A Guide for Psychology Postgraduates: Surviving Postgraduate Study

Edited by Emma Norris
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Published by the British Psychological Society, 2015.
It is my pleasure to introduce you to PsyPAG’s first ever book: commemorating our 30th Anniversary Conference. This is the result of a year-long process, originating from the idea of the PsyPAG Committee.

The aim of this book is to provide support to psychology postgraduate students throughout their studies. Although many general texts are available providing often PhD-specific support, we felt strongly that a psychology-specific resource for all postgraduate students was needed. We have designed this book to capture issues experienced within our discipline and to shed some light on new possibilities for you to pursue during your work. This book should be used as a go-to resource for common matters experienced during study. We hope it will also serve as a discussion point for postgraduate student groups, enabling common experiences to be openly shared.

This book consists of three main sections: research skills, social support and practical support. You will notice that the book is heavily weighted towards common debates, issues and advice for postgraduate study, rather than focused on research competencies. With an abundance of great-quality books, journals and training providing research support, we have chosen to focus mainly on issues related to the student experience. Articles are largely written by psychology postgraduates, for psychology postgraduates. However, we have also included a range of post-doctoral level authors, to provide a range of experience. We present a range of both newly-commissioned articles and recent past articles from our peer-reviewed journal, The Quarterly.

We hope you and your department find this book a useful resource. It is envisaged that this book will be updated with future editions as topics pertinent to psychology postgraduates evolve over time. Please see our website (www.psypag.co.uk) for more information on PsyPAG and for a digital copy of this book.

We would love to hear your thoughts. Please contact me at chair@psypag.co.uk, tweet @PsyPAG or contact PsyPAG on Facebook to let us know what you think.

Emma Norris
Editor
PsyPAG Chair 2015–2017
What is PsyPAG?

If this is the first time you have heard about PsyPAG, then I would like to wish you a warm welcome. PsyPAG (Psychology Postgraduates Affair Group) is a national organisation for all psychology postgraduates based at UK Institutions. PsyPAG has no official membership scheme: anyone involved in postgraduate psychology study at a UK institution or Practitioners-in-Training are automatically a member. We are funded by the Research Board of the British Psychological Society (BPS), with all of our work run on a voluntary basis by postgraduates for postgraduates. PsyPAG operates to provide support for psychology postgraduate students in the UK, act as a vehicle for communication between postgraduates, and to represent postgraduates within the BPS. We offer a range of events and support to students: including an Annual Conference, workshops, bursaries and awards. We also run a peer-reviewed journal, The Quarterly, which is distributed free of charge to all postgraduate psychology departments in the UK.

The PsyPAG committee includes representatives for each Sub-Division, Section and Branch within the BPS (see flowchart opposite). Their role is to represent postgraduate interests and problems within that part of the BPS. We also liaise with the Student Members Group of the BPS to raise awareness of postgraduate issues in the undergraduate community.
What can PsyPAG offer you?

The Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing opportunities, representation and support to all psychology postgraduates based in the UK. You assume automatic membership if you are enrolled on a relevant course, which is likely the case as you are reading this book. So, welcome!

If this is your first time hearing about PsyPAG, chances are you are unsure of what we are and what we actually do. Here we have provided a brief outline of how PsyPAG can benefit you during your time on this course, and how you can get involved!

**Representation**

*PsyPAG Representatives*

As a psychology postgraduate, it is essential that you are able to have your voice heard. Our committee of representatives allow you to do just this. They offer you a point of contact to raise any issues you feel are important as a student, and meet regularly to discuss the best solutions.

- A full list of representatives and contact details are available on our website.
- Any UK psychology postgraduate can apply.

**Peer-reviewed journal**

*The Quarterly*

PsyPAG run a postgraduate student publication that is circulated free to every psychology department in the UK. As the ‘publish or perish’ rhetoric in psychology prevails, submitting an article to *The Quarterly* can be a great opportunity for publication. There’s loads of interesting stuff from original research and expert interviews to top tips and reviews. We always welcome new submissions!

- Published in March, June, September and December.
- See website and @PsyPAGQuarterly or email quarterly@psypag.co.uk for more details.

**Mailing list**

*JiscMail*

Started by a PsyPAG alumnus, this mailing list is a great resource. You can use it to recruit participants, ask for methodological/statistical advice, find out about training opportunities and even job and studentship advertisements. The list offers a supportive platform for postgraduates across the UK.

- Subscribe at: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=psych-postgrads

**Bursaries**

Attending extra-curricular events can enrich your experience whilst studying at postgraduate level and add credit to your CV. Unfortunately this often comes at a price. We believe your ability to immerse yourself in the world of psychology shouldn’t depend on whether or not you can afford to, so our PsyPAG bursaries are there to offer help towards related expenses.

*Research Grant (up to £300)*

This can go towards any research-related expenses, such as participant cash incentives and personal travel costs.
What can PsyPAG offer you?

Conferences (Domestic and International)
Conferences are often an expensive endeavour when you consider the travel, accommodation and registration involved. Domestic conference bursaries available up to £100; International up to £300.

Travel (up to £50)
This can go towards any travel expense for attendance at professional development events.

Workshops and Training (up to £100)
Registration and travel costs at professional development courses/events can often be high. This bursary can go towards any expenses such undertakings might entail.

Study visits (up to £200)
For travel, accommodation and other associated expenses.

The annual application deadlines are:
- 10 October
- 10 February
- 10 June

Awards
PsyPAG Awards
Undertaking a postgraduate course is no mean feat, and we believe you should be rewarded for your hard work! PsyPAG offers three awards, which would be a great addition to your CV.

Rising Researcher Award
This is to recognise outstanding early PhD research. Win £100 and receive an invitation to present at the annual PsyPAG conference (expenses covered up to £150).

Master’s Award
This is for an outstanding Master’s level research project upon completion. Win £100 and an invitation to present at the annual conference (expenses covered to £150).

DART-P Teaching Award
For DART-P members undertaking teaching roles and aspire to a career in academia. Win £150, a one-year DART-P subscription and a teaching-related textbook. Application forms and further information are available on our website

Networking
PsyPAG Annual Conference
Attending conferences is an excellent way to network; however, it can be a daunting prospect to go alongside hundreds of longstanding professionals. This is why PsyPAG host a yearly conference especially for postgraduate students every July. It provides a safe space to share your research work through presentations and posters and discover the most up and coming research from fellow students across the UK. Attendees have reported make friendships for life at the conferences and thoroughly enjoy sharing their postgraduate experiences. Plus you will likely be rubbing shoulders with the future of leading psychology researchers! More details are available on our website.
Professional development

Workshops and Training

Professional development is vital to enhance your studies and your CV, but it is not always easy to access the skills training you’d like the most. Recognising this, PsyPAG have a workshop budget set aside each year for you to organise tailored events that are guaranteed to benefit you. Previous workshops have provided guidance on Matlab, Communication Skills for Motivational Speakers, Teaching Skills, and many others. Annual application deadlines are:

● 1 October
● 1 February
● 1 June

Social Media

Follow us online for more information, tips and advice!

● facebook.com/PsyPAG
● @PsyPAG
● www.psypag.co.uk

Jessica Littlefair

North East Branch Representative and News Officer.
Part I: Research Skills
Why do we need systematic reviews?
Before we begin to design a new research study, it is important that we have a clear idea of what already exists in the literature so that we can improve on previous research designs and identify niches to explore further. Studies should be interpreted and understood in the context of other studies that have tested similar hypotheses and similar populations (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Generally, reviews can offer an overview of existing evidence but it should be recognised that they can also be biased. Traditional reviews, written in a ‘journalistic’ style, are particularly at risk of this (Greenhalgh, 2010). These narrative review types tend to be subjective, in that they only reflect the opinions of the reviewer; hence they are unlikely to be reproducible (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD), 2009). On the contrary, systematic reviews are ‘conducted to explicit, transparent and reproducible method’ to minimise bias (Greenhalgh, 2010, p.113).

As a PhD student, you might be required to conduct a systematic review as one of the first steps of your research. Alternatively, your PhD may be similar to mine in that a systematic review is the main component of your doctoral research. Conducting a systematic review can be a large and complex task, as there are numerous decisions that the reviewer(s) needs to make. This can be particularly daunting if you have no or limited experience of systematic reviewing. I am currently halfway through my review and there are certainly things which I wish I knew about before starting. The aim of this article is to outline the stages of carrying out a systematic review and share some tips which may be useful to fellow postgraduate systematic reviewers, based on my personal experiences. Given that I am only halfway through my review, the present article will focus on the development of a systematic review protocol.

Writing a systematic review protocol
Why is it important?
One of the first tasks I undertook as part of my PhD was to write a systematic review protocol. Having a detailed protocol before starting the systematic review process is important for several reasons: First, a key advantage of systematic reviews is that it is conducted through transparent and reproducible methods. Therefore, it is important to have pre-specified inclusion/exclusion criteria and methods of identifying, appraising, analysing and synthesising data from the outset. This will create a structured framework for the review. Second, as a PhD researcher, you are likely to be the one who primarily works on the review. However, particularly for larger reviews (such as mine which includes approximately 250 studies), you might have other researchers working on the review. A protocol will ensure that everyone on the research team is clear on their role in the review and the tasks they need to undertake.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria
I started my protocol with a literature review to help develop a critical understanding of the existing literature. This will help you to determine whether a systematic review is warranted and why it is needed, and aid the development of clear research questions/aims. This could
also be achieved through more systematic means by conducting a ‘scoping review’ which uses explicit search strategy (discussed later on) to identify how much work has been done in a particular area. The next step is to specify the type of studies that your review will include and exclude. Inclusion/exclusion criteria will depend on what your review is on. In my case, I have set criteria relating to the design of the study, type of intervention, type of participants, and type of outcome measures. I found it helpful to look at similar previous systematic reviews to see what inclusion/exclusion criteria they had adopted.

**Literature search**

Once your inclusion/exclusion criteria have been decided, the next step is to plan how you are going to find these studies. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework suggests that identifying studies for review consists of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Moher et al., The PRISMA Group, 2010). In terms of the identification stage, studies can be identified through several avenues: expert consultation, hand-searching of relevant journals, backward- and forward-citation searching of the most relevant review papers, and grey literature and electronic database searching. You may decide to use all or only some of these sources but it is important to bear in mind that you have limited time to complete the review as part of a PhD, so feasibility needs to be considered.

Electronic database searching is probably the most common source for identifying relevant studies. To ensure that you capture as many relevant studies as you can, a detailed search strategy should be used. Appropriate search terms can be identified from previous similar reviews. For those conducting reviews that are health-related, ‘PICOS’ (Population, Intervention, Comparator, Outcomes, Study) might help you to turn your research question into a search strategy. If your university library has an information scientist, you might also want to consult them for advice. It should be noted that the search strategy needs to be adapted for different databases as the use of wildcard symbols and truncations will vary across databases.

Given that there are numerous databases available (e.g. MEDLINE and PsycINFO), it can be hard to decide how many and which ones to search. To tackle this, I searched different databases to see which were able to capture studies that had been included in previous similar reviews. This gave me an idea of their potential to capture relevant studies. Once again, when making these decisions, it is important to consider feasibility. The more databases that you search, the more citations your search will generate, and the longer the screening process will take.

Citations generated from searches should be exported into reference management software to facilitate management. Popular choices I have come across include Reference Manager and EndNote. I would also suggest exporting citations into Microsoft Excel so you have a spreadsheet to record which papers have been retained after title, abstract and full-text screening. Reasons for exclusion at each stage of the selection process can be documented in this spreadsheet. This information will need to be reported in the write-up of your systematic review. The number of papers obtained from your literature search and the number of studies you include into your review will differ as one study may have been published in several papers; so the spreadsheet will also useful for keeping track of these details.

**Screening**

The next stages outlined by PRISMA are screening, eligibility and inclusion. After duplicate citations have been removed, the screening process will consist of two stages: For initial screening, the titles and abstracts of the studies will be screened against the pre-specified inclusion/exclusion criteria. In the second part of the screening process, full-texts of the studies
Included from the initial screening stage will be screened. Some universities may not hold subscriptions required to access the journals needed to review. If this is the case, full-texts can be requested through inter-library loans. This can be a lengthy process so I would advise that you request these at the earliest opportunity, such as at the title and abstract screening stage. To ensure the reliability of literature selection, wherever possible, a proportion of the titles and abstracts, and full-texts, should be screened by a second independent researcher. As a ‘rule of thumb’, this might be 20 to 30 per cent (Schlosser, 2007), but should be decided amongst your research team. Differences should be resolved through discussion, and if agreement cannot be reached, a third researcher should be consulted. Statistical measures of agreement, such as kappa, should also be calculated as these can describe the degree to which assessments made by different authors are the same (Higgins & Green, 2011).

**Data extraction and quality assessment**
It is important to be clear on what information you want to extract from the studies you have found. This should be considered in relation to the aims of your review and planned analyses. Relevant information may relate to participants, intervention, outcome measures, and results/analysis. Besides this, you might also want to collect data related to methodological quality. Critically appraising included studies in a systematic review is important because not all studies are methodologically sound. For example, studies with lower samples tend to produce exaggerated estimates. Hence, when synthesising the results of the study, studies of higher methodological quality should be given more weight. There are different critical appraisal scales/checklists available for different research designs, so it is important to choose one that is relevant for the studies included in your review. For instance, if your review only includes randomised controlled trials, one option would be the Cochrane risk of bias assessment tool (Higgins & Green, 2011).

A data extraction form that captures all the relevant information should be developed and piloted on a handful of studies to see how well it fits your review. This is likely to be an iterative process in which you have to keep amending and testing until it is considered ready for finalisation.

**Plan of meta-analysis**
A systematic review does not have to include a quantitative synthesis but, should your studies permit you to do so, you could conduct a meta-analysis – a ‘statistical technique used to combine the results of two or more studies and obtain a combined estimate of effect’ (CRD, 2009, p.268). As data is pooled across studies, power is increased, so there is greater accuracy and precision of estimates. A meta-analysis may not be possible if the included studies are too heterogeneous. This means there is too much variability or differences between studies to warrant pooling these studies together. These differences could be in terms of statistical, methodological or clinical heterogeneity (CRD, 2009). It would therefore make little sense to compare these different studies, as it would essentially be comparing apples to oranges. If you do conduct a meta-analysis, you might also want to conduct sensitivity analyses to see if results differ when you include/exclude certain studies. For example, in my review, I will be exploring whether my results differ when only objective measures of physical activity behaviour are included. If your review is qualitative, you would conduct a meta-synthesis rather than a meta-analysis.
Final thoughts

Overall, conducting a systematic review is not an easy task but could be made easier by developing a thorough protocol in which each stage of the review process is planned in detail before the reviewing commences. The protocol is likely to undergo many rounds of amendments, and although it should be avoided wherever possible, it may still need modifying even when the review has started. Systematic reviewing is simply not straight-forward. For instance, one may encounter studies which do not fit any of the pre-specified criteria, so the criteria will need to be amended.

One last piece of advice I would give to those considering doing a systematic review would be to undertake some systematic review training. I completed the Introduction to Systematic Reviews and Critical Appraisal course run by the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York, which I found to be very helpful. Other courses I had come across include the ScHARR Systematic Reviews Course: Practical Skills for Undertaking Reviews, at the University of Sheffield. With the range of courses available, I am certain that one can find a course that suited to the needs of their particular review.

To conclude, despite being a complex task, I am confident that anyone can achieve an in-depth insight and understanding of their subject area through conducting a systematic review, and hopefully advance knowledge in their area of research.

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References


On a date with secondary data: 
Things you should know before asking someone else's data out
Patrycja J. Piotrowska

*Secondary data can be a quick, useful way of testing hypotheses. This article provides advice on how to access secondary data and popular misconceptions about its use.*

**What do we mean by ‘secondary data’?**
This term refers to already existing datasets that were either collected by someone else or for a different purpose. Secondary data analysis is a practice encouraged by many research councils and other research funding bodies which have been actively advocating the re-use of already existing datasets. For example, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) introduced the Secondary Data Analyses Initiative which aims to deliver high impact policy through deeper exploitation of existing data resources. This £10.8 million initiative started in 2012, and the second phase has opened in 2013 inviting proposals for innovative and creative projects of up to £200,000 each (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/).

Many datasets are freely accessible to researchers via data archives and repositories (you simply need to register!) and can also be requested from local experts, international institutions and charities working in the area of interest.

The UK has an incredible collection of datasets such as the world-leading cohort studies (e.g. Millennium Cohort Study, www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/mcs), Census datasets (www.census.ac.uk) and other longitudinal studies (e.g. Scottish Longitudinal Study, www.lscs.ac.uk/sls/). There is relatively little qualitative secondary data; the two main resources are: Timescapes – a longitudinal study of the relationships with significant others (www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk) and Qualidata (www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/).

**Popular misconceptions about secondary data analysis**

‘Saves time collecting your own data’
Although secondary data analysis may be time- and cost-effective, the time needed to evaluate and prepare a dataset is often underestimated. It depends on the scale and quality of the dataset as well as specificity of the research topic, but it may take from a couple of weeks of intense work to many months of preparation and data cleaning.

‘You can always find some significant results’
Datasets available are often very large and as such have a lot of power in estimating the strength of relationships with reasonable precision; however, they also have good power to estimate significance. Due to the risk of cherry-picking of variables or trawling data for significant relationships, many repositories require researchers to present the social case and rationale for their project before any data are revealed to them. This emphasises the importance of having clear research questions before approaching the data. The choice of dataset must be directed by a research question, and the appropriateness of the dataset to answer this question.
'A monkey could do it’
More often than not, analysing large-scale secondary datasets requires advanced statistical and analytical skills as well as thorough understanding of the chosen dataset. Large dataset collections always involve experts and professionals in the area which often results in sophisticated sampling and weighting techniques. Some funding bodies offer specialist workshops to help researchers familiarise themselves with chosen dataset and advanced statistical techniques (e.g. ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, www.ncrm.ac.uk/).

‘I’m in control of my research project’
Although a project is based on your own research questions and ideas it is also heavily dependent on the data available. When working with a dataset someone else collected, not all the information you would have liked may have been included or questions may have been asked in a different way to what you would have preferred. As a researcher you lose the chance to choose your own measures and may find yourself working with the data you have, not the one you wish had been collected.

Not all that bad…
Despite quite a few not so positive things you should consider before starting your journey with secondary data, there are numerous advantages of this endeavour.

High-impact output
Large-scale projects are often more easily generalisable due to the breadth and type of the data. They are also a unique tool to study questions that you could not possibly address with primary data such as time trend analyses which require comparable cohort studies, life course development, or behavioural genetics studies based on twin or adoption designs; this could not be done from scratch as a single research project within one research team.

Self-development
As with any research project, use of secondary data will require you to learn new techniques and methodologies; it will also help you develop resilience as the volume of data is often quite overwhelming and cleaning procedures daunting (but extremely important too!). It will also increase your awareness of the importance of high-quality data management (there is nothing like the joy of figuring out how the data were coded or why the same coding scheme was not applied to the whole sample).

Networking
Due to the multidisciplinary nature of many datasets, you may find yourself working alongside researchers from other departments such as economists or statisticians. This enhances new cross-disciplinary collaborations and helps create knowledge exchange environment.

Funding
With the existing and upcoming secondary data initiatives and the UK’s largest national birth cohort study – Life Study around the corner (www.lifestudy.ac.uk/), many funding bodies happily welcome proposals involving the re-use of existing datasets (e.g. Nuffield Foundation, www.nuffieldfoundation.org)
Employability
Abilities to perform and relay complex statistical procedures as well as analyse large-scale datasets are increasingly desired by many employers, not only within research but also commercial services.

Go and find an interesting dataset!
Secondary data analyses are important for research integrity and the future of many disciplines. One day you may also be asked to share your data (which will surely increase the number of citations for your own research). With that in mind, it is always useful to have a clear and accurate data management plan in place.

There are many pros and cons of secondary data analyses, but being aware of them is the first step to making an informed decision whether one wants to get involved in secondary data projects. The key, not only to success but also to ensuring you make the most of all the opportunities offered by secondary data, is to stay extremely focused on your goals and research questions, choose a high-quality dataset, and remember that while it is not going to be easy, it will be worthwhile.

Useful resources
Economic and Social Data Service
www.esds.ac.uk/
UK Data Archive
www.data-archive.ac.uk/
ESRC Research Catalogue
www.esrc.ac.uk/impacts-and-findings/research-catalogue/index.aspx
Office for National Statistics
www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html
HM Government
www.data.gov.uk
World Health Organisation
www.who.int/research/en/
Social Data Sources (US)
www.socialdata.info/
Census (US)
www.census.gov/

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Schools-based research: Hints and tips for successful data collection in schools

Michelle Jayman & Kate Rix

Both primary and secondary schools are a popular site for postgraduate research, with projects possible across educational, clinical and health psychology. This can be incredibly enjoyable but challenging. This article discusses some personal insights, experiences and top tips for researchers collecting data in schools. We hope that this will be useful for you. Some additional resources you may want to look at are Christensen and James’ (2008) very useful book on conducting research with children and Midford, McBride and Farrington’s (2000) paper on retaining a large sample of schools.

Collecting data in schools can be a rich and rewarding experience. Engaging children and young people in the world of research is undoubtedly exciting and worthwhile but can be a challenging and sometimes frustrating process. By developing a tactical approach and anticipating some of the potential pitfalls, the prospect of embarking on schools-based research can appear much less daunting. Schools come in all shapes and sizes, with diverse communities and cultures and recognising this uniqueness is a valuable first lesson. For those readers new to data collection in schools this article provides some personal insights and experiences gleaned from both primary and secondary schools' research and will hopefully offer some helpful hints and tips to guide you through your research journey. For the more seasoned researcher, we anticipate that much of which we describe is reminiscent of your own experience, however, we hope you will still enjoy the article with the extra benefit of hindsight!

