaluation of a text, rather than an oral examination.

When a thesis goes out for examination, a marking criteria accompanies it. This marking criteria guides the examiners in their evaluation of the thesis. Understanding these criteria is important in the production of the work. Students are also often interested in the process of examination as ultimately they will have to navigate through it after the submission of the thesis.

**What are you working towards? The process of examination**

Graduate Research School’s Examiners’ Recommendation 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)
Stages and Milestones

Stage 1. Research Proposal
(We will discuss the research proposal itself in more detail at the next workshop)
- negotiating a research question
- managing supervision
- ethics approval
- confidentiality & IP issues
- identifying skills, equipment and data needed
- preliminary reading in the field of study (writing of a draft literature review)
- developing structure (thesis as a series of papers?) and timeline for thesis
- understanding the research proposal approval process

Submit to the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office (M356):
* 2 x Research Proposal
* 2 x Research Proposal Coversheet

Make sure that all sections have been completed and appropriate signatures obtained, otherwise there will be a delay in processing the Research Proposal.

The Research Proposal is sent to a member of the Board of the Graduate Research School for review.

Research Proposal approved in present form.

Reviewer may recommend that the candidate consider particular comments or questions, but responses to these are not required.

Research Proposal not approved in present form.

Revise and resubmit

Stage 2. Confirmation of Candidature
Check the specific guidelines for confirmation in your school
http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/candidature/confirmation
- substantial progress on literature review
- moving from broad to specific reading
- drafting sections of the thesis
- beginning data collection (after obtaining all approvals)
- building peer networks and thinking about publishing

**Stage 2. Mid thesis**
- finish data collection, begin data analysis
- ever more drafting of thesis chapter/papers
- maintain regular contact with supervisor
- developing professional networks
- conferences? publication?
- skills and professional development
- thinking about career options (life after the thesis)

**Stage 3. A full draft**
- develop timetable for written feedback from supervisors leading to submission
- think about editing
- think about examiners

**Stage 4. Submission and completion**
- know the requirements
Reporting on the Stages

- The Graduate Research School requires you to document your progress by submitting a Research Proposal, Confirmation of Candidature (PhD only), Annual Reports (and interim reports if required) and Nomination of Examiners and Submission of Thesis forms.

- Schools may have additional requirements.

- Supervisors may also set their own reporting mechanisms.
Presenting your thesis as a series of papers: to do or not to do?

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/thesis/series

What do the University Rules say about this?
• 1.3.1.33(1) A thesis may be presented in the form of a typescript, a published book or a paper or series of papers which have been published in refereed journals.

• (4) If a series of papers is presented, there must be a full explanatory introduction and a review article at the end to link the separate papers and to place them in the context of the established body of knowledge.

• (5) If detailed data and descriptions of methods are not otherwise given, they must be included as appendices.

What do the Rules mean?
• A thesis may consist of work that is.
  • All published
  • Partly published
  • All or partly in the process of being published
  • published in a mixture of scholarly and other media
  • Some mixture of the above
  • Wholly unpublished (but not wholly unpublishable: if it is a PhD)

Reasons to Present your Thesis as Papers
• resolves conflicts between preparing the thesis for examination and preparing papers for publication
• increases the probability that you will publish the work
• you can use reviewers' comments on your papers to improve your thesis
• having part of the work published prior to examination establishes it as worthy of publication, which is one of the criteria for thesis examination. The larger the proportion that is published, the easier it is for your examiners and the BGRS to recognise that your work is substantial and of value.

Possible Problems
• A thesis is more than a collection of papers. The chapters of the thesis can stand alone, but the thesis is a complete and coherent “story”, in which each chapter is an integral part. The chapters must be in a logical order and strongly linked together.
• It is easy for a thesis like this to become disjointed. This will stand against it, as a thesis is not the same as a body of work.
• Copyright issues (not yet encountered at UWA)

**Analyze sample of reviewers’ reports for journal article**
Defining Research Impact

1. An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia (that is, it excludes impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge)

2. Impact includes an effect, change or benefit to:
   a. The activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding
   b. Of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals
   c. In any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally

3. Impact includes reduction or prevention of harm, risk, cost or other negative effects

Determining Research Impact

| Societal | ▪ Developing and building understanding of major-long term issues facing the planet – such as the environment, demographic trends, transport and energy.
  ▪ Providing evidence and policy advice to national and local government in Australia and around the world.
  ▪ Supporting development of local, national, and International Policy
  ▪ High societal impact (i.e. well designed and sustainable engagement) |
| Medical / Health | ▪ Better quality of health / care provision – in Australia or abroad.
 ▪ Collaboration with health industry / NHMRC.
 ▪ Better training for staff.
 ▪ Increased public awareness. |
| People / Cultural | ▪ Increased skills and better training; Better problem solving/ stronger networks
 ▪ Better quality of life for individuals or families. Enriched local communities
 ▪ Enhanced creativity in culture and with non–typical engagers.
 ▪ Museum Exhibitions / Galleries / Cultural Events based on research. |
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<th>Economic</th>
<th>Knowledge Exchange</th>
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<tr>
<td>• New commercial IP / Patents / Products</td>
<td>• Co-produced research, with the public helping to shape the research question,</td>
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<td>• New companies / Creating university-owned spin-offs.</td>
<td>design and/or delivery.</td>
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<td>• Increased investments from overseas companies or Improved competitiveness / performance from Australian industry</td>
<td>• Seeking public input into your research.</td>
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<td>• Helping individual companies to develop and grow so that they can thrive in a knowledge economy.</td>
<td>• Assisting governmental agencies to operate with the benefit of the latest ideas and technology and the best-prepared staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Generating financial revenue from sales associated with research outputs (for instance patents / ticket sales to cultural exhibitions).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Public Engagement</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspiring individuals to engage with research. This engagement should go way outside academics, informed practitioners, and enrolled students and beyond the academy.</td>
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<td>• Working with communities, whether locally, nationally or internationally by working with schools, special needs, community groups or the not-for-profit sector.</td>
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**Question:** In what ways do you envisage your work being significant or having an impact (not just in your research field) but more broadly?
Communicating your Research

The three P’s

**Present.** put your workout for engagement and criticism at conferences, and use the interest you gain as a means of building your own network of colleagues and informants.

**Participate.** take part in your professional associations activities and committees in your teaching workplaces

**Publish.** aim low to start with to get runs on the board, and look for opportunities to learn the trade; book reviews and online forums such as The Conversation. Seek advice from colleagues and mentors on your work.

Why is it important to build effective networks in the research environment?

What is the point of undertaking so much painstaking work on your research project if nobody knows about it and its relevance? There are lots of reasons for making sure people know you and your work. Why?

- Because the environment we are working in is essentially a competitive one. There are limited opportunities compared to the demand for them. This may be ‘hidden’ or invisible to some extent, but it will become more recognizable to you as time goes by. There are limited opportunities, whether that is for teaching or tutoring positions, for research grants (or other forms of financial support for your project), post-doctoral fellowships and so forth. For this reason, you must find ways of building a profile for yourself, that is, promote your research through various channels of communication.

- To find out about the kinds of research that is being conducted in your field. To meet other researchers and practitioners working in your area.

- For the purposes of collaboration, of linking up with other scholars. Collaboration allows for the possibility of producing co-authored or multi-authored publications.
- As a means to maximise your chances of making a smooth transition into academic or professional life. Contacts, friendships and perceptions of your professional worth will play a big part in your success.

- As a means to promote collegiality and make your research experience a more satisfying one.

- To demonstrate a range of achievements during your candidature will make you more likely to gain an appointment post PhD.

**How has networking been institutionalised in academia?**

To some degree, the importance of networking is reflected in the growth of disciplinary associations and societies and research networks and. I am sure you are familiar with at least some of the associations and research networks (both national and international) that exist in your own discipline. Examples include:

- Australian Anthropological Association
- The Australian Sociological Association
- Oral History Association of Australia
- International Association of Applied Psychology
- European Diaspora Research Network
- Migration research Network

These types of organisations facilitate the promotion of research within their specified discipline. They organise conferences (at least annually) and workshops (and provide at least some funding for participant’s travel costs), often publish their own journal or newsletter and host visiting scholars. Many associations are inclusive in that they endeavour to engage and promote academic research, teaching, consultancies and public commentary. You can benefit greatly from being part of a society or association that focuses on similar types of research as your own.

**Question:** Are you aware of the different societies, associations and research networks that exist in your own field of study?
OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO PROMOTE YOUR WORK AND BUILD AN ACADEMIC PROFILE

Conferences – begin delivering conference papers on your work as soon as possible (you might consult your supervisor to determine what parts of your research might best be suited to a good presentation). You can avoid duplication of writing and get maximum worth from your writing effort if your conference presentations are oral renditions of a paper you are intending to submit to a journal, or if you rework your oral presentation into a publishable paper (or a chapter in your thesis). Consider conferences for postgraduate and early career researchers in particular. Get onto mailing lists

Posters – Poster presentations at conferences are useful for work in progress. The poster needs to be eye catching, informative and portable. Establish beforehand the dimensions the conference organisers are expecting and the means for fixing the poster to the wall or noticeboard. Avoid having too much text – no one will read it. The whole point of the poster is to make it graphically striking and attention inviting. Be available on-site at the times specified to answer queries, and have a hand out ready.

Developing an impact statement for your project – Consider as an ‘informal abstract’, one that can be reproduced in different situations.

Discipline group/school/faculty seminars – Always take the opportunity to present your ‘work-in-progress’ at postgraduate and departmental seminars. Sometimes these are a condition of your candidature.

Publishing – perhaps the most important way to expose your work to a wide audience. Having publications in quality journals is a big advantage at examination time for your PhD thesis; consider submitting as a series of articles rather than a typescript.

Media – Including university newsletters, radio and newspaper.

Committees – There will be opportunities for you to participate in academic committees as a postgraduate representative.