Tip number 1: Be persistent (with the right people!)
As with all areas of research, finding willing participants is the first challenge. Schools are incredibly busy places and an added complexity is fathoming who you need to approach in the first place. Knowing who is most likely to understand and support your research in school is the first step to securing participation. Whilst an initial email is a useful introduction, follow-up telephone calls and face-to-face meetings are essential components of the recruitment protocol. Although the head teacher is the ultimate gatekeeper of school data and is the one who will authorise consent, they may not be the first person you approach or eventually meet with in person. School websites can be a very useful first point of access to information on who’s who and to find the most likely person to champion your research idea. Also consider contacting other agencies that might help you link with schools, such as educational psychologists or healthy schools’ co-ordinators. A way of recognising the school’s support and also a useful tool for encouraging their participation is to offer a summary report of results for both school staff and parents/guardians (see Tip 4!). The good news is that there are plenty of schools out there willing to offer support and allow researchers access to work with their students. So it is definitely worth being persistent!

Tip number 2: Plan meticulously: the when and the where
One of the greatest challenges for any researcher is time and one way to counteract the deleterious effects of this essential resource diminishing is to be a meticulous planner. Gantt charts are a great way to help you to organise your time and can be easily created using Excel (Office Tool Tips, 2015). Organising your research schedule to accommodate the hectic school calendar can be a logistical minefield, navigating through inset days, trips, exams, concerts and
a whole host of other competing activities. There are definite points in the school year to avoid and in general spring term (January to Easter) seems to offer the best opportunity to get into the classroom. You will need to be flexible and requesting a copy of the school calendar will help you plan your time in school more effectively as not everyone will think to mention these things to you! Think about the practicalities of the school day and check the basics such as when the day starts and ends, as this may vary from school to school. Also, find out in advance what a typical day looks like and if there are any particular times when it is not convenient or possible to collect data – assembly, break times or during particular core lessons – again different schools may have different policies so don’t assume one rule for all. You can be quite creative with your time if different year groups or classes have different break times. If you are planning on going back to see the same children at a later date, check whether they change classes as they move between school years, as this may raise some points that need to be considered.

It is equally important to consider and agree with schools about where you will collect your data. For most schools space is limited and therefore finding a suitable location where you can work and collect your data may pose another challenge. It is imperative that you are flexible and willing to move around but be clear about what is an appropriate space to suit your needs and those of your participants. Once you have agreed a schedule it’s worth calling or sending a quick email reminder a few days before your visit. This helps ensure proper arrangements are in place and moreover, everyone is expecting you!

**Tip number 3: Be clear from the outset**

Always present your research proposal and objectives clearly and succinctly to school staff. Although you may be very excited about the intricacies of your design and the virtues of its philosophical underpinnings, your audience in school will want you to cut to the chase. Explain simply what you will be doing and identify the benefits of your work. During face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations, being able to summarise your project in five minutes allows you to focus on the practical elements of your data collection: what you need; from whom; by when. The same holds true for any written communication and remember – strictly avoid research jargon! You may also find it useful to be clear with the schools and staff about your role. This may include being introduced by your first name (which is encouraged to establish a good rapport with children – see Tip 5!), and how long you will be taking children from class for, and what you need from them.

You also need to be clear about the school’s policies and procedures which you must adhere to whilst you are on site, including practices for signing in and out and emergency protocols. If in doubt, ask. Specific policies might be of particular relevance to your area of research, for example, the anti-bullying policy and most documents are easily downloadable from school websites. Most importantly, make sure you have your Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check with you on your first day, so the school can make a copy for their records.

**Tip number 4: Agree a research agenda and contract**

This will save you a great deal of time and effort in the long run. Once a school has agreed to participate in your research the temptation to jump straight in with data collection can be overwhelming. However, it is well worth producing a short, simple contract, clearly stipulating the commitment you expect from the school in terms of access to participants and the data you propose to collect, within a specific timeframe. Breaking things down into key activities and summarising them in a table, along with proposed completion dates, can really help to keep things on track. This is particularly useful when the research extends over several months as your contacts in school may change. Equally so, you need to be explicit about what the school can expect from you in terms of feedback and any reports you will provide on completion of
the study. It is much better to have this agreed early on, thus avoiding any confusion or ambiguity later on. A summary report of your findings made available to staff, governors and parent/carers is very useful for schools and you may be asked to write a document for a particular purpose, for example an Ofsted inspection. A professional approach precipitates smoother data collection and a positive experience will help strengthen links to schools – a great benefit for future research purposes!

Tip number 5: Build a good rapport with your participants
Working with children and young people can be fun and rewarding and is the most enjoyable aspect of collecting data in school. It is well worth investing the time to build a good rapport with pupils and to help them understand that you are not a teacher or authority figure. This is particularly important in areas of social development such as studies of bullying or behaviour as pupils may feel more able to speak honestly with you. Depending on the nature of your project you may have the opportunity to spend time in class with your participants, getting to know them and engaging in typical classroom activities prior to any data collection. This enables you to develop a good relationship with the students in your study and helps them to feel safe and more comfortable answering questions (and can also be great fun!).

Establishing a good rapport with your participants is, of course, essential regardless of your research design. If you are only meeting them for a short time you will find that children and young people are generally curious and are keen if you have something interesting to say. At the beginning of your project it is helpful to speak to the pupils about the research (in age appropriate language and detail): what it is about, why you are doing it and what you hope to do with the findings, and be prepared to answer any questions. You should also explain if you are returning at a later stage and why, so everyone knows what to expect. Remember you are a fresh face in school, so use this to your advantage to make a good impression!

It is also important to ensure that parents/guardians feel informed about the research and that they have had the opportunity to ask any questions. A detailed but concise letter to parents/guardians that puts their mind at ease about the research is important for recruitment of child participants. Be persistent with these too – send reminders if necessary and a letter of support from the school head teacher is an invaluable way of encouraging parents/guardians to read the letters and return forms as necessary. Being willing to meet and talk to parents can also help to encourage their willingness to let their child participate!

Tip number 6: Be enthusiastic!
Keeping children and young people enthused and engaged during research collection requires a lot of energy! They will pick up on you feeling tired, so keep a smile on your face and remember that whilst this may be the 100th time you are asking each question, it is the first time they have heard it. As with all ethical procedures, remind them that they do not have to take part and can stop at any point, and let them do this if they say they want to, but give them the opportunity to take part at a later time. Don’t forget the practical things, especially with younger children – remind them to let you know if they need to go to the toilet! Children and young people love to be helpful. Particularly with younger children, be prepared to feel like the most popular person in the world and to hear cries of ‘Can I go next?’ , ‘Can I go again?’ , ‘Is it me now?’ ‘Are you working in my class?’ Embrace this and ensure you are as equally enthusiastic.

Tip number 7: Maintain a good relationship with schools
Data collection in schools can extend over several months and over the course of your project it is important to maintain a good relationship with everyone involved in supporting your
study. This includes showing your appreciation of how helpful schools have been in allowing you to conduct your research. Moreover, whilst good communication is a key issue within any research situation, operating within a large organisation makes this imperative.

In primary schools, take the time to speak to the class teachers and teaching assistants about your work. They often show genuine interest and are normally willing to help in whatever way they can – just remember that they are busy and you will need to be flexible and work around them if you require their input in your data collection.

One of the biggest challenges of collecting data in secondary schools is the sheer size and complexity of them. As students in secondary schools have several subject teachers rather than one class teacher communicating with staff is often indirect (via the head of year or pastoral manager). If this is the situation for you, remember whoever is requesting information on your behalf will have a multitude of other things on their to-do-list and your data collection is unlikely to be the highest priority, so you need patience! If however, you are getting seriously behind schedule and a gentle reminder is needed, it can be helpful to have reference to your contract.

Tip number 8: Raise the profile of your research in school
Another challenge which arises from conducting research in schools is that in such sizeable communities, with so much going on, it can be hard to get noticed. You may, however, get permission to distribute flyers and arrange for posters to be put up about your research which is a great bonus, especially if you are looking to recruit additional participants. Another option which can be hugely successful is to host an information event at the school for parents and staff. This provides a great opportunity to raise awareness about your project and to answer any questions or address any concerns. A further useful way of publicising your research is to write a short article about it for the school newsletter. This will bring your research to a much wider audience within the school community.

Tip number 9: Appreciate everyone’s contribution and give feedback
Without the commitment, engagement and support of staff and students alike, it would not be possible to conduct current, informed and pertinent research in schools. This vital contribution should be acknowledged and appreciated throughout the research process. It is good practice to provide feedback to schools at the end of the data collection period and written reports can be shown to parents and governors or can sometimes be included as evidence for Ofsted. Individual school reports with a summary of key findings are always well received and can be sent with a letter thanking staff and students for their involvement at the end of a project.

For younger participants, particularly those of infant school age, stickers are like gold! Have plenty with you and be prepared for some indecisiveness if you allow children to choose which one they would like at the end of your research. They will be genuinely excited to receive a sticker and it’s a wonderful way to say thank you to them for taking part. It is also an appreciative gesture to refer to the schools and children who participated in your acknowledgments (anonymously of course!)

Tip number 10: Reflect and learn
Despite the best laid plans there will always be circumstances beyond your control that result in fewer participants than you originally anticipated. Attrition is the unwelcome bedfellow of real-world research in schools. If it happens to you, look at the situation as a temporary set-back and stay optimistic. Hopefully, earlier in the research process (remember that meticulous planning stage?) you allowed for some slack to extend your period of data collection. Although you
may anticipate some of the challenges associated with collecting data in schools you are likely to encounter some new ones. The same advice holds true for any hindrance – don’t panic! One important lesson is to be adaptable; every school is unique and has its own way of doing things. Taking time to understand the culture and identify which processes work best can help to smooth the sometimes rocky road of conducting research in schools.

A final thought…
The opportunity to engage with the world in a vibrant environment beyond the laboratory is one of the delights of school-based psychological research. As anyone working in schools will attest, every day is different and every pupil unique. As you discover the challenges and excitement of carrying out research in schools we hope you find the experience as enlightening and rewarding as we did – and don’t forget to enjoy yourself along the way! You will look back with fond memories – even for moments that seem somewhat challenging at the time.

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Article first published as two separate articles in PsyPAG Quarterly:
Recruiting a clinical population
Martin K. Toye

The recruitment of clinical populations can be an important feature of postgraduate psychological research. This article outlines the challenges and strategies to be aware of when embarking on such work.

As a PhD student working between the fields of clinical and developmental psychology, I met and discussed my research with a wide range of colleagues in these fields. My PhD involved a clinical population of participants, which I recruited through the NHS. I held honorary contracts with two NHS Health Boards (trusts) and was chief investigator on a NHS Research Scotland (NRS) registered project in a pediatric outpatients (CAMHS) department as part of my PhD.

My research explores the relationship between children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and their involvement in accidents that result in death or serious injury. In Britain, traffic accidents now account for more child deaths in those aged 1 to 18 years than the next 20 causes of death combined and retain a seemingly permanent position in the top 10 causes of death in the World Health Organization’s global burden of disease (WHO, 2008). There have been recent calls by the British government for research to be undertaken to address this issue and to provide an evidence base for the best way to improve accident trends for children with behavioural disorders, particularly those with ADHD (Scottish Government, 2011; Transport Select Committee, 2007). This is just one of countless domains in which the recruitment of children with ADHD and other developmental disorders is essential to improve life expectancy, quality of life and other outcomes for vulnerable members of society.

The difficulties of recruiting specialist (clinical) populations are well known, but the solutions are less so. As an early career researcher beginning this process, there were few resources or sources of encouragement out there that I was able to find. This article aims to demonstrate the difficulties of recruiting specialist groups to take part in research and the difficulties of doing so via the NHS, through my own experience of recruiting children with ADHD during my PhD. It aims to reassure those beginning this process that they are not alone in facing these difficulties, and with a little hard work, it can be done.

Challenges with recruitment and sampling
The intrusive and delicate nature of negotiating a clinical research project is perhaps exacerbated when projects target specialist patient groups such as, in my case, those with developmental disorders. This is perhaps more challenging still when attempting to recruit children, as it necessitates engagement and co-operation from both children and their parents/guardians.

The avenues through which specialist participant groups can be recruited are also much more limited than is the case when recruiting from the general population. One option favoured by many is approaching charity organisations or peer groups that support the population you wish to sample. However, this limits the scope for the collection of formal diagnostic and clinical data (such as comorbid diagnoses, information about symptoms and their severity as well as clinical information about other aspects of health and functioning such as growth and social/emotional development). Recruiting via charity and support organisations means all of this information (some of which patients may not actually be aware of or remember) will

A Guide for Psychology Postgraduates: Surviving Postgraduate Study
be entirely self-report. Therefore, datasets might lack sufficient detail or credibility to adequately characterise the sample for publication in clinical or medical journals.

Another option, in the case of specialist groups of children, is to recruit via schools. However, the limited training education professionals receive about health conditions and disorders (which quite understandably limits their awareness of the symptoms) make it difficult to identify participants through school-based approaches. Indeed, the diagnostic process for the majority of psychological disorders is rooted firmly in clinical settings and is usually carried out by psychiatrists and clinical psychologists rather than by educational psychologists. Even when schools are able to identify potential participants, many educational psychologists and specialist teachers will have limited knowledge of or access to children’s diagnostic history. They may therefore also be limited in their ability to inform researchers about formal diagnoses and other key facts typically required for the publication of research with specialist populations. These two paragraphs could be made more succinct.

Consequently, in order to access accurate clinical, diagnostic and treatment information (something particularly important for studies involving populations which are treated pharmacologically), one must often recruit participant groups via the NHS, which poses a range of additional challenges.

NHS ethics
The lengthy and complex acquisition of NHS ethical and research and development approvals can be extremely time consuming and is no easy task, often requiring months of work to obtain. In order to even submit these applications for consideration, academics must identify and recruit suitable clinical collaborators, acquire site approvals for the locations in which studies will be conducted, and in most cases, will need to negotiate NHS clinic and room timetables as well as other NHS resources required for the completion of projects. Part of this process requires the NHS to cost the time commitment for your clinical collaborator. In my experience this can be minimal, perhaps only requiring one hour per month. Balanced with the benefits to the field your research can offer, you should try to argue this is a small price to pay indeed.

As well as ethical approval, you will likely be required to obtain NHS research and development (R&D) approval. In comparison to obtaining ethical approval, this process was much simpler in my experience. If you are not funded by/employed by an NHS trust/health board, this process involves negotiating your honorary contract for which you (and your supervisor) will need to submit a two-page CV, even if you have previously worked in the NHS.

In Scotland, if your research will be conducted in more than one centre, you will also be required to obtain NRS approval. Try not to be put off doing this from the beginning if you are unsure of the extra work this final step may require. In my experience, this was the least arduous part of the process; so persevere with this final step necessary to include multiple sites (hospitals/clinics in different trust/health board areas) to boost recruitment if the opportunity presents itself.

The very thought of the NHS ethics process is daunting to many academics (even the very experienced) and was something I was advised by many to avoid attempting to navigate during the course of my PhD. In hindsight, I understand well the reasons for this advice, but having successfully survived and completed the process of obtaining NHS ethical approval I have found the experience extremely beneficial. It is one I am grateful to have completed during my PhD, as I now feel confident to pursue this approach to recruitment in the future.
Beyond ethics and recruitment: DNAs and drop out

Once a means by which one can access a specialist sample of participants has been identified, there are no guarantees that those who initially express interest in taking part will either be suitable to participate or eventually form part of your sample for a range of clinical and ethical reasons. For example, you may well have to exclude a high number of potential participants due to comorbidities. The need to include comorbidities in exclusion criteria of course will depend on the aims of individual studies, but this is a particular problem for studies investigating developmental disorders such as ADHD, given the highly comorbid nature of the disorder (Gillberg et al., 2004). Moreover, anyone working in the NHS will dread the term ‘DNA’ far more than your average biology student. A ‘DNA’ (or ‘Did Not Attend’) can result in both a significant loss of time for researchers and in the wastage of NHS resources through unnecessary room-bookings. In my experience, this was particularly common in recruiting children with ADHD.

For those studying the effects of medication, or for those studying longitudinal development, another range of potential problems may present in terms of participant dropout. Indeed, the majority of clinical trials by their very nature are at least to some extent longitudinal (in that they usually require more than one testing session to ascertain success of treatment). I found this particularly problematic, as many children who start taking medication to treat ADHD discontinue or change treatment within the first year post-titration (Barner, Khoza & Oladapo, 2010). This causes significant problems for clinical trials and medication studies. Beyond dropout for medical reasons, participants may simply choose not to participate in follow-up research, which impedes the evidence base for the long-term use of the very medication they may be taking. Many participants will associate visiting an NHS site with being unwell or being assessed or tested. A consequence is they may fear or feel negatively towards attending.

Whilst planning your research, try to ensure testing sessions are not too time consuming. If multiple testing sessions are required, try to make testing sessions as short as possible, particularly in the first instance so as not to put participants off. In my experience such measures, reduced the likelihood of dropout.

For those interested in studying the effects of medication on cognition, a wide range of additional ethical and experimental difficulties present. For example, identifying a medication naïve sample can be extremely time-sensitive. This will require you to make yourself available to meet participants between the window of participants receiving their diagnosis/first prescription and collecting this prescription from a pharmacy. Alternatively, ensuring children do not take their medication for a designated period (usually 24 hours) prior to participation in research can also be difficult. The ethical implications of asking children to discontinue medication for research are vast and can be difficult to justify. It can also be difficult to encourage participants to agree to this. Approaches to recording this in an empirical way can also be challenging and is something you should have a clear process for requesting and recoding detailed in your ethics application.

Defining samples: Comorbidities and diagnostic information

As has been touched upon above, many patients diagnosed with one disorder are also diagnosed with another. In my experience this was particularly common with ADHD in terms of other common disorders, including Autism Spectrum Disorders and Williams Syndrome (Gillberg et al., 2004). Beyond the potential issues for recruitment, the presence of comorbid diagnoses presents additional implications in terms of recording and reporting these comorbidities in order to accurately define and describe samples.
Accessing diagnostic information about comorbid diagnoses can be as challenging as recording specific data for children with single diagnoses. Recording information about both of these factors is imperative for research to be meaningful and interpretable. It is essential for research purporting to investigate a single developmental disorder to provide statistical information about diagnosis of the disorder being studied and the broader profile of the sample being reported in terms of comorbidities and medical history. Gaining this information is no easy task. Indeed, locating a child’s medical records and extracting the necessary information from notes is a mammoth and time-consuming task (which in my opinion almost warrants recognition as a whole study in itself!).

The difficulty of recruiting a control group
My PhD has highlighted the difficulties (which I hadn’t anticipated) of recruiting a control group for studies which investigate a specific group. In my experience, despite ADHD being one of the most frequently diagnosed and commonly discussed disorders, recruiting control children in mainstream schools for an ADHD study has proved surprisingly difficult. I have conducted a number of developmental studies as part of my PhD. In contrast, I have found it much more difficult to recruit children to become part of a control group for my ADHD studies than was the case for my studies focusing on neurotypical children. Perhaps negative attitudes about developmental disorders are off-putting for participants, or perhaps the lack of direct relevance of a study focusing on a specialist population for those without this disorder means families fail to recognise the value of their participation as a control. Either way, recruiting a control group to take part in a study on a developmental disorder proved challenging for me. Beyond the challenges of recruitment, the issue of matching these participants to specialist population participants appropriately necessitates a significant workload to ensure suitable matches are made. This can require additional testing (such as the administration of a full-scale IQ) simply to identify whether or not control participants are suitable for comparison testing. The balance of time commitment and ethical implications of not excluding participants who volunteer to participate but are not eligible is also difficult to reconcile and is something to think about during the planning stage of your study.

Conclusion
In summary, conducting research with specific populations is no easy task. My experience of recruiting children with ADHD has been difficult not only in terms of accessing a clinical sample and identifying eligible participants, but also in terms of recruiting these participants; accessing diagnostic and clinical information from their medical notes; monitoring medication adherence; recruiting suitable controls and ensuring a reasonable retention rate at longitudinal follow-up. This article is not intended to be overly pessimistic or to put people off recruiting a specialist participant group via the NHS. Rather, it aims to highlight the fact these difficulties are common to everyone engaged in clinical research, regardless of their experience or stage of career. Importantly, it also hopes to show that they can be overcome. In the end, I managed to recruit a sample of 120 and managed to follow up 60 longitudinally, around 12 months later.

The hardship of recruiting specialist population groups can only be overcome if participants understand the value of research. One of my supervisors (Rhodes, 2010) wrote recently in *The Psychologist* outlining the two-way nature of the public’s perception of ADHD. Her argument extends to all specialist populations. Indeed, while many misperceptions of research and psychological disorders continue to exist, it is our responsibility as researchers to better inform public perception. I believe improvement of these perceptions can only be achieved through the perseverant conduct of research and the careful dissemination of our findings that exem-
plifies their value. Meaningful and high-impact research in this field requires us to ironically overcome the very problems with recruitment that our research may one day help to tackle. It is only if we strive to swerve the many hurdles experienced in relation to the recruitment of clinical populations that perceptions of research, participation rates and our subsequent understanding of these disorders be improved.

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References

Organising and formatting long documents
Whether you’re writing a Master’s, PhD thesis or any kind of report for that matter, there are many useful tricks on Word that can help you present it neatly.

- Check out the Youtube channel TransformatUK for lots of tips to format Microsoft Word documents: https://www.youtube.com/user/transformatuk
- Use referencing software: Endnote, Reference Manager and internet-based Zotero are all great places to start.
- For more specialised formatting, try the document preparation system LaTeX.
Part II: Social Support
The emotional side of carrying out a PhD
Kate Williams

Completing a PhD gives the opportunity to lead research projects but can be a challenging and isolating experience. This article provides first-hand reflections of the emotional elements of PhD study, with a range of tips to help.

Congratulations! You’ve succeeded the competition, passed the interview and you’re about to start working on your PhD in Psychology. PhD programmes are well known for being academically challenging but what about the more emotional side of carrying out a PhD? I’m currently in my second year of my PhD at the University of Manchester looking at the underlying mechanisms of how Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy works in Depression. What follows is some advice that I hope may come in useful during your PhD. It may also be useful for those of you carrying out other postgraduate programmes such as Master’s or Postgraduate diplomas despite my explicit reference to PhD study throughout. At best, I hope you won’t need the advice which follows. I hope you sail through with no need to take in any of it. However, reality tells me that this will not always be the case. PhD’s are challenging emotionally. Armed with this knowledge at the start of and throughout your PhD, there are ways in which you can ensure that you can comfortably and happily complete your programme.

Firstly, let me start by highlighting the wonderful aspects of doing a PhD. You have been given a rare opportunity to spend at least three years researching an area you are passionate about. Very few jobs allow people to say that. The PhD affords you an opportunity to immerse yourself in literature, design experiments, attend conferences to disseminate your findings and network, and hopefully publish your research helping you to become known in your field. Further, if you are fortunate enough to have funding then this can help take some pressure off of your financial outgoings. Your PhD will also bring variety as not every day will be the same. There will of course, as with any job, be days that become monotonous, but you have an opportunity to create your own working schedule and introduce variety into your day. Your PhD may also give you a sense of creativity; this is your project. You may develop a sense of mastery and control over your project. You will engage in critical and inspiring dialogue with colleagues. You will meet inspiring people. Finally, universities are also fantastic places to immerse yourself into University life, be it socially, extracurricular or through getting involved in undergraduate teaching. There are lots of activities and support available to help enrich your experience of the PhD. All this is great, but your experience may change over the course of your PhD.

In my first year, I came across psychologist Hugh Kearns who gave a talk at Manchester University describing a phenomenon known as ‘imposter syndrome’. His lunchtime talk was oversubscribed indicating that other students and academics had encountered something along these lines. Many highflyers in different professions have been known to say that despite their successes and achievements, they worry that somebody will discover that they are a fraud and that they do not deserve what they have (Clance & Imes, 1978). They may discount or attribute their success to pure luck. With a rational mind and some perspective, such thoughts may only be fleeting. However, these thoughts can become very real and debilitating for some. Imposter syndrome was first termed by two psychologists, Clance and Imes (1978), from a study of high-achieving women unable to internalise their successes and achievements, or even convince themselves that they do deserve success. Despite evidence suggesting capability and success, cognitions can become hard to alter. Imposter syndrome is more likely to affect
women (Kaplan, 2009), but men are not immune to it. In fact, one study suggested that the difference lies in women working harder to prove themselves, whilst men are more likely to avoid situations which may expose weaknesses (Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). Either way, imposter syndrome can be a very real phenomenon for many and may be worth keeping in mind, particularly if you are perfectionist or a high-flyer used to being at the top of your game. Imposter syndrome can be difficult to shift and some say it gets worse so it may be worth recognising if you have such tendencies and developing strategies to help in the future (see some suggested strategies at the end of this article).

Undoubtedly you will make mistakes during your PhD. You cannot know everything and you may at times start to question what you know or even how you got accepted onto your PhD, particularly if you are the type of student who is used to getting everything right… this will be where the imposter syndrome starts to kick in! However, one article suggests that embracing your ‘stupid’ side or the part of you that just does not know everything, is actually good for you and makes you a good scientist; embracing our stupidity helps push us into the unknown (Schwartz, 2008). Science could be said to be at its best when we can study something, get it wrong and learn from it, refine it and move on. This is research.

In previous academic endeavours you may have gained or boosted your feelings of self-worth through your academic successes. This will likely continue throughout your PhD as you have such a passion, time-dependent and emotional investment in your research. Keeping your research too close to your heart can be dangerous; if it goes well, you can feel great, boosted and more confident but if things don’t go quite to plan, you can feel you’ve failed as a person. It might sound dramatic, but these are not uncommon thoughts of a PhD student.

A PhD can be isolating. A PhD is a very different experience to your undergraduate or master’s degree which may have felt more social or more collaborative. Your PhD is very much your own work, your responsibility and you may find yourself working alone for a large proportion of the time. This may be daunting or feel overwhelming but there are ways to help manage this (see below). You are probably aware that a PhD can be stress-inducing. Stress is inevitable, a natural part of life and is a natural reaction for when you care about something (i.e. your research). Life will also happen over the next three to four years. It is important to take care of yourself and to seek help if you start to feel unwell or need extra support. It can also be useful to start to build some resilience to be able to manage whatever is happening alongside your PhD.

Finally, all the above is not to be taken lightly. There are PhD students who have experienced mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or stress (A University Blog, 2014). An academic programme should never make you feel this way and it is simply not worth it. If you ever find that it does or a colleague or friend becomes unwell, make sure you seek help and support from a supervisor, friend, relative, or other services such as the University Counselling Service. Carrying out research can provoke stress but stress may also result from the new feeling of independence and responsibility for your research, relationship with your supervisors, comparisons with other students/post-docs, or feeling in competition with others and yourself. It might not always be easy to remove such stress. In essence, unless you leave the PhD you cannot rest in the knowledge that you could leave at any moment as in a normal job – the feeling of being trapped can become quite encompassing! However, do not despair as there are strategies to put in place for coping with such feelings as much as possible:

**How to take care of yourself during your PhD**

Build your emotional resilience; a PhD will test this. A PhD has the potential to change you, affect your health, relationships and the way you think about the world. From the start, put into practice strategies to help manage the next few years. Start early and you will be better
equipped to manage better what comes your way. What follows are some of my suggested strategies that you can experiment with to see if they work for you.

1. **Treat your PhD like your job, if not mostly because it is.** Set working hours that work for you (e.g. 9 to 5, or 11 to 7). Establishing a daily structured routine will go a long way in helping you to be productive, keep you on track and help you to feel you are inputting the right amount into your work.

2. **Plan your time.** Spending an hour a week planning your day, week or month ahead can save hours of procrastination and can help you see how productive you are being (or not).

3. **Keep an eye on your work life balance.** This is crucial but not easy. By keeping a structured routine, you will benefit from a healthy work life balance. This may also help keep away any PhD guilt. If you know you have followed your planned structure or routine, you can enjoy a social lunch or night out.

4. **Try not to compare your progress to other students.** Every PhD is different and will go through different stages at different times. If another student is recruiting, attending a conference or writing up a paper, it does not mean they are necessarily better or further ahead than you. Every PhD and every student moves at different paces.

5. **Be honest with yourself.** Take your PhD in the direction you want to – at the end of the day it is your work. Do what is right for you and your career. Follow your gut instincts and seek advice to help with making decisions.

6. **Remember that researchers are trained to be critical.** You may be doing a presentation, talking about your research, or getting feedback on work. Try not to take it to heart if someone criticises your work. You are not your work. Your work is not a direct reflection of who you are as a human being.

7. **Meet with your advisor (if you have one), and make sure you can establish a good working relationship with them.** Take the time in the first year to meet with your advisor or find one if you do not have one. They are there for you so find one that you can relate to or can establish a good rapport with. You never know when you might need them.

8. **Embrace uncertainty as best you can.** This is a life skill whatever you do but this is one to start practising during your PhD.

9. **Take your annual leave.** I suggest you take at least four weeks off per year – you are entitled to it! It is important to take a break regularly and come back to your work refreshed. Check with your local University about their annual leave policies.

10. **Take up mindfulness.** Mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce stress, depression and can improve quality of life and wellbeing (Davis & Hayes, 2011). Mindfulness meditation, however, is not a quick fix so start it early on and commit to practising it.

11. **Read about Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).** There are fantastic books and manuals out there which contain great techniques for challenging any negative thinking patterns you may have or may start to develop.

12. **Exercise.** Walk, bike, run, take up yoga, join a gym or a running club, and get some fresh air (see Zhou in this book)! Apart from health benefits, the old cliché of the scientist pacing up and down the room whilst thinking may actually have some truth to it. Walking indoors or outdoors may help to boost creative thinking (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014). Taking the time to exercise will help you and your PhD.

13. **Hobbies and interests.** Whatever you did pre-PhD, keep doing them. If you didn’t do anything, pick up a hobby during your first year. There are plenty of University societies and clubs that you can join. You can also look at what clubs and societies exist outside of the University.

14. **Imposter syndrome.** Take a look at the evidence for how you got here. You did not get this far out of luck; you have earned your place on the PhD and you are here for a reason. Every now and then, check back in with the evidence.
15. **Talk to others.** Talk to people who are doing, or have completed, a PhD. Your family or other friends who work in different fields may not fully understand the unique pressures a PhD can put you under. Create a support network.

16. **Keep in mind that there is life outside of academia.** Think outside the box. In the midst of a PhD, it is easy to get lost in the idea of being a researcher and worrying about what happens post-PhD. It can be easy to think academia is the only thing important to you but move back and gain some perspective. Take some time to research other career options as you move through the PhD. Even if you decide academia is for you, at least you will have researched all available options.

17. **Regularly check back in with yourself.** Re-read this article or write a list in your first year of ways you plan to look after yourself. Check back in with it every now and then to see how the plan is going. Keep stock of feelings of self-doubt and self-criticism or perhaps keep a diary of how you feel during the PhD. If this isn’t a method for you, perhaps schedule a time to chat about it periodically with a fellow PhD student and use the time to check in on how your PhD is making you feel.

18. **Seek extra support.** If you feel you need extra support, make use of University counselling, support or researcher support services. Seeking out help is not a weakness; it takes strength to recognise when you need help. These services will normally be offered free of charge to you and should be easily accessible.

Make the most of your time during the PhD and enjoy the sense of mastery, control and pleasure that can accompany it. Bear in mind some of the more difficult times that may crop up remembering that you are not perfect and you are here to learn. It is OK not to know everything; recognising that you don’t know and cannot possibly know everything opens up doors for more learning and more absorbing of information. Admitting that you might not have all the answers but endeavouring to find out makes you a worthy researcher. There will be highs, but there will also be lows during the PhD but start early with taking care of yourself and that should help see you through. Good luck!

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Some useful, handy and sometimes humorous blogs or websites to keep you going:
http://thesiswhisperer.com/
http://phdcomics.com/comics.php
http://jameshaytonphd.com/everything/
http://www.placehacking.co.uk/2010/12/12/15-thoughts-phd-students/
http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/mar/20/phd-research-mental-health-tips
http://bemindful.co.uk/

References
http://tinyurl.com/nzuyjo9
The importance of peer support during the final stages of a PhD

Daniel Jolley, Alys Wyn Griffiths, Niamh Friel, Jannath Begum Ali & Katie Rix

This article offers a reflective account of five friends who supported each other during the final stages of their PhDs. Our supportive group, however, was unique: it was a virtual support group that relied on Whatsapp, Facebook and Skype. Using such online resources allowed five PhD students, based from Glasgow to Kent, to offer each other advice, guidance and friendship. The article recommends that instead of hiding yourself away during the final stages of thesis writing, you should reach out to peers around you for support. Our experiences highlight that this can be in person but can also be successful via the use of social media. Ultimately, this article, therefore, aims to highlight the benefits of our virtual peer support group and how it helped each of the authors at the end of their PhD journey.

It has been noted that the experience of completing a PhD can be isolating and leave individuals feeling ‘invisible’ (McAlpine & Norton, 2006), a factor that may influence doctoral attrition rates of up to 50 per cent (Lovitts, 2001). Yet there appears to be a lack of recognition regarding the importance and benefits of peer support when evaluating the PhD experience (Devenish et al., 2009). Peer support allows postgraduate students to teach and learn from each other, share experiences and most importantly, develop behaviours that are vital for careers in research, such as collaboration and self-reflection (Hortsmanshof & Conrad, 2003).

Bridging a gap in the literature, the aim of this article is to offer a reflective account of the importance of peer support throughout a PhD. Specifically, this is a story of five friends who helped support each other during the final stages of their PhDs.

To begin, we offer some background on our circumstances. Throughout the summer of 2014 each of us — Dan, Alys, Niamh, JJ and Katie — were in the final stages of our PhDs, specifically the ‘write up’ phase. Throughout the next few months each of us submitted our theses and defended them during a viva at different times. With each of us, therefore, at different stages of the journey, we were able to support each other as we hit similar problems. This type of network can typically be found within most universities, such as writing groups. These can be particularly successful in keeping you motivated with writing goals. There is also the classic network of postgraduate students that are based in offices around each other. The problem arises, however, when you come to the final stages of the PhD and stress of writing hits. At this time, you may leave University in search of full-time work. Even when this is not the case, it is possible that you may have to leave your desk or office. Sometimes there is space to ‘hot desk’, but on other occasions, this may not always be possible. It can, therefore, be easy to lose the network of people that you had grown close to. The success of our group however, is due to the fact that the support group is not restricted by physical location as in these typical support groups discussed. Instead, we have a virtual support network that encompasses a variety of social channels, namely Whatsapp, Facebook and Skype.

Utilising such a virtual group has several benefits, alongside the associated costs. The main cost, of course, is the fact that you are unable to be there physically and so unable to offer support in this way, such as a hug. The benefits, however, are particularly noteworthy. Having four other people at the end of phone can be a great comfort when you receive another round of comments on a draft of a chapter and you need someone, who is also going through it, to
say things are going to be OK. Moreover, as highlighted above, a lot of changes can occur at
the end of your PhD where you can lose the network of PhD students around you. This may
indeed be a reason why our virtual support group has been a success, as it formed at a time
when each of us was going through a transition phase for various reasons.

To offer a more personal perspective, each of the authors offer some reflective pointers on
the experience of our virtual peer support network. First is Dan, who was in the write up stage
of several PhD chapters when the group formed. He found the timing of the group perfect –
while dealing with some personal changes in his life, the support group offered advice and
friendship. At the beginning of summer Dan moved back to his family home for a short period
of time. This meant that he lost the daily support of other PhD students at his university,
meeting his supervisor face-to-face, and importantly, his office! It could have been quite easy
to lose motivation when everything around him had changed. However, as each member was
in a slightly different stage of the process, it was easier to remain motivated as we all saw others’
submit their thesis, and complete the viva: There is light at the end of the tunnel! It was also a
very beneficial way to learn what happens during this process – specifically, how your viva is
typically organised; the questions asked and more importantly, how to present yourself.

Writing up your PhD can be a very challenging time. You may struggle to keep focused, as
not having a job secured afterwards can cause worry. Then, when you do secure a job, your
writing time becomes your evenings and weekends – otherwise known as, your ‘free time’!
Having another four people all in similar positions to bounce off is fantastic. Moreover, with
each of us being based at different universities, stretched from Glasgow to Kent, but still being
able to feel supported, is also an amazing achievement in itself. Of course, a support group
does not need to just be online. Universities offer several alternatives, such as writing groups,
but while you may have the best intentions to finish bang on time, sometimes this does not
happen. So such an online group can be beneficial. If Dan had not had the support of this
group, when he moved back home away from his PhD surroundings, then subsequently
[thankfully] starting a full-time job, his write up experience would have been a drastically
different experience.

Similar to Dan’s, Alys’ experience wasn’t quite so simple in her final year. At the time of the
support group starting, Alys’ main supervisor had just begun maternity leave. This presented a
new challenge, as her second supervisor had moved to a university several hours away two years
previously. Alys also started a full-time job six months before her planned submission date and
was no longer at the university where she was completing her PhD. At a time that could have
felt quite isolating, the group provided advice on mundane things, such as referencing and
formatting the thesis, and trivial dramas, such as how often it was acceptable to contact your
supervisor who was about to give birth!

Alys’ final few months of writing didn’t follow the usual plan. Expecting to submit in the
September, she had a full first draft submitted by April, with the understanding that she would
have feedback by July. Once her supervisor started maternity leave, it was not certain whether
or not she would be able to provide the support they both hoped she’d be able to. Alys didn’t
really find writing in the evenings and on weekends a challenge, but she found preparing for
her viva very anxiety provoking, especially knowing that her supervisor couldn’t be there on
the day. Without the support group, Alys would have been an isolated bundle of nerves – she
cannot recommend finding a support group enough!

While Alys had several challenges during her final year, Niamh had an excellent support
system within her university throughout her write up phase. When the peer support group first
started Niamh had submitted a first draft of her thesis to her supervisors and was working on
making changes. In honesty, Niamh’s PhD experience had been everything you can hope for.
She had fantastic supervisors who provided academic guidance and pastoral support. She also
had the support of other PhD students in the department. Even though she thought she had everything she needed the group provided her with more support than she could imagine. As there were four other people in the group, who were also writing up, no one ever took long to reply to what seemed like a crisis at the time! There was always someone there to reassure one another that everything would be fine. In the final stages of writing up this quick response was invaluable and stopped Niamh overly panicking about small things that really didn’t matter. Sometimes the group saw the bigger picture even when she couldn’t!

Since July we have spoken every day, sometimes about the PhD, often about other things and for Niamh this has been a fantastic experience. This group has provided support, motivation and friendship, which are things definitely needed in the final stages of your PhD. During the write up of your PhD thesis, so much is achieved every day (e.g. addressing x out of y supervisor comments on a particular chapter) that it’s important to have people to talk to about it. The virtual group was, therefore, definitely a soundboard for this where constant support and encouragement were also offered to keep moving forward. Now, as we all have entered new jobs, we continue to support each other in the next chapter of our post PhD lives and this is something Niamh is extremely grateful for.

However, unlike Niamh who had a draft of her thesis before the group started, JJ at the conception of the support group was coming to the end of her data collection and had yet to begin writing up her thesis. While she had a great support system at her university and within the lab she was working in, JJ was the only student due to complete and hand in her thesis in 2014. Given the nature of her area (infant EEG), JJ was somewhat delayed in getting her last phase of data collected and analysed, and thus starting the write up of her thesis. The support group allowed JJ an insight into the writing trajectories of other final year students, providing her with the motivation (and fear!) she needed to get underway with the first draft.

As is inevitable with a first draft of any piece of writing, but especially with a doctoral thesis that would eventually be upwards of 65,000 words, much of the chapter documents were covered in ‘red comments’ from her supervisor. Upon seeing the level of changes that were required to get the thesis to an appropriate standard for submission, it was difficult to not be disheartened. This is when the support group became especially important – without the words of encouragement from the other members of the group, it would have been far too easy to get discouraged by the writing process and procrastinate before madly attempting to amend chapters under an ever looming deadline. The four other voices in the group were often far more rational than any of JJ’s own thought processes during the writing up phase and the fact that they had been through this ordeal only a few short weeks/months beforehand demonstrated that there was a light at the end of the PhD tunnel. Having the group at the other end of the phone, often at any time of night and day, greatly diffused any academic anxieties that she had during the writing up phase. It was almost like having your own team of academic counsellors who were also a cheerleading team to boot – we all managed to cross the finishing line of our PhDs and this support group bears a certain responsibility for that feat.

Similarly to JJ, this support group transformed Katie’s experience of the final stages of her PhD. The group have shared the daily events of their lives with each other since July, and Katie has found the support group to be kind and encouraging throughout. This includes being amongst the first to be told when Katie got a job offer, to hear about her first day, her first lecture, and when her examiners were approved. They also provided Katie with daily words of encouragement, and an incredible amount of proofreading when Katie was struggling with the final stages of her thesis.

People’s personal lives continue during the course of a PhD, and it is likely that most people will undergo some form of life changing experiences during its course. While this may be exciting, it can also be a sad experience such as death or illness. For Katie, developing a
support group who provided empathy, advice and a listening ear when some of these events occurred truly was invaluable. In addition, being able to offer this support to others opened Katie’s eyes to other people’s experiences. Honesty and openness has been central to the excellent functioning of the group and Katie feels that this has transformed her experience during the final stages of her PhD.

In summary, it is clear to see that each of us gained something positive from being in the virtual support group, and how it enriched our write-up experiences and our viva preparation. We have talked a lot about why this group was so successful and has been maintained for so long, as we believe this is what would be useful to tell other postgraduates. Perhaps one reason for the success of the group is that there are five of us. This number was small enough that everyone had a significant contribution and felt part of the group. However, it was also big enough that there was always someone to respond, usually within minutes. In addition, every member of the group was different, but had a similar goal. This meant we all brought something unique to the group and together, as a team; we had all the qualities you need to complete a PhD.

The ultimate goal of this article was to be an outlet to highlight the positive aspects of a [virtual] support group during the final stages of the PhD, and to recommend to you that you do not isolate yourself, but get involved with peers who are in a similar position to you. You may hear people advising that when you are writing up you should ‘lock yourself away’. However, we disagree. We have, as suggested by Hortmanshof and Conrad (2003), developed behaviours that will be extremely useful for our future careers, such as collaborating within a group and reflecting on our experiences. More broadly, such a support group may also be beneficial during the whole PhD experience. Within this article, however, we have just drawn on our own experiences that happened to be during the write up phase. Ultimately, a peer support network can be there when you want to cry, but also when you want to laugh. Moreover, peer support groups can also provide a welcome distraction from your dramas with dramas of their own! We feel highlighting the benefits of peer-support are therefore important, and we hope that this piece has succeeded in doing just that. If you are lucky, you may also make some friends for life!
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Value, collaboration and networks:
The benefits of volunteering your time on a committee

Emma L. Davies

*Studying for a postgraduate degree can be a very intense experience. It is hence often useful to have a change of scenery and expand your CV by volunteering as part of an external committee. This article describes the benefits and potential drawbacks to consider before searching and applying for a post.*

**Time is not your friend**

Time is not your friend during your PhD; the further you progress into the depths of recruitment, data collection and writing up, the more precious time becomes. Given this inevitable feature of doctoral study, you would be forgiven for locking yourself away in a dark room for the entire duration of your programme. On top of your research you may have teaching commitments, conferences and training sessions to attend. Your families, partners, children, friends and pets may feel neglected, particularly in the run up to deadlines and submission dates.