3 Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition
Establishing Correspondence – To begin with consider research expertise databases (e.g. Community of Science [COS] at http://expertise.cos.com/) and authors whose work you particularly admire.

Virtual recognition. Creating a web page – using appropriate software such as PebblePad to create an online academic profile and eportfolio

Social Media

Academia.com
Share your publications, see analytics on your profile and papers and follow other scholars working in your field.

http://www.academia.edu/
Research Communities

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

**Exercise.**

List as many resources as you can that are available to facilitate candidature of research students at UWA
Supervision

Charting Alignment of Student Needs and Supervisor Style

Alignment template

This tool for measuring supervisor–student alignment was developed by Geoff Gurr of the University of Sydney. It is a two-dimensional graph which is used to stimulate discussion about the needs of graduate research students and supervisory styles. It can be used every six months.

Consider that:

- A supervisory relationship in its first year will most likely be within or close to the appropriate support quadrant (which is not to say that some departure toward the autonomy generating quadrant may be desirable).

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1 With the assistance of a teaching development grant and the staff at the Institute for Teaching and Learning.
• If the relationship is tending towards the *possible conflict* or *possible neglect* quadrants an emerging problem has been diagnosed and subsequent discussion may be required to explore its nature and appropriate responses.

• Over time the crosses would ideally move from the *appropriate support* quadrant to the *autonomy generation* quadrant

**Instructions**
Place an X on the chart to show how you currently perceive your own status – from dependent to autonomous – and your supervisor’s (or your past supervisor’s) supervisory style – from hands on to hands off. You can bring this to a meeting with your supervisor

At the meeting,
Each party takes the time to explain their rationale for the position of the X. the speaker should not be interrupted. Each should try to describe frankly their feelings about the supervisory relationship. Each should try to make positive comments as well as flag any issues of concern. The instrument need not be confined to holistic
level of overall performance. You and your supervisor may want to apply it to the various components of research training (publishing, writing development, career development). Questions to bear in mind include:

1. Is there a significant lack of agreement between the position of the supervisors X and that of the student?

2. Are our respective views of the relationship’s position appropriate for the stage of candidature?

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)

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'.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic</td>
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<td>2. It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students should decide which theoretical framework or methodology they wish to use</td>
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<td>3. The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student</td>
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<td>The supervisor should leave the development of the program of study to the student</td>
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<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>
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<td></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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<td>5. Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic</td>
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<td></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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<td>6. A warm, supportive relationship between supervisor and student is important for successful candidature</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A personal, supportive relationship is inadvisable because it may obstruct objectivity for both student and supervisor during candidature</td>
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<td>7. The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student</td>
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<td></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>
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<td></td>
<td>The student should work independently and not have to account for how and where time is spent</td>
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<td>9. The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support &amp; encouragement to the student</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Personal counselling and support are not the responsibility of the supervisor - students should look elsewhere</td>
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<td>10. The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track</td>
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<td>Students should submit drafts of work only when they want constructive criticism from the supervisor</td>
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<td>11. The supervisor should assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary</td>
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<td>The writing of the thesis should only ever be the student's own work</td>
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<td>12. The supervisor is responsible for decisions regarding the standard of the thesis</td>
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<td></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:
A UWA-based tool to facilitate discussion with your supervisors about the process of supervision
Negotiating the extent and nature of supervision

Looking 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.

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies/good_practice

(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.

(g) In conjunction with supervisors, candidates must make every effort to ensure that they fulfil all academic and administrative requirements promptly and satisfactorily.
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

**Exercise:** What techniques can you use to make the most effective use of your supervisors?
### Part 4. Starting Effectively

#### 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 attached list)

#### 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

#### Exercise.

Personal productivity checklist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a proper workplace in which to do my research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep my work environment neat, clean and orderly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use an orderly system to sort and plan my work before starting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use management tools such as a daily planner to keep myself on track</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always work from a “To Do” list prepared in advance of beginning a task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once I begin a task, I work steadily until it is complete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I handle each particular task only once</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always put things away after I am finished with them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an organised filing system that enable me to retrieve information quickly when I need it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Starting the dissertation early

Write and show as you go (this is “show and tell” not “hide and seek”)
Use a “draft” stamp to reduce the fear factor
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.
### 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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you checked out other theses in your field?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you developing a research question?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you developing hypotheses? Or, do you have an idea how your argument will work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a plan for analysing your data?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you know how to set up a template for your thesis using Word or other software?

Do this NOW. Start your thesis document today, both electronically and in hard copy.

Have you begun working on the project? What specific aims do you have for the work you are doing at the moment?

Do you have a strategic plan for completion of the research and your other commitments?

Have you negotiated arrangements about meetings with your supervisor?

Do you have a system for keeping your supervisor/s regularly updated on your progress?

Have you negotiated respective responsibilities with your supervisor/s?

For the next workshop, Print out the Research Proposal Forms. (http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/forms). Draft in answers to at least sections B and E, and draw up a draft timetable.

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!