**So why consider taking on extra voluntary responsibilities?**

The Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG) committee is run entirely by volunteers with the aim of supporting postgraduate students. Before I started my PhD, a colleague (Dr Emma McDonald, Welsh Branch Representative 2006–2008) told me about PsyPAG and tried to encourage me to get involved. I have to admit, I was sceptical. My assumptions about PsyPAG were that I would be too old to get any benefit, or that perhaps it would just be about drinking binges, and I could not see the relevance of their events or conferences. Plus, I had too little time and could not see any benefits of taking on extra responsibilities. I was wrong. I would like to share my reflections on the experience, and three key benefits of getting involved.

**Given the scepticism, how did I get involved?**

I went for dinner with Dr Gillian Shorter after a seminar she delivered in my department. Gillian works in my field of research and just happened to have previously been on the PsyPAG committee whilst undertaking her PhD. Gillian enthused about her experiences on the PsyPAG committee and explained how she had enjoyed and benefitted from the experience. The very next day, an email was sent out on the JISC list inviting applications for the representative position in the Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers in Psychology (DART-P). Although this was just a coincidence, it seemed like a 'sign'! I tentatively emailed the sender back to enquire about my suitability and received a friendly warm reply from the Vice Chair, Emma Jackson (now Dr Vardy). I sent my application and was voted onto the committee.

**Being a PsyPAG representative**

I was apprehensive about my first meeting, held at the British Psychological Society (BPS) offices in London. The large committee sat in a square, with the Chair and Treasurer seated together. Sarah Goldie and Jen Mayer were immediately impressive with their professional
attitudes. They meant business and rallied the rest of the committee to action with plans for upcoming workshops, events and conferences to support postgraduates around the UK. It was at this meeting that I joined the workshop sub-committee who were responsible for reviewing applications for workshops and training events.

As a representative on the DART-P committee I attended their committee meetings and was responsible for raising issues that were relevant to postgraduates. For example, requesting funding and support for a workshop at the PsyPAG conference (Davies & Jackson, 2013), and starting discussions about a jointly funded award for excellence in postgraduate teaching. As well as attending meetings with the DART-P I was able to get involved with Higher Education Academy (HEA) events, as they also had a representative on the DART-P committee. A further benefit was being able to advertise a call for papers and publish in a special issue of *Psychology Teaching Review*, which focussed on postgraduate teaching research (Davies & Jackson, 2014).

**Vice Chair: Taking on more**
I became Vice Chair at the end of 2012, with responsibility for organising meetings; recruiting new representatives onto the committee; liaising with BPS Divisions, Branches and Sections, and communicating with up to 40 committee members at one time. As part of the core committee I certainly felt like the number of emails that I received had increased! I tried to allocate a specific time of the week to addressing PsyPAG tasks, but also saw it as a welcome relief from PhD recruitment stresses and strains. In this role I was able to have a greater input to the annual conference. Additionally I became chair of the workshop sub-committee, which meant I was responsible for making funding decisions, and held a key role in communicating outside of the committee about the work that PsyPAG was undertaking.

**The three key benefits**
If you think that all of this sounds exhausting, then you would be absolutely right. However, the benefits of volunteering my time on the PsyPAG committee are still being reaped, nearly two years after I completed my postgraduate study. I have categorised these benefits into three key headings.

1. **Broadening your experiences and adding value**
This may seem like an obvious one, but all these extra experiences will add value to your CV and provide further depth to your answers in job interviews. Academic roles require expertise not only in research and teaching, but also with administrative tasks such as managing staff; chairing meetings; taking responsibility for running a budget; organising events; and the ability to communicate with people at any level. You can gain valuable experience in all of these areas through volunteering your time on a committee to help you stand out in the crowd.

2. **Collaboration opportunities both within and outside of your main field**
If you complete your studies in a smaller department, or where you and your supervisors are not part of a large research group, then getting out to conferences and meetings is a must. At the start of your postgraduate research it can be daunting to attend a large conference and suddenly find yourself face to face with those big names on you reference list! However, you will also find it useful to chat with other postgraduate students who are looking at the same topics as you. A postgraduate focused conference such as PsyPAG is ideal for this purpose. Moreover, the need to publish or perish is a key concern to postgraduate students. It may not be sufficient to have evidence of publishing a paper with your supervisor when you apply for post-doctoral roles and lectureships. Being part of a committee, such as PsyPAG, can lead to useful collaborations with other researchers in your field. One example is a short paper I wrote
with Richard Tyler about the challenges of recruiting school-aged participants into drug and alcohol research (Tyler & Davies, 2013). Furthermore, I am now working with PsyPAG colleagues on a project to explore distance learning expertise (Rix et al., in preparation). Another project, which explored psychologists’ views and experiences of blogging is just about to be completed and submitted for publication (Davies, Coiffait & Jolley, in preparation).

3. Networking and friendship across the UK
As someone who spent six years working in financial services in the private sector, the word networking used to evoke a somewhat grubby, self-serving event, where people were only talking to you if they thought you were able to help line their pockets. However, networking is not just about meeting people and thinking about how they will be useful for your future. Being part of a wider network of PhD students across the UK may well mean that you are rubbing shoulders with the future president of the BPS, or the future head of department of a university where you want to work. However, being part of this network has also provided me with a number of people that I now genuinely think of as friends for life. When you are locked away in that dark room, working on a challenging piece of your thesis, or fighting with page breaks and figure headings, you need a friend, (someone a little further away than your office mates who may be storming ahead with data collection or submission) to call on. Furthermore, during the early part of your career, where it is genuinely tough for a lot of people who wish to stay in academia, having these friends to call on from all over the UK and offload onto can turn a terrible day around. In addition, when you want to find out about a particular institution, or attend a job interview somewhere unknown, there’ll always be someone you can call on for information, a friendly chat and a coffee.

That sounds great, but what about the drawbacks?
My overall experience of being part of the PsyPAG committee was positive. However, there were times when I felt under pressure and questioned my sanity in taking on the extra responsibility. At those times, I was able to talk to the Chair (did I mention that the Chairs that I worked under, Sarah Goldie, Fleur Michelle Coiffait and Laura Neale, were fantastic!) to let them know I needed help, or some time away to focus on my PhD. You do need to think about time commitment and how much you are willing to do. If you take on any committee role it is important to remember that you are relied on by other people and to consider the consequences of letting them down.

I would wholeheartedly recommend volunteering to become a member of a committee such as PsyPAG during your postgraduate studies. Despite my initial reservations, I think this was one of the best decisions that I made during my PhD (and PhD life is littered with bad decisions). Whether I stay in academia or not in the long term, I am sure I will stay in touch with the friends I made on the committee and feel proud of the projects I completed with the people that I met during this time. The skills that I developed during time on the committee are transferrable to roles within and outside of the academic world. I have also recently joined the BPS West Midlands Branch Committee as Communications Officer, in order to gain some further experience and develop new skills.
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References

Maintaining writing momentum
Starting and completing any document can be a challenge, with so many other commitments to manage. Here are some tips to help you finish with minimal stress.

- Break down your work into small tasks with mini-deadlines and a timeline.
- Set daily word targets (be realistic!).
- Try the Pomodoro technique: sets of 25-minutes of uninterrupted writing, no internet, no distractions (free apps are available): http://getalifephd.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/how-to-enhance-your-writing.html
- Set up an academic writing group with peers: http://patthomson.net/2015/03/19/4033/
- Plan for surprises and obstacles, breaks and socialising.
- Celebrate milestones.
Part III: Practical Support
Finding out I had secured a PhD studentship only weeks after graduating from my undergraduate course was one of the most exciting and daunting feelings I have ever experienced. Of course, this is what I wanted to do but at the same time, I couldn’t shake the feeling that others wait years pursuing Master’s degrees or work experience before embarking on the PhD process. Was I ready? How did I know I could do it? Today, I am in my second year so although I cannot yet tell you how to successfully complete a PhD, I can provide some insight, hints and tips from my experience of the transition from undergraduate to PhD student.

**Becoming an Independent Researcher**

As an undergraduate student, you attend classes and submit assignments which are set for you. Thus the subjects you study and learn about are somewhat predetermined. When starting your PhD, it’s important that you don’t wait around for someone to tell you what to do: this research is your responsibility. Of course, you have the support and guidance of your supervisor but ultimately a PhD requires you to show your ability to be an independent researcher and thinker. This can be a little daunting as if like me, when starting out you don’t know much about the literature surrounding your area. I spent the first couple of months just reading. Having just finished an undergraduate dissertation which moved at quite a fast pace, the thought of only reading for weeks worried me. If you are in this position, don’t worry. It’s important that you become an expert of the literature as this will help you design well informed research studies. The time I spent reading was hugely beneficial to my research in terms of having a sound rationale and design. Further, this time allowed me to create a detailed plan with regards to data collection and analysis.

**Changing your working hours**

During your undergraduate degree, you attend lectures at the university and when these are finished for the day, what you do is up to you. As a student, I would go to class, maybe have lunch with my friends and then do a few hours of work in the library before heading home. Of course, there were times when I would study intensely, for example, in the run up to exams or when an important assignment was due, however, I did not routinely work a 9-to-5 day. Starting my PhD, I knew that I would need to put in more hours than before. Getting into the swing of knowing what hours to work was difficult as I was never sure if I was doing enough. For this reason, I began treating my PhD like a job. I am always in my office for 9.00 a.m. and try my best to leave at 5.00 p.m. Having strict hours made me more productive during this time but also meant that when I left, I did not feel guilty about having some time to myself. Although this seems like an obvious point to make, I feel it is relevant to the undergraduate-PhD transition as undergraduate students will work until an assignment is finished or an exam has been sat.
You work on your PhD for approximately three years and, therefore, cannot always ‘finish’ things. Setting yourself clear working hours will help separate your PhD from your home life.

**Imposter Syndrome**
Starting my PhD, I will admit I had an issue with my confidence and this is something that my supervisor would tell me I needed to work on. Coming straight from the undergraduate course made me feel a little inferior as other PhD students had Master’s degrees or work experience. This introduces ‘Imposter Syndrome’ which relates to beliefs that you do not deserve your PhD, you do not have the ability to do it and that soon enough, you will be ‘found out’. Firstly, it is important to note that many PhD students feel like this, regardless of what stage they are at or what experience they may have. Secondly, you need to try and rule these thoughts out. Try to remind yourself that you were chosen to do this PhD for a reason; your supervisor saw something in you and would not have agreed to work with you if they did not think you were ready or capable. This was perhaps, the biggest problem I had, however, by working hard and trying to ignore these thoughts, I began to realise that I could do this PhD.

**Becoming familiar with academia**
During my undergraduate studies, I was unaware of how important it was for academics to present at conferences and the pressures there are to publish research. When starting my PhD, I took some time talking to my supervisor and getting familiar with what conferences I should be attending, the importance of networking, how to get my work published and where I should be aiming to publish this. This helped me understand that doing a PhD is not simply about writing a thesis and if I want a career in academia, I must present my work and network with others. During my first year, I attended several courses within my university which aimed to provide useful information and tips on publishing your research and networking at conferences. I would recommend researching whether your university do similar courses as these really helped me get to grips with what conference attendance and networking involved.

**Talk to other students**
The transition was made a lot easier for me simply by having the support of other PhD students within my department. During my first year, I shared an office with students who were in their final year. They provided me with invaluable advice regarding all stages of the PhD. By talking to them about their own research and progress, they helped me understand what would be expected of me. I have had the support of my peers every step of the way and I am confident this will continue to be the case. When I began to attend conferences, I met other PhD students who had also started their PhD soon after finishing their undergraduate degree. This was great as it allowed me to realise that others had gone through a similar process and had experienced the same thoughts as myself. For this reason, I stress the importance of having people there to talk to.
Conclusion
To reflect on my experience, I have so far really enjoyed my PhD and feel very grateful that I was offered this when I was. If you are just starting out and feel a little daunted, I hope this article shows you that you are not alone – others have been there! My advice would be to spend some time getting to grips with what the PhD process involves such as the need to work independently, considering your working hours and understanding the importance of the extra-curricular activities such as attending conferences. Talk to your supervisor or other students if you feel unsure about any of these points.

All that is really left for me to say is work hard and good luck!

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Adding interest to presentations
- Use interactions via Twitter by including a hashtag, your Twitter handle or displaying incoming tweets as part of your presentation. See Graham, L. (2014). The engaging researcher: How to make your presentations more interactive via Twitter. PsyPAG Quarterly, 93, 37–40.
- Try an interactive Prezi as an alternative to Powerpoint http://prezi.com/: consider whether the venue has internet-connection beforehand.
1. Is a PhD for you?

An increasing number of postgraduates are applying for PhD study to develop their academic and professional skills (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). However, before you begin to consider searching for positions, you must be fully aware of what studying for a PhD actually entails. A PhD is the highest degree a person can achieve. It will involve around three years’ full-time (up to six years’ part-time) work, culminating in a thesis of somewhere around 80,000 words. It is research-intensive, with you developing and leading projects and writing papers in your chosen field of study. Although you will have the support of two or more specialist supervisors, a PhD is by-and-large independent work. Unlike any Research Assistant roles you may have previously undertaken, you often will not have a research team working alongside you. The onus will be on you to drive forward your research and meet self-defined deadlines and goals. Importantly, a PhD in Psychology does not automatically include Chartered Psychologist status. You may have to make extra arrangements to accumulate achievements towards these different qualifications alongside your research work.

Does a PhD fit in with your future career plans? It is important to be aware that the PhD experience is an innately challenging experience and not to be chosen lightly. You must ensure that you have the confidence and composure to navigate yourself through various obstacles during your research journey. There are many resources to help you decide if a PhD is right for you (e.g. QAA, 2011). Speaking to colleagues, friends or academic supervisors who have experienced the process is a great place to start. Also there are a range of social media (@PsyPAG, @ECPsych) and blogs (www.thesiswhisperer.com) covering all aspects of the postgraduate research experience. It is important to remember that every PhD journey is different. Don’t let the experiences of one person rule your decision – try to choose according to what suits you best.

2. Identify your research interests

There is really only one golden rule in choosing your PhD research area: ensure that you are passionate about the research project! You will be studying this topic from all angles, at varying hours of the day for the next three years, at a minimum. You will be researching the unknown in this area. It should indeed form the basis of your future career. It is a big decision and one that you must not take lightly. Think carefully about what you enjoyed in your undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as in any work experience. What are the gaps in the literature? What excites you? What research questions keep you awake at night?
3. Where to search?
The approach you take to searching for a PhD place will likely depend on what you intend to study. If your interests are broad, it is good to start with PhD vacancy websites such as www.findaphd.com and www.jobs.ac.uk. These provide a range of funded and unfunded vacancies. Try not to be put off by ‘unfunded’ places. There are often other funding sources available but this is something worth exploring with the university and supervisors. However, already-funded PhD places are usually an easier place to start.

If you have a specific research question, department or research group in mind, it is best to contact potential supervisors directly. Don’t be embarrassed to do this. The relationship between PhD student and supervisor is highly reciprocal: you receive guidance, whilst they receive publications with less effort than working alone. You should also browse the websites of individual universities you are interested in. There may post-PhD vacancies here and not elsewhere. It is best practice to cast a wide search net!

Whatever your approach, make sure that you investigate the department and university who would host you thoroughly. Although somewhat controversial, the Research Excellence Framework (REF; Research Excellence Framework, 2014) is a good place to start. This assesses the quality of research output across various metrics. Also, make sure to speak to academic staff and current PhD students to understand both the research and social atmosphere.

4. Recruitment process
Potential supervisors want to find a person who has confidence and composure to continue in the face of adversity and complete the PhD. They want someone who is motivated, organised, committed and passionate about research. After applying for a doctoral position, you will usually be invited to an interview. Typically your supervisory panel, a member of the Graduate School, and an internal member of staff will interview you. Here, you may be asked questions such as: Why do you want to undertake a PhD? What has bought you to this position? Why are you interest in the proposed research? What original contribution to knowledge will your research make? It is not unusual to have to prepare a presentation about your proposed research. If you are applying for a studentship, you may have to undertake teaching activities. Make sure that you acknowledge this in your presentation, and aim to present your research in a way that is suitable to an undergraduate audience. Of course, the interview is also the place for you to ask questions. Think about what aspects of the project, supervisory panel, department and university you are unclear on and come prepared!

5. Starting out.
Congratulations! You’ve secured a competitive PhD place. Now what’s next? First, you may have to apply for ethical approval for your research projects, depending on the nature of your PhD. It is essential that you submit your ethics application(s) in a timely manner, as departmental and faculty ethical approval can be quite time consuming.

Second, it is beneficial to participate in any training offered to you and the social functions provided. At times, a PhD can be a lonely journey, so it is good to create a research community, comprising of other postgraduate students who you can share your experiences and triumphs with, but also your doubts and problems (see Jolley et al., 2015, this book). See your PhD as an apprenticeship: you are here to learn and train to be a reputable and independent researcher.

Third, set a precedence with your supervisors and arrange regular meetings to ensure that they are up to date with your research activities. It is advantageous to record meeting notes, which you can utilise in your viva examinations and any annual appraisals you may have. Many universities also have doctoral school training programmes that encourage you to log all meet-
ings and training that you receive. You should also try to make the most of the training they provide and ensure your professional development occurs alongside your research. Useful information on the breadth of skills expected in a modern day researcher can be found in the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (Vitae, 2015).

6. Useful tips

- Conduct a systematic literature review before, or during, data collection. This will greatly shape the way in which your research will progress and can help identify key gaps in the literature.
- Stay up-to-date with the literature. Even when you are conducting your systematic literature review, your research area will be expanding and developing. After finalising your systematic literature review, continue to check the journal databases as there may be newly published studies that you have missed. It is important to remain up-to-date throughout your PhD. You need to be the expert in your area, and this will come from reading, reading and… reading.
- Attend conferences. This will increase your confidence in disseminating your research, and will allow you to create contacts that may be useful in future study and may open up employment opportunities. You will also receive feedback about your research that will greatly enhance and improve your final thesis.
- Aim to publish. A key component of a PhD, and something that will be addressed in your progression viva, is: ‘Is this research of publishable quality?’ If you have published your doctoral research then this is all the evidence you need. Indeed, publishing your research can be a difficult task. Manuscript rejections can be painful, but you will soon build resilience. Getting your articles reviewed is beneficial, even if the final decision is a rejection, as you will receive feedback about your work and recommendations, from leading experts in your research field.
- Compartmentalise your time: Allocate periods of time to specific tasks, perhaps using a Gantt chart (The Research Whisperer, 2011). Over the course of your doctoral studies you will be required to undertake many research activities such as collecting and analysing data, writing literature reviews, writing and presenting conference presentations, and of course, submitting your 80,000 (approximately) word thesis. Planning ahead will help you keep focused on both your immediate and future goals.
- Keep a sense of perspective (Kaye, 2013). Remember why you are undertaking a PhD and be mindful of the huge achievement that will come from submitting. This will motivate you in more difficult times. It may be useful to enlist others to remind you of this perspective, particularly at times when motivation dips (see Jolley et al., 2015, this book)
- Try to maintain a healthy work-life balance. It is important that you look after your mental health. Get involved in other activities that allow you take to a break from your PhD. These do not have to be academic (see Zhou, 2015, this book). Set and maintain breaks for social occasions and relaxation: your productivity and research outputs will benefit from this.

There now follows our (the authors’) experiences of our PhD journey.

Charlotte Pennington
PhD Student, Edge Hill University

Everyone’s experience of applying, and undertaking, a PhD is unique. In part, this is what makes a PhD so exciting as people have their own story to share. I applied for a doctoral student position at Edge Hill University in the summer of 2013, whilst still undertaking my undergraduate degree. When I first started my undergraduate degree I was knowledgeable to a range of options that I could pursue after graduating. By the time third year came along,
these options weren’t as salient in my mind, as I was, at the time, tackling my dissertation. Then I heard about the opportunity to undertake one of 12 studentships at my university. A studentship can typically involve conducting your PhD research alongside teaching duties. The application process involved submitting a 2000-word research proposal, and an academic CV. The first thing you should note here is that I did not have a Master’s degree. The second important thing is that, at the time, my CV was not particularly academic. Indeed, I had four years of clinical experience under my belt, which was greatly beneficial, but I lacked expertise in research and teaching. If you have the passion, commitment and enthusiasm for research, then this should be your main reason for applying for a doctoral position. A good mind-set to achieve is to think of a doctoral degree as a learning process; you are being trained to conduct rigorous, high quality research.

After passing the initial selection process, I was then invited to an interview. I had to present my research proposal in a way that was accessible to undergraduate students. I proposed my own personal choice of research: you can often apply to a research degree with a pre-arranged research proposal or your own research idea. In both cases, it is essential that you select supervisors whom are dedicated and knowledgeable in the field. After successfully securing my doctoral position, I was required to conduct a 15,000-word research proposal and undertake a registration viva examination. Again, this highlights the diversity of universities offering PhD candidacy. However, conducting a systematic review of the literature for my final research proposal, and obtaining ethical approval at this early stage greatly helped to outline and organise my research. Reflecting back, now in my second year of studies, I have deeply enjoyed my doctoral studies so far. Pivotal to this, is the way in which this experience has shaped me as a person. I have become more confident and independent, travelling to many different places to present my research. I have developed a critical eye and appreciation for high quality research. I am more of an inquisitive person than I was before: questions need to be asked in order for us to advance knowledge and become pioneers of our generation. You could be that person!

Emma Norris
PhD Student, University College London.

After enjoying being involved in various research projects during my earlier studies, I was always set on undertaking a PhD. What was more uncertain was exactly what I wanted to research! I’ve always had a broad range of interests around health psychology and behaviour change and so found it very hard to whittle down my search. In searching various websites and making enquiries to potential supervisors, I attended two interviews and was unsuccessful. Rejection is common in the highly competitive PhD market – one interview was lost by the difference of one publication in one case. The PhD I ended up securing was a fully-funded, four year UCL studentship with no teaching requirement. This is a multidisciplinary project with supervisors across public health, epidemiology and educational psychology and a very specific title and aim.; hence very different from Lottie’s experience where she crafted her own proposal. After my initial application, I had an interview with all four (!) of my supervisors and the departmental Graduate Tutor. I then had a final interview and had to prepare a mock-up school recruitment presentation for the study. Looking back now, the rejections that I experienced have worked to my favour. UCL is where I studied my MSc, in commuting distance to my home and one of the top universities in the field of behaviour change. Location, familiarity and reputation are all essential to consider when making your own PhD choices. I am enjoying leading my own scheme of study and having the flexibility to take on additional teaching and extra-curricular activities (such as PsyPAG).
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Teaching and/or research?
Professor John Radford

The relationship between teaching and research is one that affects academics and Higher Education generally: making it an issue that postgraduates should be aware of. This article aims to inform postgraduates of this issue for their current studies and potential future work in academia.

This one will run and run. A continual dilemma for both universities and academics is the allocation of resources to teaching and research, particularly as time and money are increasingly hard to come by. Underlying the dilemma are two basic questions. One is how valuable, in various ways, teaching and research are, to the individual and the institution. The other concerns the interaction of the two; specifically regarding the extent to which they help or hinder one another.

It is clear that the job of the professional academic is becoming harder (Stromquist, 2007). He or she is likely to have to undertake, in varying proportions, at least 20 different kinds of activities (Radford, 2013), the most vexatious of which is often felt to be administration of various sorts (Tight, 2009). But what has drawn them into this game is almost certainly an interest in a discipline, which they wish to pursue both by seeking knowledge and by passing it, and their enthusiasm, on to others (Gemme & Gingras, 2012). Certainly if they are looking for an easy or lucrative occupation they will usually be disappointed. However, the academic profession is heavily weighted towards research rather than teaching.

First of all, the main preparation, after a first degree, is the research-based PhD. Three years or so are spent exhaustively exploring an often very specialised topic, which may well not feature in the syllabuses academics are later called on to teach, and which has certainly not given the sort of broad overview of the discipline and its methods, or of Higher Education itself, that a teacher should (in my view) ideally possess (see Bowen & Tobin, 2015; Radford, 2010). There have been numerous criticisms of the PhD (e.g. Gibney, 2012; Nerad, 2004; Radford, 2001) which I will not explore here. The next step is obtaining an academic post, advertisements for which (certainly in the UK) routinely stress research, but not always teaching. Once appointed, it becomes apparent that promotion too depends largely on publications in research journals (Parker, 2008), and increasingly on proven ability to attract funds for research. This is especially the case at professorial level. Below that, (in the UK) the ‘post-1992’ universities are more likely to value teaching and research equally. However, they themselves are generally less prestigious than the pre-1992 institutions (ironically, many of the post-1992s are actually much older as institutions, having begun life as colleges and polytechnics in the 19th century). So for the ambitious young academic it is still largely ‘publish or perish’. Backes-Gellner and Schlinghoff (2010), in a study of American and German universities, found that publications generally increased before a possible promotion, and declined after it. However, Carpenter (2003) reviewing promotion criteria at Emory University, found that most excellent researchers were also considered excellent teachers.

Most universities themselves are weighted towards research, despite the fact that usually most of their income comes from students. Again, it is a matter of prestige. As Carpenter (2003) puts it, no university ever became world class through excellence in teaching. What count are published research and the presence of distinguished academics. Prestige in the UK is currently semi-formalised in the various groups such as the Russell group, and by the league tables of universities, which are strongly biased towards research. For example, in May 2012,
the Times Higher Education published a ranking of 100 universities under 50 years old, in 30 countries. Sixty-two per cent of the weightings were based upon research criteria, compared to only 10 per cent based upon teaching. (The Deputy Editor of the Times Higher Education told me that it is easier to obtain quantitative data for research than for teaching. No doubt, but that does not resolve the issue. And attempts to assess the value of research are both expensive and controversial.) League tables have long been criticised as both unrepresentative and statistically invalid (Berry, 1999; Stolz, Hendel & Horn, 2010), and numerous suggestions have been made for possible improvements (Kay, 2011; Tofallis, 2012; West, 2009). However, as things stand, league tables remain influential; to the chagrin of institutions that feel they do an excellent job of teaching students, but can never hope to match the research output of those at the top of the lists.

It has been an article of faith with some (e.g. Warnock, 1989) that it is research that distinguishes university teaching from lower forms. In fact the relationship is difficult to pin down. In 1996 Hattie and Marsh put the cat among the pigeons with a meta-analysis of 58 studies, concluding that there was zero relationship between quality of teaching and quality of research. Twenty years before that, the UK had introduced polytechnics, intended to concentrate on degree-level teaching, but not research, for which there was no funding and which was initially forbidden. This was despite the fact that many of the colleges that formed these institutions had long been active in research, often of an applied nature in conjunction with local industry. This policy was politically driven, and was designed to be cheaper and more controllable than the universities. Yet, like most such policies, it did not work: research went on.

A host of later studies has shown that the relationship between teaching and research is not a simple one. Jenkins, Breen and Lindsay (2003), reviewing the evidence, found (unsurprisingly) that many academics feel strongly that there is a functional link between teaching and research. Whether this works in practice depends on a range of factors, including the balance of time and interest (which varies between both individuals and disciplines), the relative involvement of students, and so on. Coate, Barnett and Williams (2001) decry the compartmentalising of teaching and research resulting from separate funding mechanisms, competition for resources, and management strategies that treat the two separately. Smith and Smith (2012) describe the way in which (Australian) academics, while still valuing face-to-face teaching, buy time for research by finding funds to pay for routine teaching activities such as marking. Elsen et al. (2009) advocate strengthening the link by involving students more in research. Weimer (2010) reported, in a school of Engineering, that it was both rare and ineffective for academics to use their own research in teaching. She advocates, rather, inquiry-based and problem-based learning that mirrors the research process (this is perhaps already more common in Psychology). There was some evidence that undergraduate research correlated positively with student retention and desire for graduate study (this might not be causal; it might simply be that keener students like research and want to pursue it). Several writers, for example, Norris et al. (2003), advocate some kind of reconciliation between research and teaching, which they think may be forced by financial constraints. Prince, Felder and Brent (2007, cited by Weimer, 2010) make the same kind of suggestions as Elsen and Weimer, and add that it is necessary to accept a broader definition of scholarship, a point to which I shall return.

The first Western-style universities in the late 13th century were teaching institutions, giving students a practical basis of what we would now call transferable skills, and preparing those who wished and could afford it, for the then three professions of law, medicine or theology. The word ‘research’ in its modern sense dates from the 17th century, when science began to emerge as a distinct enterprise. However, by the 19th century the (still only two) English universities aimed at producing a non-specialised elite suitable to govern. Research began to
replace this as the ideal only towards the end of the century as, though not because, more universities were created. In the 20th century, there was a huge increase in higher education worldwide (the acceptance of women by itself doubled the demand). Many people (e.g. Trow, 1987) have pointed out that a mass system could not be research-based: there could never be sufficient funds. Many countries have adopted two- or multi-tier systems, a plan which in continental Europe goes back to Napoleon in France and von Helmholtz in Germany shortly after.

Kerr (1990) describes the complex American pattern. The British attempt at a binary system mentioned above was destroyed, apparently in the interests of central control, in 1992. We currently have a theoretically uniform system which everyone knows, and as the league tables manifest, is no such thing, but in which every institution is striving to attract students and attain the same standards of excellence based largely on research.

There are some signs of change. There is some increase in recognition of teaching. The Higher Education Academy awards National Teaching Fellowships worth £10,000 which aim to support continued professional development. The British Psychological Society has initiated (2011) a Lifetime Achievement Award in Education in Psychology (no cash attached). The Open University has recently described a system under which its academics will be able to progress up four different career strands: teaching, research, combined teaching and research, and ‘knowledge exchange’ (*Times Higher Education*, 2 April 2015, p.24) Several factors may cause students to be more insistent on value for money in their courses. One is the current increase in fees. Another is a proliferation of institutions with powers to award degrees. And most advanced countries have privately funded universities (as Oxford and Cambridge were well into the 20th century), which are just developing in the UK, some for profit, some not. We might note that at Bologna, generally accepted as the first Western university, students paid their tutors to teach them. There will probably always be a role for universities that are mainly concerned with research, even perhaps offering only higher degrees, but they cannot be the norm in a mass system, and should not be seen as an (unattainable) ideal for all.

The answer to whether research and teaching help or hinder each other is, ‘it all depends’. My own view is based both on the published literature and on personal experience, particularly as Head of a large department, and as Chair of the Psychology Board of the Council for National Academic Awards, over-seeing the so-called ‘public’ sector of higher education. I agree with Prince et al. (2007) that ‘scholarship’ (or ‘research’ as I would say) is too narrowly defined; and add that, however defined, it should not be the only major criterion of excellence. I think that an institution offering first degrees should have a significant number of staff who are active at a high level in their discipline and/or profession. ‘Significant’ means sufficient to have an effect on students. ‘High level’ could mean research in a narrow sense (refereed publications); it could also mean professional practice, consultancy, publishing other than one’s own research, activity in professional bodies, scholarship in the sense of wider and deeper knowledge, promoting the discipline outside the university, and so on. There should be no sharp divisions between teaching, research and practice (see Walton, 2011). Consequently, excellence in all of these should be supported and appropriately rewarded. The important thing for students, I think, is to feel that their teachers are at least of equal standing with those in other universities. (One essential criterion of the early universities was the ius ubique docendi, the fitness of its alumni to teach in higher education elsewhere.) At the same time, academics must not be an aloof elite; students need to be equally engaged by and with their teachers in the pursuit of knowledge. Whether all this can be achieved in present circumstances is problematical. Perhaps fundamentally new thinking is needed. I have elsewhere offered a fanciful suggestion as to how higher education might be radically changed, simply to show that there is more than one possible way (Radford, 2012). In any case, the future lies, dear reader, with today’s postgraduates.
Questions to ask yourself when considering teaching as a postgraduate

- What can you learn from teaching?
- What training is available?
- Can you observe the teaching of others to improve your practice?

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Submitting and publishing papers during your PhD

Hannah Broadbent

Papers are an essential part of the academic research process. This article provides practical information on how to manage the writing and submission of papers alongside PhD studies.

The thought of trying to publish research during your PhD can be a daunting prospect, and may seem relatively unimportant at this early stage of your career. As a PhD student nearing submission of my thesis and having published 18 papers in academic journals (three of which are from research conducted during my PhD, and a further one currently in press and another in prep), I thought it might be useful to share some of the tips and advice that I have received that have helped me on my way.

Why try to publish during your Doctorate?

There are a number of benefits to publishing papers during your PhD, beyond the obvious boost to your CV and enhancing your employability. Publication of your work and developing a research portfolio in the early stages of your career, particularly as a first name author, serves to get your name known within your field and will assist you in being taken seriously as a researcher. At the outset of your PhD it is easy to assume that publishing research will perhaps be a bonus and something to be thought about nearing the end of your doctorate, if you still have time and energy left. However, many benefits ensue from starting this process as early into your PhD as possible.

The skills and experience gained during the process of submitting and publishing work from your thesis will be advantageous when it comes to your viva. For those of you only at the very beginning of your PhD journey, talking about the viva examination may seem fairly irrelevant and lead you to think about putting this article away somewhere for a later and more appropriate time. If you’re somewhere between the middle to two-thirds of the way through your PhD, the mere mention of the word ‘viva’ will likely result in mild palpitations and feelings of overwhelming self-doubt. Traversing the peer-review process before the inevitable defence of your research at the end of your doctorate will mean that you would already have had the opportunity to thoroughly analyse, dissect, and refine your work whilst receiving valuable feedback from experts in your field. This will invariably give you more confidence in your research and allow you the opportunity to think about your methodology and findings from different perspectives. Successful publication is also likely to serve as a pretty good motivator to get the rest of your PhD research done and written up – once you’ve survived the fairly unnerving peer-review process that is (more on that later)! Moreover, research papers or literature reviews that have already been clearly structured and undergone review are easily adapted into thesis chapters. Even at the outset of designing any experimental work that will form part of your thesis, it is beneficial to envisage the extent to which the research design would be publishable and the way that you might analyse any data and formulate your arguments. Indeed, it is never too early to begin thinking about submission and publication.

Publishing articles does not only flag up your name to other researchers in the field. Often, journal Editors will subsequently ask you to stand as a reviewer on other papers, allowing you to hone your critical evaluation skills and give you further insight into the peer-review process. After your PhD, a rich reference list stands as a clear indicator of your ability to disseminate
your research findings. Publishing ability is also an important skill considered during grant-applications and practice will, therefore, benefit you in any future requests for research funding.

In the pursuit of an academic career, there comes great pressure to publish your research. Indeed, you are valued as a researcher not just on the extent to which you publish your work but where you have published and how much your work is cited. Whilst no-one should expect a PhD candidate to publish reams of research articles in prestigious journals; getting into the habit of writing papers for publication and experiencing the peer review process during your PhD will pave the way for an easier transition into academic and post-doctoral life.

What to write
Research papers for academic journals are not the only articles that you could try to submit during your PhD. In some cases the results of your research may not be publishable, or you may be still collecting, coding, or analysing data for a while into your PhD. Most of the alternative options detailed below may require a different framework and structure to your writing but would provide excellent practice in academic and scientific prose. Many journals, for example, welcome review articles, giving you a perfect opportunity to publish work from the introductory chapter of your thesis. PhD students are sometimes asked to write or co-write book chapters on subjects relevant to your specific area of research interest. For instance, if you hear of experts in your field who are currently editing a book, it is worth expressing your availability to make a contribution. Although this may be time intensive, many students find this useful for honing skills such as literature reviews and critique development: useful for your own research.

In addition to writing for the more prestigious academic and scientific journals or books, it is worth considering submitting to organisational journals such as The Quarterly, which is targeted at postgraduates and accepts a wide variety of article types. Alternatively, The Psychologist encourages a diverse range of submissions. The many different sections in The Psychologist such as ‘New Voices’ and ‘Reviews’ are ideal for postgraduates to gain writing experience, disseminate your work and receive feedback from a wide audience.

Furthermore, many universities have their own journals that welcome (and indeed encourage) submission of work from doctoral students. This could include preliminary research findings, pilot study reports, book reviews, or even the dissemination of ‘work in progress’. Remember that submitting results of research to such journals may exclude you from re-submitting these data to other places, so check this before submission. However they provide a good place to start out if you are unfamiliar with the process of submission and review.

Even before starting my PhD, I was fortunate enough to collaborate with a number of different researchers on systematic review papers as well as original research papers. This provided me with important insight into this part of academic life, without all the added pressure of holding the primary responsibility for responding to reviewer’s comments. Asking for opportunities to collaborate with your PhD supervisor, postdoctoral researchers or other academics in your lab or department on research that is in line with your area of interest or expertise is recommended. However, it is important to deliberate how much these collaborations would take away from your own PhD time and focus. Likewise, collaborations with researchers at other institutions may prove fruitful in respect to your publication list and future career, but need to be considered pragmatically.

Another worthwhile option for writing and publication of sorts is in the preparation and submission of abstracts for scientific conference proceedings. Before the process of writing up your research for publication, presenting your work at conferences and even at lab meetings
or to other research groups are excellent ways of learning to frame your arguments and getting feedback from other experts in your field. Sometimes just the relatively simple process of condensing your research to a few PowerPoint slides or a scientific abstract can actually help you to think more clearly about how to present your work, and particularly your data, in a more concise and publishable manner.

**How to submit**

A number of sources of information exist regarding how to write papers (e.g. Hall, 2012; Van Way, 2007), and how to publish academic research (e.g. Hoogenboom & Manske, 2012), and so I will not focus on that here. Instead, I will emphasise certain aspects of the submission process that may increase your chances of successfully publishing work. Firstly, before you even begin writing a paper, it is worth contemplating which journal(s) you would like to submit to. This will give you clear indication as to how to focus your writing, and the journal-specific requirements relating to manuscript length, style and formatting. Once you have formulated your ideas for an article, a sensible option is to write to the Editor of the journal with a brief description of the research you are intending to submit, to see whether it would be of interest to them and worth sending to their journal. This could save you a lot of time and pain if the answer is no!

It is also worth taking into consideration the ‘impact factors’ of potential destinations of your work. Impact factors are the aspect by which journals are rated, based on the extent to which the research that they publish is cited. The higher the impact factor, the more important the journal is regarded to be (Hall, 2012). Journals with higher impact factors will have stricter criteria for article acceptance but it is worth aiming high at first submission; not least because these more prestigious journals are (supposedly) associated with a more rigorous review process. If unsuccessful on this first attempt, subsequent submissions could then be made to lower-tier journals. Although this may seem like an unsettling prospect, it should serve to enhance your research and the formulation of your manuscript. Going through a more challenging review procedure first is also likely to improve your chances of getting the paper published in a different journal, if you are unsuccessful on the initial attempt.

It may seem obvious, but before submitting your article to a journal, it is important that you have followed the ‘Author Guidelines’ laid out by the specific journal in terms of formatting, headings, referencing style and file-types required for tables and figures. Also, the use of APA formatting for presenting data is imperative. No matter how interesting or ground-breaking the research your paper is reporting, a poorly formatted and presented article will not fare well in the eyes of the reviewers, and may not even get past the Editor to the review stage before being sent back to you. The submission of any type of manuscript to a journal will also require you to write a covering letter. This is a chance to address the journal Editor(s) directly and state (very briefly) the main points of your paper, why your manuscript may be of importance and to whom it may be of interest. It is also usually a requirement here to declare any conflicts of interest and that you have not submitted the same work anywhere else.

Often at the point of submitting your manuscript, you are offered the chance to recommend or select potential reviewers. Although it is not guaranteed that they will be selected or available, this is an opportunity to help the identify experts in your field who are likely to hold a positive and constructive opinion on your work and would provide insightful feedback. Indeed, more importantly, you may even be able to select who you definitely do not want to review your work, allowing you to avoid potential conflicts of interest or individuals you feel may have competitive motives.
Surviving the peer-review process

After working for weeks and months diligently perfecting your article to a point you believe ready for publication, it can be disheartening to receive feedback from a journal Editor that your submission has been rejected. Firstly, this has happened to, and continues to happen to, even the most highly cited, highly acclaimed researchers. An outright rejection of your paper is often a sign that the work was not in line with the journal’s area of interest and sometimes Editors will even recommend other places to submit your work (see above point about writing to the Editor before submission). Bordage (2001) and Pierson (2004) provide insightful accounts of other reasons why manuscripts may not be accepted for publication. However, quite often the Editor will state that they would be willing for you to ‘revise and resubmit’ your work following the adjustments outlined by themselves and the reviewers. This may be quite a task, and is important to consider whether it is worth your while. However, if the Editor has expressed some interest in seeing the article again, it is likely that they will look favourably on a well-revised manuscript. On the other hand, even if you decide that labouring through all the recommended changes would not be possible, it is not advisable to try and submit the same article to another journal without taking into consideration and amending the manuscript in light of the reviewer’s comments anyway.

Fortunately during your PhD, submitting and publishing work is unlikely to be an endeavour you undertake alone. Most likely you will collaborate with your supervisor(s), who will help to guide you through the process. Preparing an article for submission is one thing, dealing with the critiques of your work, amending your article in light of those comments, and formulating appropriate responses to the reviewers is another. Typically, once your manuscript has been through review and returned to you, recommendations would have been made for either major or minor revisions of the paper (and often both!). Trudging through pages of reviewer’s comments can be a gruelling and intimidating process, and the thought of having to collect further data or re-write major parts of your research can feel quite demoralising. It is important to try and see this as optimistically as possible and not feel that this reflects on your ability as a researcher. Reviewers often have quite differing opinions on the way to interpret your findings and what may be important to present. This is why the review process is such an important one, and should serve to ensure that research is of a high standard before being accepted, particularly when the results are likely to have significant impact on the field. One article by Williams (2004) is a particularly useful resource for learning how to respond successfully and appropriately to reviewer’s comments. Alongside some ‘golden rules’ for responding to reviewers, Williams (2004) highlights that disputing points reviewers have raised by being argumentative is not likely to be fruitful, even when you believe that they might be wrong. Picking your battles will be important in raising the likelihood of subsequent acceptance of your manuscript. Even if you do feel the need to battle a certain point, learning to do this diplomatically and constructively is key.

Concluding remarks

This might seem like a lot of hard work on top of the already difficult task of completing a PhD. However, the process of writing, submitting, revising and then (hopefully) publishing your work during this time will only serve to increase your confidence as a researcher, and compliment and strengthen your PhD. Organising your time well is key to balancing this alongside an already heavy workload. Having a set day over a number of weeks to work on a paper, or blocking out a section of time to work just on responding to reviewers and editing your manuscript will mean that you are more likely to maintain the motivation needed to get this done.

Trying to publish your work may seem like one of the more challenging components of academic life, but is also potentially one of the more rewarding. Do not lose heart, especially
in the face of overwhelming reviewer’s comments; it is worth all that extra time and effort. Even if you do not manage to get anything published at this point, having papers submitted by the end of your PhD will help you feel like you are on track and would have given you invaluable experience of the whole process. Have confidence in your ability, and be assured that at some point the value of your work will be recognised.

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**Postgraduate Psychology JISC-List**

Started by PsyPAG alumnus Jeremy Miles, this mailing list is a great resource. You can use it to recruit participants, ask for methodological or statistical advice, find out about training opportunities and even job and studentship advertisements. The list offers a supportive platform for postgraduates across the UK.

Subscribe at: [www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=psych-postgrads](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=psych-postgrads)
Costly conferences and steep study visits: A whistle-stop tour of funding sources for postgraduate students

Harriet M.J. Smith

Many postgraduate students experience a lack of funds to help pay for CV-boosting activities such as attending conferences and organising study visits. Often the limited nature of departmental funding forces students to seek help from external bodies. Financial help for psychology postgraduate students is available from numerous sources, but navigating these can be complicated. This article aims to shed light on potential sources of funding, and to offer some general tips for constructing applications.

Funding conference attendance

Attending conferences has various benefits for postgraduate students – from networking with peers and promoting your research, to gaining valuable feedback from experts in your field. All psychology postgraduates are eligible to apply for funding from the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG), who offer a generous number of bursaries for travel (£50) as well as for attending domestic (£100) and international (£300) conferences. Deadlines for the three rounds of bursaries fall in February, June, and October. Other general sources of available funding include the Grindley Grants for Conference Attendance (maximum £500), which are available from the Experimental Psychology Society (EPS). Although preference is given to funding attendance at EPS meetings themselves, grants are also available for giving presentations at non-EPS conferences.

The majority of societies issue a call for postgraduate bursaries specifically to help fund attendance at their own conferences. In the case of the British Psychological Society section conferences, you will need to be member of the section in order to be eligible. The £5 annual subscription is certainly worth it if you manage to secure an award, which usually amount to around £250.

Some bursaries for conference attendance are unique to research areas. The European Association of Social Psychology (EASP) offer travel grants (maximum €800) to both their postgraduate and postdoctoral members. For neurologists and neuroscientists, it is worth exploring the travel grants offered by Guarantors of Brain (maximum of around £400 to £800). Alternatively, postgraduates investigating topics relating to feminism, gender, or women’s studies may be eligible to apply for bursaries from the Fran Trust Association (maximum £500). As a further example of a topic-specific funding source, the Encephalitis Society have in the past offered an award of £500 to students working on relevant research.

The availability of some bursaries depends on demographics. Each year, the British Federation of Women Graduates (BFWG) gives out a number of scholarships on the basis of academic excellence in order to facilitate ongoing doctoral work. Female postgraduates studying in North West England or North Wales are eligible to apply for money from the BFWG North West Travel Bursary (maximum £300). Similarly, Scottish postgraduates (or those brought up in Scotland) showing ‘ability and promise’ might consider seeking financial assistance from the Scottish International Education Trust (maximum £2,000).

It could even be possible to apply for money from corporate bodies. For instance, Santander Universities UK has over 70 university partners. If your university is one of them,
perhaps consider applying for one of their travel bursaries. These can be particularly generous ( £1000 upwards).

Funding study visits
In some cases, visiting a different institution for a short time, either in the UK or abroad, might be necessary for completing your research. It may be that you need to use equipment, collect data, work with a specific academic, or gain advanced skills or research training. Paying for study visits can, however, be much more expensive than attending conferences.

PsyPAG offer a separate bursary of up to £200 to help fund study visits. In addition, some bursaries from bodies mentioned above are not specific to conference attendance. For example, funding from the European Association of Social Psychology, Scottish International Education Trust, Guarantors of Brain, Encephalitis Society or Santander could also be used for this purpose. In 2015, the Santander Formula Travel Bursary generously offered £4200.

Other sources of money available to postgraduates are explicitly intended for study visits. The British Psychological Society’s Postgraduate Study Visits Scheme contributes up to £600 for a short visit (minimum two weeks) to another institution. The application window usually falls over summer, with a deadline around September time. Full-time students can also apply for grants from the Gilchrist Educational Trust, with applications welcome all year round. The average amount awarded is usually around £500. Although certainly not relevant if you are considering a short study visit, one further source of funding is the Leverhulme Trust, whose Study Abroad Studentships are available to students intending to spend between one and two years abroad in order to complete their postgraduate degree.

Tips for making funding applications
● It is always advisable to start looking for funding sources at the earliest opportunity, as application deadlines vary, and not all bodies allow retrospective applications. Many of the funding opportunities referred to here have been advertised in the ‘Funding News’ column of The Psychologist magazine over the past year. It is certainly worth keeping an eye out for future deadlines.

● Regardless of the source of funding, there is no doubt that the application process will be extremely competitive. Funding bodies will be keen to know that their money is being spent carefully and appropriately. Therefore, when putting applications together, it is important to spend time succinctly and effectively justifying why you should be awarded funds. Highlight the importance, originality, and potential applications of your research, as well as clarifying how either the conference or study visit will contribute to your academic and professional development.

● If you are hoping to cover costs for a conference, bear in mind that you are likely to have an advantage if you are presenting a paper. Make sure that the conference or study visit is wholly relevant to your studies. You will need to clarify in detail why this is the case. It might be obvious to you, but the judges will probably not be familiar with your research area.

● Always minimise projected costs where possible, and show evidence that you have carefully considered the cheapest options. For example, if you intend to take the train and have a Railcard, make this clear. Always book ahead to get the best deal, and aim to travel at non-peak times. When planning accommodation, offer to share a room with colleagues to reduce costs.

● In your application it is a good idea to fully engage with the body you are seeking funding from; take an interest in what they do. Some bodies will request that you speak to members about your research, or write a short article for their newsletter. It never hurts to be enthusiastic about this prospect in your application.
Many bodies look favourably on applications demonstrating evidence of attempts to tap into additional funding sources, other than just their own. Far from putting funders off, this can serve to highlight your resourcefulness, enthusiasm, and willingness to put in extra work in order to facilitate a conference or study visit, providing a further guarantee that any money awarded would be used wisely.

If you intend to stay in academia after graduating, it might be useful to think of the bursary application process in terms of gaining experience for writing grants in the future. Aside from the financial benefits of securing a conference/study visit bursary, evidence of your award may also offer future employers some assurance that you know how to tap into external pots of money; a valuable skill in today’s cash-strapped academic environment.

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The role of a supervisor and the impact of supervisory change during your PhD

Alys Wyn Griffiths, Heather Blakey & Emma Vardy

The most influential aspect of a PhD is choosing a supervisor as this shapes your PhD experience, subject area and research methods. Maintaining an effective relationship with your supervisor is essential to successful doctoral training (Zhao, Golde & McCormick, 2007). However, as anyone doing a PhD knows, it’s not necessarily a smooth ride from start to finish. While it is unlikely that students start their journey anticipating a change in supervisory team, this can happen, and for a variety of reasons. We cover some of these reasons, and also how to manage the process of change, in the current article. This article aims to summarise the role of a supervisor, the importance of maintaining a good relationship with your supervisory team, as well as providing helpful advice on why a change in supervisory team may be required and how to manage this process.

The role of a supervisor

The supervisory team play an extremely important role in the postgraduate experience. They oversee the entire research project and provide feedback throughout, as well as often providing emotional support where necessary. Feedback is a fundamental component of learning (Clynes & Raftery, 2008) and it has been argued that the success of a PhD relies heavily on the supervisory team, as they are required to provide time and support to ensure that the student’s research skills are fostered to a level that results in a thesis of an acceptable standard being produced (Heath, 2002).

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) suggested the following are characteristics that should be present for a good PhD supervisor:

- Technical expertise with a general knowledge of the research area and research methods that will be used;
- An active researcher who is involved in publication in peer reviewed journals, attending conferences and will help students enter into academic careers;
- Sets regular and realistic deadlines, but avoids becoming too involved in the detail of the student’s work;
- Responsive to the student, encouraging them to become an independent researcher, and responding appropriate to any problems;
- Receive, read and return work in an acceptable amount of time.

The continued support of your supervisory team is of importance to help you to navigate the PhD experience. Whilst your supervisors may be experts in your chosen area of research, this does not necessarily mean that your working styles and aims will be the same, thus doesn’t necessarily translate to a good supervisory relationship.

The importance of a good relationship with supervisory team

Maintaining a good relationship with your supervisory team is important for a doctoral project to be a success (Mainhard, van der Rijst, Tartwijk & Wubbels, 2009), but at the time that a student begins a PhD, they may know very little about their future supervisory team. You may know them by name or by their reputation within the field, but this tells you little about their working styles and expectations. If possible, try to do some research on potential supervisors before accepting a PhD position with them.
Fraser and Mathews (1999) outlined three components that are crucial for a successful supervisor-student relationship. Firstly, each supervisor must have expertise in the research area. As a student, it is important that your supervisors have up-to-date knowledge of the research area, have publications in the research area, maintain successful collaborations with other researchers, and have supervised similar PhDs in the past, which can usually be accessed via University libraries. However, there is a balance to be struck between finding someone who is an expert in the area, but who does not have so many responsibilities that they have no time to provide effective supervision. For example, if your supervisor has a secondment in a clinical setting, it may be helpful to have a second supervisor who may have more time to dedicate to you. Secondly, the supervisor must show support for the student. Research has found that in the view of PhD students, positive attributes of supervisors are that they are reliable, have confidence in the student, and are encouraging towards the student (Denicolo, 2004). Finally, supervisors must balance creativity and criticism. At the start of a PhD, students require more creative support, with supervisors providing research ideas and suggestions of the most appropriate methodologies to use. In contrast, during the write up phase, students require more constructive feedback and criticism, to develop a well-written and critical thesis that will be successfully defended at the viva. It has consistently been shown that supervisors need to maintain an understanding of the relationship that they have with their students, as being unaware may lead to the production of an unsuccessful thesis (Leonard et al., 2006). Good communication can help to maintain and promote a strong relationship between you and your supervisor.

Positive student-supervisor relationships have benefits for both individuals. For example, providing thorough and effective feedback has been shown to benefit not only the student, but supervisors also, as they may achieve a sense of personal satisfaction through the facilitation of the development of research skills of another person (Clynes, 2004). Positive interpersonal working relationships have been associated with student satisfaction with their supervisor and also effective progression through the PhD (Ives & Rowley, 2005). Early on in the PhD set out clear expectations by having an honest discussion with your supervisor, what do they expect of you and what do you expect of them, this avoids a mismatch in expectations which can lead to a change in the supervisory team.

**Reasons underlying supervisory change**

There are many reasons you may need to change supervisor during your PhD. This may be initiated by the student, by the supervisor, or as a result of a breakdown in the student-supervisor relationship caused by, for example, an insurmountable difference in approach. For example, if there is a radical change in the direction of your research, it may be more appropriate for another faculty member to become your supervisor. If your topic has moved outside your supervisor’s area of expertise, there is a good chance that they will be supportive of the change.

While it might be the right move for you, deciding to change supervisor is a big decision. First, be sure you are clear about your reasons for wanting to change, and discuss these with someone outside of your supervisory team for advice before speaking to your supervisor. Once you are clear of your reasons and understand the university’s procedures then speak to your supervisor. Be honest; good communication on your part will go a long way to ensuring a smooth transition.

If the issue is more to do with the relationship between you, it is worth making use of the pastoral support in your department to discuss your reasons and your options. While the support available differs between universities, it is important that you speak to someone whose opinion you value, they will be able to signpost you to a more appropriate person if necessary. Many supervisory relationships have ups and downs, so you do need to be sure that any
difficulties you are having are genuinely a result of the interaction between you and your particular supervisor. If you feel that the relationship between yourself and your supervisor is affecting your progress or making you doubt your wish to continue as a PhD student, this may be the time to seek advice. If you can, always speak to your supervisor about any concerns before the situation becomes difficult. It may be that the problems you have can be resolved through an honest discussion. If they can’t, a mutual ‘no blame’ decision to work with someone else will be much easier for you to manage, and be much less disruptive to your work (and wellbeing!) than remaining with your original supervisor. However awkward the situation is, your first supervisor is much more likely to be supportive of your move if they understand the reasons for your request, and feel assured that you have done your best to resolve the issues directly with them first. Additionally, supervising PhD students is a learning curve for supervisors. Your supervisor may appreciate and respond to feedback to help them improve in the future.

If your supervisor sees the situation very differently to you – or if you feel there are substantive issues with the quality of your supervision (which go beyond an incompatible approach), check your institution’s procedures at an early stage, and make sure you keep a careful record of events. There should also be support available to you for institution specific advice regarding the procedures to be followed. It may be worth contacting the student union if you are unsure of where to turn for support. Evidence of both your supervisor’s communication with you and your own attempts to resolve issues should be helpful, but in difficult situations, a written (and dated) record of problems can also be invaluable. Keep a log of all meetings, including what was discussed and any actions arising. Again, raise concerns as they arise, either directly with your supervisor, or if this is not possible, with the director of your programme.

Burnett (2014) provided some helpful tips for how you may deal with supervisory change.

- Supervision is subjective, what one supervisor may think is an excellent research idea, may be seen as an uninteresting project by another. By changing supervisor, your PhD may have to take a slightly different course. Ensure that you discuss this with potential supervisors before confirming a change.
- Supervision styles differ between supervisors. Some supervisors provide feedback electronically, whilst some prefer to provide this in person. Always have an honest discussion at the start of expectations so you are aware of differences and hopefully address them early on.
- Do not use your previous supervisor to justify decisions made about your research - ensure that you take responsibility for the way your research progresses. If you cannot explain why you made decisions, they may need to be reconsidered, as such questions may be asked during your viva. Remember it is your work.
- See revising and reflecting on previous work as a positive experience, rather than a setback. Although challenging, when you have your viva, you will be able to justify your research with much greater confidence.
- Remember to thank all of your supervisors in your thesis acknowledgements that you feel have contributed to the completion of your PhD, however many there may be. Each supervisor helped you to reach the stage of having a complete thesis, even though this may have been a small role.

Managing an involuntary transition between supervisors

In some cases, the transition between supervisors might be sudden and unplanned, for example, due to long-term sickness. In these situations, your supervisor may not be able to provide support for the transition themselves. If you’re lucky, your institution will have thorough procedures in place for managing the transition between supervisors in these circumstances. However, if not, it is worth being clear with the academic director of your
programme, regarding your needs to ensure that you are able to continue uninterrupted. While your department should pass on records of your progress to date, it is in your interests to take an active role in this process yourself. Your new supervisor may find it helpful if you provide a written, chronological account of your thinking and work to date, including details of support and input you have found useful. They need to understand how you work as well as the content of your work, and a written account will help you communicate this. It is additionally helpful to remind your institution to take any disruption into account when they are assessing either your progress or your support needs. Ask your student union for help if you don’t feel you are being treated fairly.

In conclusion, if you feel that a supervisory change is necessary remember that you won’t be the first and certainly won’t be the last student to do so! Your PhD is your own personal journey, through which you will become an independent researcher. Therefore, whilst a change of supervisory team may initially seem like a hindrance, with a positive attitude you may see the experience as a chance to have more opinions and feedback on your work and potentially some good viva practice. In the end, you might find yourself thinking that the change was a blessing in disguise! Situations like this can be very stressful, but remember that you have a right to excellent and supportive supervision. A minimum of three years is a long time so if you need to change then do so; the difference it can make to your progress and enthusiasm could be huge!

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An apple a day keeps the doctor away...
Five minutes of exercise a day helps the doctorate stay!

Jin Zhou

Postgraduate study can often be a very sedentary time, with lots of writing and computer-based research. This article shows how exercise can benefit your health and studies, whilst also providing some simple example movements to incorporate into your daily routine.

As budding academics and scientists, we have probably all clocked up our fair share of 10,000 hours1 of writing, reading, and SPSS trauma. This will probably increase during our postgraduate career as we spend even more time at our desk dedicated to reviewing journal articles, analysing statistics outputs, and perhaps becoming more at-risk of consuming greater quantities of caffineinated beverages than is advised (EFSA, 2015).

Somewhere along the PhD journey, we may find ourselves more and more deskbound as writing, teaching, and email pressures slowly build. The intensity of the doctoral process can cause moments of stress, panic and sheer terror, and often non-academic activities are put on the back burner as our energies are taken up by our research focus. In addition, those extra foamy lattes, and the snacks we might allow ourselves to indulge in every 500 words as a treat, can start to impact on our health.

However, even as a nation, we are too sedentary (National Statistics, 2013). The general health guidelines are that we should engage in moderate forms of exercise at least two-and-a-half hours a week, in order to maintain a healthy physiological system (Chief Medical Office, 2011). That being said, the most common excuse for not engaging in exercise is the ‘I just don’t have time’. These energy and time constraints can become even more amplified during the PhD process. However, recent research suggests that even just five minutes per day can have long lasting benefits on a range of health-related outcomes (Lee et al., 2013).

Exercise is known to improve circulation (needed to power our brains), reduce stress (needed to maintain sanity during PhD-related crises), and provide a genuine mental break away from the computer and thesis-related thoughts. Research suggests regular exercise benefits the brain in a number a ways, for example, improving attention span, memory retention, and academic learning in students (Tomporowski et al., 2008). Moreover, physical activity can boost self-esteem (for those suffering from imposter syndrome2), improve sleep quality, and reduce your risk for depression (Boss et al., 2002; Fox, 2000).

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So what might be the best way to get some well-needed exercise into our schedules? Many sports physiologists advocate interval training as one of the most effective forms of performing exercise in the most efficient and time conscious way. Its general format is a series of exercise workouts interspersed with rest periods, in order to improve cardiovascular fitness (Heyward, 2006). Some experts believe that the benefits of interval training revolve around allowing participants to burn more calories in a shorter period. Adopting a high intensity approach to interval training can provide short but effective workouts that speed up metabolism to facilitate fat burning, as well as increasing anaerobic fitness and athletic capacity. Research indicates that high intensity interval training (HIIT) is particularly effective for sedentary or recreationally active individuals (Laursen & Jenkins, 2002).

The idea behind this is that we work better in short bursts. This idea is reflected in academia, where techniques like the Pomodoro technique 3, are used as timed method to create efficient study sessions. In a similar fashion, interval training is now a well-established workout method thought to be extremely effective way to exercise in short bursts. One particular style of workout called tabata training (Tabata et al., 1996) forms an exercise routine where you work on a certain movement at maximum effort for 20 seconds before resting for 10 seconds. This is repeated eight times for a total period of four minutes 4. The important component of HIIT workouts is that you really have to go hard on the exercises with maximum effort and 100 per cent intensity, with the relief of knowing that you will be having a rest period in between sets.

This rest of this article will introduce four essential bodyweight movements that can be incorporated into these five-minute workouts aimed to get you away from the screen, engage with some of those areas that may be taking too much of the PhD strain, or resulting in too little activity due to our this overtly sedentary stage of our career. Moreover, the following exercises can be considered ‘functional’ – actions that will benefit your everyday mobility and movement. Finally, the flexibility and ease of the routine means that it can be performed at any point during the day, and moved to fit around your working hours and energy levels.

Each movement is supplied with a detailed description of how to perform the exercise. If you are having trouble with performing the full range of movement, or you prefer to engage in a more low-impact version, then the ‘scaled’ and ‘controlled’ sections are provided as the respective alternatives.

### The workout

Warm up (one minute) – high knees jogging to get the heart rate up and the body moving.
- Your knees should be hitting as high as possible, and definitely at least past the hips.
- Drive up with your arms, and contract your core as you pull your knees up.
- Start slow and speed up throughout the minute – imagine you are switching up a gear every 20 seconds so that in the final third you are going as fast as you can.

Twenty seconds on, 10 seconds rest x eight (four minutes).
- You can either choose to perform one movement for the entire four minutes, or you can mix and match the movements (letters denote movements described below).

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3 The Pomodoro technique is a time management method developed by Francesco Cirillo in the 1980s. It uses time intervals to create intermittent relief periods suggested to improve mental agility.

4 There are plenty of mobile applications that can provide an electronic stop-clock specifically for interval training.
Scoring: Make a note of the routine and the number of reps you manage across the entire four-minutes. This will provide you with a benchmark to reach and improve on when you come to repeat it again.

A. Push-ups
Whether you are doing the push-up on your toes, or if you have to drop your knees, this is a very effective strengthening move. Also, after those many hours spent crouched over a keyboard, this movement helps to open up the chest and strengthens the shoulder blades to help pin our shoulders back and counteracts bad posture.

- Begin in the plank position with your hands on the ground, with arms fully extended and shoulder-width apart.
- Your back should be flat, and your hips in line with toes/knees. Your body needs to be in one straight line with everything in your core locked tight, with your lower back and glutes (bum) tightened.
- Lower yourself to the ground until your chest touches the floor, and then explosively push yourself back to the starting position. Your chest must touch the floor to fully benefit from the full range of movement.
- Your core should not drop, nor should your lower back collapse in. If you find yourself ‘snaking’ your way back up, or rounding your back or arms out in an attempt to make the move easier, stop and take a second or two to compose your form, before trying again.

Comments:
Push-ups are one of the hardest movements as it takes a lot of upper body strength, as well as a solid core. The focus is to make sure your form is correct from the start to the finish, whether on your toes or with knees dropped. This means no collapsed back or core. If maintaining this form means you are only managing two to three push-ups within the interval then that is perfectly fine. This strength-focused exercise is about building your strength and form, and will not be as effective if the movement is performed incorrectly.

Scaled version:
Drop to your knees – with your knees dropped you take away some of that bodyweight so there is less to push up, but your back and core must remain in a straight and tight position.

Hand release – lower yourself with control until your chest is touching the ground. Lift your hands briefly off the floor while resting on your chest (but with hips off the ground). Push explosively off the ground, as if you are trying to push the floor away from you, and return to start position with arms fully locked out. This allows a brief respite on the ground, and more explosively power at the bottom on the push up to help you return to starting position.

Controlled version:
Instead of performing a push-up, stay in a strong straight armed plank position for the duration of the interval.
B. Squats

The squat is nature’s intended sitting position, and is both a vital and functional component of our everyday mobility. We spend a lot of time sitting at desks, in meetings, on public transport, and in front of the TV, and our posture on these various chairs, benches and couches typically leads to the loss of functionality of our natural sitting posture. The squat is a movement that not only keeps our hips, back and knees operating at a sound state, but also has the added benefit of contributing to our biomechanics of how we stand up from a sitting position.

- Feet should be shoulder-width apart, with toes slightly pointing outwards. Your head should always be looking straight ahead.
- Engage your hips and send your bum back before pulling down into the squat. Your knees should avoid turning in, or coming too far past your toes. The weight should be on your heels, not on your toes (as this will cause you to fall forward).
- Your hips should break the parallel plane – so the bottom of the squat has your hips and things are below the knees.
- Squeeze the glutes and thighs to explosively push yourself back to starting position, and stand up tall with hips fully extended.
- Use your arms to provide balance – as your move into your squat bring up your arms parallel to the floor, this will keep your head and chest up. As you stand up from the bottom of the squat sweep your arms back down to your sides, this will help propel yourself back upright.

Comments:

For the full movement your hips and thighs must be below parallel at the bottom of the squat, and your legs and hips fully extended at the top of the squat. Do not let your knees roll around, and keep your back straight and core tight. After a few squats you will start to notice that it is not just your legs and bum you are working, but your arms and core too. This is why this movement is so important for our whole body functioning.

Scaled version:

Hold onto a tabletop or door handle with your arms fully extended. Sink into the full squat movement, but using the solidity of the table/handle to pull yourself back up.

Controlled version:

Instead of standing up from the squat, remain in the bottom of the squat for the duration of the interval. Squeeze your arms straight out in front of you to provide balance, and to work your shoulders.
C. Jumping lunges

Lunges are a great exercise to improve your core strength and stability. Although it is seen as a lower-body movement, you should be engaging your core and your arms in order to maximise its effectiveness. In addition, it helps to be strong when putting one foot in front of the other in everyday life, that is, walking!

- Start in a forward lunge position: step forward with one leg, lowering your hips until both knees are bent at a 90 degree angle. Hips are squarely facing forward (so don’t end up rotating your hips/upper body towards the back leg! To stop this from happening you need to keep your core tight).
- Jump, switch, and land on the opposite side. You should have a strong switch movement so that when you land your back knee should be under your hip, the front leg should land slightly out to the side, in order to facilitate a strong and stable landing position – too narrow and your balance will be off and you will wobble.
- Do not let your front knee lean over your toes as your lunge. Keep you upper body upright throughout the movement, engaging your core, lower back and shoulders as you move into the lunge.
- Use your arms as you did in your squats to power you up, and to help you balance.

Comments:
The stronger you get the higher you can jump. Do not just rely on switching your feet. Get the full intensity by really looking to jump up and land in a deep lunge, and using as much explosive force as possible. Remember, it is only four minutes and you get breaks in between. Avoid looking down as this can strain your neck and throw off your balance.

Scaled version:
If you do not have the strength or the balance just yet to perform the jumping split lunge, start with static alternating lunges. However, make sure you keep up the intensity and perform the full range of movement (back knee touches the floor!).

Controlled version:
Stay in a strong lunge position, with your arms squeezed straight up by your ears. Concentrate on keeping your balance by squeezing your core, and not dropping your arms for the entire interval. At the next interval, swap legs.
D. Burpees

The burpee is the complete total body workout, requiring strength, co-ordination, power and speed. It is an explosive squat-push-up-jump combination requires you to use all of your body to drop to the floor before powering back up again as quickly as possible. Its function... well, if you fall over, you might want to be able to get up quickly without too many people seeing your trip!

- Begin by standing up straight with feet should width apart.
- Bend your knees so that you drop to a frog stance squat with your hands on the ground.
- Both feet jumps back and your chest hits the floor (keep your arms strong to stop yourself from face-planting!).
- Now reverse this and get back up by pushing up with your arms and bring your knees and feet back beneath your body.
- End the movement by making a straight jump up with an overhead clap. Land softly, and then repeat the movement as fast as possible.

Comments:
The burpee is a tough movement, requiring you to use your entire body to shift your own weight from standing to ground to jumping tall. The more efficient you become at the burpee the easier they become, so try and focus on keeping your body under control, and powering up from the floor straight into a wide squat so that you have the upward momentum to jump up. Having flailing limps and a wobbly centre of gravity will mean a lot of your energy is wasted. This movement requires a little bit of flexibility in your hip flexors, but as you become practiced with the movement you will become better at ‘snapping’ the knees back to your chest to really work your core muscles as well as your glutes (bum) in one swift move. Finally, because this is a combination of movements try to work at a tempo that will provide a rhythm for your down and ups.

Scaled version:
There is not much in the form of scaling for the burpee. The more experienced ‘burpers’ will demonstrate smoother transitions between getting up from the floor, performing a fully extended leap, and then dropping back to the ground to begin the next burpee. A scaled version will be to perform each burpee as one, taking a few seconds to compose your body and your breath before going again. The better you become, the easier it will be to start to link them together.

Controlled version:
This low impact version removes the jumping, whilst working key areas of your whole body. Keep your feet shoulder width apart and reach up as tall as possible, with everything stretching up leading with your fingertips. Keeping your legs straight, reach down and place both hands on the floor (depending on your hamstring flexibility, as close to your feet as is comfortable for you). Move your hands out as far as you can, while keeping your legs straight until you are at (or almost at) a straight armed plank position. Reverse the action by inching your hands back towards your feet, then roll your body up and reach up tall again.
Still don’t think you have time for a five-minute workout? Here is a sneaky way to fit in at least something daily...

Try standing on one leg while you brush your teeth.

- This will work your core stability for at least four minutes of your day (if you go by the recommended two minutes brushing time).
- The progressions from this would be to raise your knee higher and higher, aiming to be able to stand perfectly balanced with your knee raised above parallel (i.e. above your hips) for the entire duration of the brush.
- Make sure you switch legs to give both sides of your body and brain a go. This will help you flex those back muscles that hold us up at your desks, and restore balance and posture.
- To really test yourself try closing your eyes, and holding your leg straight out to the front/side.

**Turn your teeth brushing into a mini workout:**

Squats x 10 – improves your flexibility, but also strengthens your whole lower body and core by targeting your hip flexors, glutes, lower back and abdominals.

Knees raises x 10 each side (alternating knee) – raise your knee as high as possible by squeezing your abdominal muscles and crunching up. Your knees should be hitting above the hip line every time.

Lunges x 10 – strengthen your legs, core and balance. Big lunge forward with one leg so that the knee of your back leg grazes the floor, before pushes back off your front foot to finish standing in a strong upright position. Concentrate on keeping your core and back tight.

In summary, the article above looks to provide a detailed description as to how to perform a form of high intensity interval training that has benefits for your physical and mental wellbeing during your PhD journey. The concise five-minute workout attempts to address the issue of time constraints due to our academic duties, and scaled and controlled versions are provided in order to allow anyone at any fitness level to engage in this five-minute circuit. Finally, it is important to mention that many esteemed higher education institutions seek to provide a healthy working environment, and you are encouraged to look up what your institution and occupational health department has to offer to support the well-being of their staff and students.

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References
A Guide for Psychology Postgraduates: Surviving Postgraduate Study

There is a virtual world full of real benefits for postgraduate psychology students. Social media provides an infrastructure that can be utilised to support your research, to help develop your professional profile and to communicate research findings with the public. Making the most of these opportunities often requires time, knowledge and persistence. Luckily, for us, our journey into the digital foray has the benefit of the experiences of others, who have already explored some of the obstacles. The use of social media in a professional setting is becoming widely recognised as a supportive platform to share, connect and develop research practice. However, some in the Psychology/Research field deem not all aspects of social media beneficial (Research Information Network (RIN), 2011). There are many issues, which as professionals we need to be mindful of when engaging in various online social platforms. This article will reflect on the use of social media upon creating a ‘digital presence’ and carrying out research.

A digital presence
Many people in the research field are now turning to social media to present themselves to a wider audience, which may aid in collaborative and further research opportunities. However, creating a digital identity can be a daunting prospect, particularly for students who are yet to determine what career path they wish to pursue. We can create a digital presence within a variety of social network platforms ranging from more specific, research and professional platforms to more personal blogging available to a wider audience (see Table 1 for useful websites regarding social media use by researchers and academics).

Academic and professional specific
Websites such as academia.edu and Researchgate target an academic audience. This platform is useful for following specific researchers of interest, disseminating papers and monitoring impact. The features are extremely useful for communicating research and creating a specific research profile. Similarly, LinkedIn is a great way to connect with other researchers and businesses by creating a professional profile (Miah, 2015). However, these platforms are solely academic and it is difficult to provide that ‘personal touch’. As postgraduates, connecting with researchers in the field can be daunting and the way in which we convey ourselves may be scrutinised more in these social network platforms. Further, it can be difficult to communicate ideas and general research updates, as the focus is on sharing papers, impact, and maintaining a professional research profile.

Personal blogs and Microblogging
Conversely, there are various social media platforms which although are not solely aimed at academic or professional use, are continuously being utilised for this purpose. In order to create a more personal platform with the opportunity to communicate ideas or unpublished

Social media: A psychology postgraduate's reflection
Donna Peach & Marianne Erskine-Shaw

Social media is increasingly being utilised as a means of sharing research and ideas, showing your skill-set and collecting data. This article reflects on the positives and potential pitfalls for psychology postgraduates of this burgeoning area.
research, many researchers and research groups are using tools such as WordPress to create blogs. Blogs allow you to post both large and small writings, are largely useful to gain comments on ideas and research, and are often a vehicle for collaborative opportunities (RIN, 2011). However, it can be difficult to publicise personal blogs to a wider research audience and therefore many academics are turning to microblogs such as Twitter. Twitter allows people to share small posts to a wide audience, in 140 characters. Although this allows for a quick read, this may also limit information that is more detailed. For this reason, microblog posts often share links to various webpages or blogs containing more information. Microblogging websites such as Twitter allow us to communicate information beyond our professional identity, for example; music tastes, food choices and social activities. However, it is important that we are mindful of what we are posting and sharing, and how this may affect our future connections and career. Many employers are now accessing current and potential employee profiles on social networking websites, which in some incidences can lead to disciplinary, dismissal or unsuccessful applicants (Roberts & Sambrook, 2014).

Although the vast array of social media platforms allows many different digital profiles, a downside of this is the time that it can take to keep them up-to-date. Thus, it is worthwhile to be selective with the platforms that you choose and being mindful of maintaining an appropriate work/life balance. In addition to the time spent updating social media pages, microblogging websites provide copious amounts of information, which can be overwhelming (RIN, 2011). It is, therefore, important to be selective not only about the platforms we use, but also about the information that we allow to filter into our view, for example, limiting the amount of people you follow. There is a lot of interesting information out there, but we cannot possibly read it all!

Nevertheless, postgraduate students have much to gain from having a presence on social media. This is especially the case with Twitter, as increasingly you can use this to connect with your university, library and other subject related organisations. The British Psychological Society (BPS) and many of its Divisions, Branches and Sections have a presence on Twitter making it easy to track developments and events (see Table 2 for useful Twitter and Facebook pages). As a psychology postgraduate student, you may wish to develop closer links with a Section that peaks your interest, or with a researcher in your area. Twitter provides opportunities for you to do this and often you will find academics willing to share information or to respond to requests. Even if the idea of reaching out to a particular individual is daunting, the beauty of Twitter is that engagement may consist of merely liking or retweeting a post, rather than directly connecting with each other. With these opportunities in mind, it is essential to

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<td>The A to Z of Social Media for Academia includes brief descriptions, examples and links.</td>
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Table 1: Useful websites.
consider how you want to present yourself. Social psychologists will tell you that those with whom we group ourselves create part of our social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, you may want to consider whom else beyond your interest in psychology you want to connect with on different social media platforms. This can extend to the decisions of what you share, repeat, or retweet. Concern about these issues can lead to social media paralysis; some circumvent this by adding a disclaimer such as ‘retweet does not mean agreement’.

A great opportunity is available for psychology postgraduate students through online engagement with the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG). If you are studying psychology at a postgraduate level in a UK institution then you are automatically a member of PsyPAG (there is no registration fee). At PsyPAG there is a team of representatives on the committee who run the social media outlets (Communications sub-committee). Therefore, the PsyPAG twitter and Facebook pages are extremely active with plenty of posts regarding employment, events, articles and much more. There is huge potential to extend the PsyPAG online community and if this is something you would be interested in, then do not hesitate to get involved and engage with their social media pages. The importance of a supportive network throughout postgraduate study is not to be underestimated, so get online and take part in this vibrant community!

Social media for dissemination
Another advantage of social media is in its use as a mode of disseminating research findings. Social media can be a good resource to identify traditional outlets for research such as journals or conferences. However, in our increasingly ‘open’ academic world, you can also share links to your research papers, particularly helpful if published in an ‘open’ access journal. I would suggest this is of particular use to psychology as a discipline that integrates across the social research spectrum. Using social media can help to develop networks with researchers in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, to evaluate and extend your research. Such activity can serve to increase your citation profile, but perhaps more importantly; it can provide opportunities to collaborate on future projects. Although the ability to share newly-published work has an array of benefits, it is becoming increasingly more common for newly-published papers to be subject to mass criticism across social networking sites such as Twitter and in blogs (Mandavilli, 2011). This brings about questions as to whether authors of such papers should reply to criticism online or whether to reply in a more traditional way (at conferences or in

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<th>Table 2: Useful Twitter and Facebook pages for psychology postgraduates.</th>
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journals) (ibid). It is important to remain professional in response to online criticism and to inhibit progression in to public arguments, which could affect your reputation as a professional researcher. However, to provide a counter argument to this matter it is interesting to note that the volume of Twitter mentions are positively correlated with downloads and early citations (Shuai, Pepe & Bollen, 2012). Therefore, social media is arguably a useful tool in the dissemination of pre-published and newly-published articles.

Social media as a research tool

The accessibility of information within the social media realm is vast. At the click of a button, you can extend your knowledge base, by accessing blogs, podcasts, videos and connecting with the current researchers in your field. Platforms such as SlideShare are a valuable source of knowledge providing access to millions of presentations; similarly, you can upload your own slides thus extending your online footprint.

In addition, there is potential to use your social media presence (with ethical approval) to invite others to participate in your research. Using social media for recruitment potentially allows you to extend the diversity of your participant pool with people who may otherwise be inaccessible to you. However, it also raises questions about the public or private intent that people who share information on different platforms have. From this complex boundaries and ethical complexities emerge as to what can be regarded as informed consent. The BPS have helpfully provided guidance to help researchers navigate the ethical challenges of what they term internet-mediated research (IMR; British Psychological Society, 2013).

Finally, it is important to remember some of the other important risks that inhabit any social media activity. As psychological student researchers, you may have an interest in its propensity to increase incidents of cyber bullying or its impact on mental health. These concerns are important as they influence people and they could affect you. In addition, it is vital that you maintain your professionalism and adhere to the conduct expected by your institution, organisation and the BPS. To ensure good social media practice it is worthwhile becoming familiar with the relevant guidance. It is also important to be aware that as a student with looming deadlines common complaints of social media feeds are their usefulness as a vehicle for procrastination.

Despite the challenges, it is evident that there is huge potential for psychologists to engage with social media in various ways. It is an exciting time to be a social scientist and to help construct this social research space. Much about the future remains unknown, but we can be sure that the relationship between social media and social researchers will remain transformative.

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References
Top tips on writing blogs
Professor Mark Griffiths

Blogs can be a useful way to present your thoughts and start conversations on topical issues or research interests. This article provides some advice on how to start and make the most of blogging.

Writing a blog can be both enjoyable and time consuming. I have only been actively blogging since December 2011 but already have two successful blogs (my own personal blog and one for Psychology Today – links below) as well as being a guest blogger on four or five other sites including NTU’s own Expert Opinion blog site, gambling and gaming sites (such as GamaSutra), and blog columns for newspapers (most notably The Independent and The Times). My own personal blog had passed 1,070,000 visitors by mid-January 2014. Although there are no ‘quick fixes’ to becoming a better blog writer, here are some general tips on how to make your writing more productive. I would advise you to:

- Establish a regular place where all blog writing is done.
- Remove distracting temptations from where the blog writing is done (e.g. magazines, television).
- Leave other activities (e.g. washing up, making the dinner) until after writing the blog.
- Limit potential interruptions during blog writing (e.g. put a ‘Do not disturb’ sign on the door, unplug the telephone, etc.).
- Make the place where you write your blog as comfortable as possible.
- Make recurrent activities (e.g. telephone calls, coffee making) dependent upon minimum periods of blog writing first.
- Write blogs while feeling ‘fresh’ and leave mentally non-taxing activities until later in the day.
- Plan beyond daily goals and be realistic about what can be written for a blog in the time available.
- Plan and schedule blog writing tasks into manageable units.
- Complete one section of blog writing at a time if writing the blog in sections.
- Revise and redraft your blog at least twice.
- Write daily rather than ‘bingeing’ all in one go.
- Share writing with peers as people are more helpful, judgmental and critical on ‘unfinished’ drafts.
- Look at other blog sites that cover the same kind of material that you would like to cover yourself.

Obviously, the problem with such a prescriptive list such as this is that not every suggestion will work for everyone. Many of us know our own limitations and create the right conditions to help get the creative juices going. Some people can’t write in silence or with others in the room. There are also some myths associated with writing generally and blogs specifically:

- **Blog writing is inherently difficult:** Like speaking, blog writing doesn’t need to be perfect to be effective and satisfying.
- **Good blog writing must be original:** Little, if any, of what we write is truly original. What makes our ideas worthwhile communicating is the way we present them.
- **Good blog writing must be perfect preferably in a single draft:** In general, the more successful writers are more likely to revise what they have written.
Good blog writing must be spontaneous: There appears to be a belief that blog writing should await inspiration. However, the most productive and satisfying way to write is habitually, regardless of mood or inspiration. Writers who overvalue spontaneity tend to postpone writing, and if they write at all, they write in binges that they associate with fatigue.

Good blog writing must proceed quickly: Procrastination goes hand in hand with impatience. Those writers who often delay blog writing suppose that writing must proceed quickly and effortlessly. However, good writing can often proceed at a slow pace over a lengthy period of time.

Good blog writing is delayed until the right mood with big blocks of undisrupted time available: Good blog writing can take place in any mood at any time. It is better to write blogs habitually in short periods every day rather than in binges.

Good blog writers are born not made: Good blog writing is a process that can be learned like any other behaviour.

Good writers do not share their writing until it is finished and perfect: Although some blog writers are independent, many writers share their ideas and plans at an early stage and then get colleagues to read over their draft blogs for comments and ideas.

Even when these false beliefs about blog writing are dispelled, many of us can still have problems putting pen to paper or finger to keypad. Insights about blog writing only slowly translate into actions. For most professionals, writing is only done out of necessity (i.e. a report that they have to hand in). This produces a feeling of ‘having to write’ rather than ‘wanting to write’ and can lead to boredom and/or anxiety. Furthermore, most people appear to view blog writing as a private act in which their problems are unique and embarrassing.

It is generally acknowledged that there is no one proven effective method above all others for teaching people to become better blog writers. It is also a process that can be learned and can aid learning (i.e. a skill learned through opportunities to write and from instructional feedback). By reading this article I cannot make you become better blog writers overnight. However, it has hopefully equipped readers with some tips and discussion points that may help in facilitating better blog writing not only amongst yourselves and your friends.

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Further reading
Dunn, A. (2012). Blogging, the tipping point, and free will. PsyPAG Quarterly, 85, 31–32.

Professor Mark Griffiths’ main blog sites:
http://drmarkgriffiths.wordpress.com/
http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-excess

Article first published in PsyPAG Quarterly Issue 90, March 2014
Confidence: A pre-requisite for the viva voce experience

Harry C.R. Bowles

The viva is an essential component of the PhD experience. Serving alongside the thesis as the culmination of many years hard work, the viva is widely seen as a stressful experience. This article seeks to de-mystify the viva and provide tips on how to prepare and successfully complete it.

Confidence and the viva

The viva is a highly anticipated event in the life of a PhD student. There is no escaping the fact that, for perhaps the first time, everything you have been studying and researching for a minimum of three years (for a full-time candidate) is exposed to a level of academic scrutiny that experienced researchers will rarely encounter again in the fashion that is performed in the viva. There is no hiding behind the detachment and anonymity of peer-review. The viva is a face-to-face, eye-to-eye, verbal examination of you and the credentials of your research and a right of passage to a career in academia through which you must pass. With your future at stake, it is easy to worry and catastrophise about the outcome and to lose confidence in the processes that got you to the point of sitting outside the examination room, with your supervisor in tow, waiting for the formalities to begin.

We can all relate to the importance of feeling confident. From a scientific point of view it is understood that confidence is a mediator of the anxiety response (see Mellalieu, Hanton & Fletcher, 2006) and has been cited as one of the most significant psychological attributes in determining successful and unsuccessful performance (Vealey & Chase, 2008). We can also recognise from our day-to-day experiences that our levels and feelings of confidence can fluctuate. This is particularly true in times of stress and uncertainty that can leave us searching to restore the faith we once had in our abilities (see Kingston, Lane & Thomas, 2010). During this search we strive to find things from which we can draw confidence that are relevant to the stressor (e.g. the viva) we are encountering. Reflecting on my experiences of the viva, this chapter aims to offer some direction to assist with this search by describing five sources of confidence that enabled me to approach viva in a confident frame of mind. In no particular order, they are as follows…

Source 1: Preparation

First and foremost confidence should be taken from the way that you have prepared. In the sport psychology literature, preparation is recognised as an important source of confidence among (elite) athletic populations (Hays et al., 2009). It serves not only to boost levels of self-confidence in the build-up to competition but also to undermine it if the steps an individual takes to prepare him or herself are halted or in some way disrupted (Hays et al., 2007).

It is also widely appreciated within the same body of literature that the manner in which two athletes may choose to prepare for the same competitive event may differ considerably in accordance with their individual needs (Hays et al., 2007, 2009). That is to say, there is no ‘one

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1 Throughout the chapter I refer to the viva as it is performed in a UK university for the examination of a Doctoral thesis. Although there are norms across the sector for the conduct of a UK viva, there are also some differences. It is, therefore, worth checking your own university’s regulations for more information on what is expected of you, and what you can expect to encounter, at viva.
Confidence: A prerequisite for the viva voce experience

size fits all model’ to the mode of preparatory activity that can instil a sense of assurance in one’s ability to cope with the pressure of a big occasion and a belief that one can be successful when it matters. What I will go on to describe from my experiences is not intended therefore to represent a panacea for viva voce preparation. Rather, it is intended as an illustration of what I did and why I did it and a resource upon which to draw, acknowledging that the ideas presented may not necessarily be appropriate for all. Nevertheless, the principle of preparation, however you choose to do it, as a source of self-confidence to take into the viva examination remains reinforced by the old adage that a failure to prepare is preparation to under-achieve.

Central to the way I prepared for viva was engaging in the process of a mock. This wasn’t a mock in the sense of having my supervisors ask me a few tricky questions over a cup of tea in the university cafeteria, but a mock in the form of an orchestrated event designed to mimic – as closely as possible – the real thing. Hence my mock viva was arranged for 9.00 a.m. on a Thursday morning – the same time and day of the week I would be examined formally. Two copies of my thesis were passed to two (mock) examiners who took the time to read and review the thesis in its entirety. A room was booked and set-up in the style of the viva with my Director of Studies acting as Chair who invited me into the room once he and both of my examiners were ready.

Unbeknown to me my examiners that day had been primed by my supervisors to be challenging in their method of questioning, not for the sake of knocking my confidence per se, but to stretch me beyond what I could expect to face on the actual day. I also took the decision to engage in the mock only two weeks prior to my formal viva date to add another dimension of reality to the experience. The mock proved to be an uncomfortable experience that left me feeling a little downcast but nonetheless encouraged by the fact that I had been through a process of acclimatisation.

Also in the room that day was another member of the university’s academic staff who had asked (for reasons related to her own professional development) if she could attend, and in the conversations that followed the question and answer session, there were two pieces of advice she gave me. The first came from an inquisition into what I had eaten that morning? I replied with, ‘a banana’ to which she responded by saying, ‘Well a banana isn’t enough’. The implication of course was that I should have eaten something a little more substantial. She explained that whilst watching the event unfold she noticed, at around the hour mark, that I started to look ‘a bit peaky’. What I had come to understand was that the intellectual exercise of fielding and responding to a battery of questions for a sustained period is exhausting. It is a feat of endurance that requires copious amounts of energy to stave off fatigue that a banana (no matter how large) cannot adequately suffice.

The second piece of advice she gave me came from the observation that I had encountered some trouble navigating a path through the array of multi-coloured ‘Post-Its’ that lined each chapter of my thesis. I had been told on numerous occasions that the key to the viva was to ‘know your thesis’ and to use it in responding to questions. And so, in the lead-up to my mock, I had been through my thesis marking it up for that exact purpose. On the surface, it appeared extremely diligent giving off the impression that I was indeed ‘prepared’ for the occasion. However, in reality, what I had done in an attempt to make my life easier had failed to benefit me in practice.

What was suggested as an alternative was to take a lined piece of A4 paper and fold it in half along its longitudinal axis to create a booklet. I was then guided to number each line of the

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2 It should be noted that to read an entire thesis for the purpose of a mock is a big commitment and is often based – as it was in my case – on the collegiality of supportive colleagues.
booklet in correspondence with all 259 pages of my thesis. Finally, I was encouraged to go away and write a ‘half-line summary’ (relative to half a line of A4) of each page of my thesis as a means of indexing all the essential information that was contained within.

It was an exercise that went beyond a mere process of indexing, but a means through which I could engage in a conversation with my thesis and busy myself in the preparation process. If you are anything like me you will find it hard to concentrate on anything for more than 15 minutes – an attention span that is somewhat reduced when the task is to review your own work. What this activity forced me to do was to focus on the content of my arguments in order to locate and synthesise what I had said and where I had said it. Engaging in the process of a mock viva thus served not only as a way of preparing myself for the atmosphere of the viva, but as an opportunity to receive some feedback and practical advice in preparation for the real event in the weeks that followed.

Source 2: The rationale of your research
At this point I should explain that my PhD thesis took the form of a traditional ethnography exploring the lived transitional experiences of a particular youth population. It involved me, the researcher, immersing myself in the context of investigation in order to examine how a group of ‘emerging adults’ negotiated the projects of their self-identities amid a structured set of opportunities and constraints. Whilst in the midst of preparing for viva it occurred to me that, for the uninformed reader, it might appear a bit odd that the first empirical chapter of a thesis exploring ‘youth transition’ was a biographical case-study of someone who was neither ‘youthful’ nor indeed ‘in transition’. I spent some time thereafter thinking about my rationale for incorporating the data within the thesis at the point in which I had. To me it seemed common sense – to the extent that I felt it went without saying.

The issue, of course, was that it had in fact gone unsaid, and sure enough in the viva I was asked to explain my decision to open the empirical sections of the thesis with data that had no obvious conceptual or thematic link to the phenomenon under investigation. From here the question of ‘why’ became central to discussions that took place between me and my examiners. This was not because my arguments were inherently flawed or missing. Instead, it was to test the logic, clarity and consistency of the line of reasoning that held the research together. Indeed, you may wish to consider the viva as an inspection of these things where coherence and research judgement take precedence over the complexity of research design and the profundity of data and interpretation. Part of the process therefore is to provide the candidate with the opportunity to make explicit everything that she or he has understood about the research they have conducted. This process extends beyond a mere concern with our choice of research question and methodology, but drills into the decisions we make as researchers in the maturation of our research that witnesses our coevolution. In essence, what I am highlighting is an exercise in reflexivity that, if engaged with throughout the course of your research, should reassure you when you are reminded of the fact that ‘you know your thesis better than anybody else’.

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3 You may wish to record your mock viva in order to familiarise yourself with the sound of your own voice. This could be particularly useful if you have little experience of public speaking.

4 The style of questioning I encountered may not be entirely consistent with more positivist approaches where candidates might expect to be questioned on the complexity of research design and the analysis and interpretation of data.
Source 3: Supervisors’ judgement

Another source from which confidence can be derived is from your supervisors’ academic judgement. One thing to bear in mind is that the result of a PhD viva also reflects on the supervisory team as well as you, the candidate. Whichever way you look at it, there is a degree of co-dependence in the relationship between you and your supervisors linked to what a thesis represents in the context of lives and careers of everybody involved in its production. It is unlikely, therefore, that they would allow you to submit your PhD thesis if they weren’t satisfied with the quality of the research and confident of a positive result. That is not to say that you should rest on your laurels. It is merely to suggest that you should take faith from your supervisors’ ability to recognise your intellectual development and to evaluate the calibre of your work based on its originality (does it add value to an existing body of knowledge?), rigour (do the methods of research withstand academic scrutiny and merit publication?) and scope (is the thesis of sufficient quality and volume that can be reasonably expected of a doctoral student engaged in full or part-time study?).

I was fortunate in the sense that my supervisors were experienced researchers and academics, and had a number of successful PhD completions between them. If, however, you are unsure of supervisors’ experiences of supervising you should be mindful that the make-up of your supervisory team would to some extent be shaped by University/School/Departmental policy that will set-out what is minimally required for supervision of a doctoral student. If this helps to strengthen the trust you have in your supervisors’ judgement, then so be it. The crucial point is that in the moments of self-doubt that crept in in the lead-up to the main event, I was able to draw a sense of validation from my supervisors that made me feel safe in the knowledge that my thesis and I were ready to be examined.

Source 4: The product

As I have already begun to describe, having faith in the quality of my thesis was a source of confidence that accompanied me into the viva. Like other forms of academic assessment though, judgements of quality are somewhat subjective and partially dictated by professional predilections and personal taste. Hence, the fact that my supervisors and I believed in the quality of the research produced did not, and could not, guarantee it would be evaluated in the same light. What I could be certain of were the hours I had invested in the processes of doctoral study from which my PhD was the product, and from which I took confidence. I’m not referring simply to the hours devoted to reading, writing and collecting data, but the many hours spent fretting and abstracting about ideas, concepts and directions when all those around me seemed to have no such concerns.

Yes, I am referring to the turmoil you have undoubtedly put yourself through on your journey to compiling and submitting your thesis. Why? Because it provides an indication of how much of yourself features within the product of your research. It may not be the greatest PhD thesis the world of (social) science and has ever received. It is OK to accept that. What matters is that it evidences a commitment to the endeavour of advancing knowledge in an ethical and conscientious fashion, and that it is ‘good enough’. I knew I had committed myself to the process. I knew I had ‘lived’ the experience and I was confident that whatever I had managed to capture within the pages of the thesis was authentic.

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5 Some universities may require formal ‘sign off’ or approval from supervisors before the thesis can be submitted. In other institutions, PhD candidates might be free to submit their theses whenever they choose. In the case of the latter, it would be an unwise candidate who does not heed the advice of a supervisory team about the readiness of the thesis.
Source 5: Choice of Examiners (and Chair)

The final source from which I derived feelings of confidence was from my choice of examiners. It is a decision that I made in conversation with my supervisors and one that I was made to feel as though I had some influence over⁶. Moreover, it was a decision that I had begun to consider well in advance of submitting my thesis as I started to get a firmer sense of the type of thesis I wanted to produce. This gave me time to sort through my ideas about possible examiners – most of which were unrealistic logistically. Whilst in the midst of doing so, I had many ‘well intended’ individuals tell me how ‘crucial’ it was that my choice of examiner included an eminent name in the field, and for a while I believed this was indeed crucial.

I should note that since viva few people have inquired about the scholarly reputations of my examiners. There are after all so many fields of study and areas of research that individual reputations tend to lose their meaning outside of their particular academic circles. Hence, it is far less important to get the right name than it is to get the right examiners for the job who will provide the right blend of personality and expertise to give you and your thesis a rigorous yet fair and open trial.

For the purpose of my viva, I had to identify both an internal and external examiner. My choice of internal examiner was relatively straightforward and I ended up going for someone who had taken an interest in the progression of my PhD from the outset. He had been my MPhil transfer ‘independent assessor’ and over the course of my studies I had worked with him in the development and delivery of learning and teaching materials. It, therefore, seemed fitting for him to be part of the final process. I also felt that he would make a very capable and suitable partner in the process of systematically exploring the content, the methods and the person behind the research, which both examiners did with aplomb. What I wanted to prevent, as much as my agency would allow, was the viva becoming a battle between two opposing views sitting either side of the coffee table, with me, the PhD candidate, getting dragged into the fight. Fortunately, this didn’t happen for the reason that I had thought about it and done everything in my power to reduce the likelihood of it happening.

When it came to deciding on an external examiner the possibilities seemed endless but in reality – once factors such as availability had been accounted for – my choices were relatively restricted. Even so, there were decisions to be made and central to my decision-making process was determining what I wanted my viva to be about. Ideally, I wanted an external examiner who, as well as engaging in conceptual and theoretical discussions, would be keen to engage in conversations about the processes of conducting the type of research I had performed on the population I had performed it with?

My supervisor ended up approaching a Professor whose early work had been influential in developing my methodological understanding of the style of research I was undertaking. However, other than the information I could glean from his academic CV, I knew very little about him. Unlike when it came to deciding upon my internal examiner, there was no working relationship upon which to pass judgement on his character, so I leant on my supervisors to ensure he was personally and professionally someone who would help to make our social encounter a rigorous but comfortable one.

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⁶ Technically speaking, I did not actually choose my examiners. Based on possible examiners together meeting certain criteria set out in my university’s regulations, I made recommendations to the decision-making committees (via my supervisory team) that were accepted.
Another consideration that I did not overlook or underestimate was the opportunity to exercise a preference over the appointment of an independent Chairperson\(^7\). The Chair is responsible for the management of the viva and has a significant influence over the atmosphere created during the examination process. Collectively, the dynamic needs to be right between all parties present, which a shrewd and perceptive Chairperson will monitor and help steer. If you are given the freedom to decide on a Chair, consider a good Chairperson as someone who is happy to take a back seat, apply the regulations fairly, and keep the discussion moving forward to ensure the climate in which the candidate is examined is professional. Furthermore, you want to look for someone who you think will be capable of putting you at ease the moment you enter the room and appease some of the pressure that you will have inevitably put yourself under in the days, hours and minutes before viva.

In essence, the preferences you make in deciding who will be in the room on the day of your viva should be made in an attempt to construct an environment that will enable you to perform at your best. If you have thought through these decisions, take confidence from the fact that you have selected the right people for the occasion, and that those people are there because they want to support and encourage you through the final stages of the PhD process, and take an interest in the research you have produced.

**Conclusion: A confident mind-set**

In summary of the hints and tips presented throughout the chapter, in preparation for viva you might want to think about:

- Eating well prior to viva. The viva is tiring. You will need the energy.
- Preparing in a manner that caters for your individual needs (e.g. engaging in the process of a mock and finding effective ways to revise).
- Reminding yourself of the choices you made in the course of your research and your reasons for making those decisions.
- Paying heed to your supervisors’ advice about the readiness of your thesis.
- Appreciating your hard work and accepting your thesis as ‘good enough’.
- Consulting with your supervisors about possible examiners (and Chairs) and exercising your preference.

Now let me assure you, in the lead-up to your viva you will receive many words of advice. Some of it will be useful like the guidance I received following my mock that helped to make my revision more proactive. Some of it, although insightful, will throw you into a state of panic. With this in mind, I appreciate fully that the sources of confidence I have highlighted in the course of this chapter may by unsuccessful in resonating with you and your individual needs. By all means treat them critically, but do so in the knowledge that my motivation for sharing these sources is to place into context the factors that took my mind away from focusing on the result of the viva, to a more constructive concern with how well I would perform on the day. Fears that my examiners would catch me out with questions that I would not have an answer for were replaced with the hope that I would do myself justice. Ultimately, it was a mind-set that enabled me to absorb and enjoy the experience of viva, and derive a sense of gratification that came not from the result – for I was confident that the result would be a positive one – but from the manner in which I was able to showcase my intellectual development through all that I had come to know. It is my wish that you are able to experience something similar and capture some of the feelings that followed post viva once all was said and done. From wherever you source it, be confident. Good luck.

\(^7\) As with my ‘choice of examiners’, the decision was ultimately that of the university’s quality management committee and depending on your institution’s regulations, the appointment of an independent Chair may not be a requirement for PhD viva voce examinations.
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References
In the UK many institutions enroll PhD students on an MPhil course prior to upgrading you to a PhD, typically at the end of the first year. It’s almost a way to say ‘ok you’re doing well, off you go and complete your PhD’. The actual process of upgrading (or ‘transfering’ as it is sometimes known) can vary between institutions; some treat it as merely an administrative process, others as a long-winded, formal, and stressful process. For example, my upgrade process involved submitting a 10,000-word document (usually part of a literature review and any early studies), plus a viva. This is actually pretty good because it gets you writing and organising your ideas very early on, so definitely beneficial. The other part involves something of an hour-long viva, which prepares you for real thing in your final year.

Although I found the process quite stressful, upon reflection I realised that the upgrade is almost like an initiation process. Once through the process, you feel a certain pride for getting through it, and a sense of how to progress with your work.

Some important tips for your upgrade are:
1. *Don’t make assumptions:* In your document don’t assume that someone has the same background knowledge as you do about a particular area. You need to spell out everything or the panel may assume you mean something else entirely.
2. *Justify everything:* You need to be able to explain what you did and why, versus other methods because inevitably, they will always ask you this.
3. *You don’t have to know everything:* You are after all still a student and still at the end of your first year (usually) when you upgrade – you simply won’t know everything and that’s fine! But be honest, do not try to fudge your way to an answer if you have no clue.
4. *You will never know what your panel will ask you:* However, it is a good idea to check up on their background to know the kinds of research expertise they have, and where their interests lie.
5. *Know your work:* Sounds silly, but you cannot expect to upgrade without knowing your work and the surrounding literature inside out. But fear not, your supervisor will always prepare you for this.

Finally the most important lesson I learned from the upgrade, and what I hope you will too, is that *you know more than you think you do.* It takes going through the upgrade process to appreciate your own hard work that you put into not just the upgrade but your entire PhD, and there is a great sense of pride and purpose that comes along with that. The upgrade is not the most comfortable thing in the world, but the benefits hugely outweigh the costs and that’s worth keeping at the forefront of your mind.

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There are certain conversations that you never forget. They are often embarrassing, sometimes painfully embarrassing, and, therefore, memorable because of that distinctive negative emotional tone. And that’s why they don’t do the decent thing, and just fade away like everything else in life. I remember the Wednesday night many years ago when my father Billy decided to explain to my older brother about the birds and the bees, after many days of cajoling, it must be said, from my mother. She must have been worried about the first hints of his interest in girls. Perhaps, the first hint of a childhood crush, a first love. That was why, she decided, that he needed to hear the facts of life from my father. For some reason my mother and I were both still in the room when my father started. That was how flustered he was. He cleared his throat with a nervous cough. His opening sentence, which I will never forget, was ‘remember your mother was a girl once’. That was as far as he got, before my mother exploded with laughter. ‘Thank God, you told him, Billy,’ my mother said. ‘He might have thought I was a boy.’ The birds and the bees education in our house stopped at that very moment. The effects of this brief message on my brother and his first crush were unclear.

Another conversation that has lodged in my mind forever was my first conversation about applying for research grants. This conversation was with my then Head of Department. I had just taken up my first lecturing post at the University of Sheffield, not quite at the end of my three years of PhD research. I was 24 at the time, and I can remember the conversation to this day. It had the same embarrassing feel to it. My Head of Department asked me what my first grant was going to be. I had been working on the micro-analysis of speech and iconic gesture for three years as a PhD student. It was theoretically very interesting and was resulting in very good quality publications, but at the time it was of little or no practical value, as far as I could see. We would probably say ‘not very impactful’ these days, but that probably makes it sound even worse. I did not want to explicitly say that my work might have little consequences for society at large, so I used a lot of ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’ to work out what I might say instead. These filled pauses were something else that I had been studying in the soundproof room in the psychological laboratory in Cambridge. This made it all worse; I knew exactly what they signaled. I thought that he might not understand my ‘predicament’ as his work was so obviously important, so there were even more ‘ums’ and more ‘ahs’ starting to pop up in front of him, like fireworks exploding in that space between us, the space into which I stared for inspiration.

‘But my research requires little resource’, I implored, ‘some video recording facilities, my own time, of course, and a lot of pencils’, I offered by way of a joke, a feeble joke that fell completely flat. ‘But’, he replied more forcefully this time, ‘grants like good publications and great lectures are a core part of the job and all research requires considerable infrastructure and support. Research is expensive,’ he elaborated. ‘Even yours.’
So I diversified. Not in the end out of sheer necessity but because I recognised that my research skills could easily generalise to other areas that were of more obvious relevance to society, but also, critically, of increasing interest to me. And, in reality, I did want to make a difference. And this diversification, and perhaps more importantly this identification of the societal importance of these other areas, gave me the confidence to put some grant applications together. I was delighted, and just a little surprised, to be successful. And later when I wrote a grant application for research on the micro-analysis of speech and gesture, it was written now with the confidence that comes with a little accumulated success (and that too was successful).

A PhD is first and foremost intensive research training and a very generalisable skill. You can tackle other research questions and still maintain a long-term interest in your first love. I once wrote a book about entrepreneurs and I discovered early on that successful entrepreneurs always seem to manage to offset the risks inherent in their risk-filled lives. They always have a number of enterprises on the go at any one time. One failure is not catastrophic for them. Less successful entrepreneurs, on the other hand, often put all of their eggs in the one basket, and failure for them can be devastating. They can be crushed by the experience. I sometimes think that the life of an academic is a bit like this, as we try to maintain our balance on that thin ledge between success and failure, trying new things, diversifying, trying to bring in money to the institution, trying to be entrepreneurial in our own sort of way. This can certainly apply to the writing of grants.

So my advice would be this. Collaborate, use your considerable skills, identify research priorities, think about impact, be creative, think beyond research councils, discuss ideas with colleagues, develop several ideas with different sets of people, off-set the risk, have a go. And if it doesn’t come off, then so what? The beauty of the whole thing is that you can try again whenever you like, and you never have to give up on, or forget, that first love that drew you into this research business in the first place. That great first love that holds all the power and is never discouraged, either by a clumsy telling of the facts of life or indeed by anything else for that matter.

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Hints and tips for grant applications

Professor Beattie’s thoughts as a highly successful grant applicant show how hard work and motivation can really pay off. To set you off on the right track with your grant application, here are some top tips:

- **Do your research**: Each funding body will have a different set of entry criteria.
- **Have a strong research team**: Ensure the team you are applying with are as experienced in the grant application and fulfilment process as possible.
- **Leave plenty of time**: Don’t leave the online inputting of your proposal until the last minute – systems are liable to crash as people rush to meet the deadline.
- **Get other people to read your work**: Your hypotheses and rationale may be crystal clear and justified to you. However, if they’re not understandable by a colleague or lay person, will they be understood by a grant reviewer?
- **Always have other ideas at the ready**: Even the most experienced Professors get their grants rejected so be prepared to persevere!

For further advice, check out the following links.


The Guardian (2013). Research funding: 10 tips for writing a successful application. [http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/apr/19/tips-successful-research-grant-funding](http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/apr/19/tips-successful-research-grant-funding)
Conclusion

We hope you have found this book useful in providing support to all aspects of psychology postgraduate study.

During the course of this book, we have learned that a range of skills are required to successfully negotiate postgraduate study. These range from academic competencies which may or may not be routinely taught, to social and practical skills providing you with the confidence to successfully complete. Postgraduate psychology studies are evidently a challenging experience but we hope our authors’ reflections provide some useful solutions and food for thought.

If you would like to read more about issues pertinent to postgraduate students, we would recommend the following resources.

Books

Websites and Blogs
Pat Thomson’s Blog: http://patthomson.net/
Providing reflections on doctoral and postgraduate studies, writing practices and much more.
Reddit – Academic Psychology: https://www.reddit.com/r/academicpsychology
Vitae Researcher Development Framework: https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework

Also, seek out training and resources provided by your department and university.

PsyPAG also provides a range of resources for UK psychology postgraduates, including an Annual Conference, workshops, bursaries and awards. If you would like to share your research, share some Hints & Tips for postgraduate students or review an event or book, please consider sending it to PsyPAG Quarterly, our peer-reviewed journal. Information on PsyPAG’s support can be found throughout the book and at www.psypag.co.uk

We hope this book has been helpful in helping you negotiate your postgraduate study. Please share this book with your friends and colleagues.

If you have any comments, please email chair@psypag.co.uk

Good luck with the rest of your studies from all at PsyPAG!
Postgraduate studies in psychology can be an extremely rewarding yet challenging experience. This publication has, therefore, been designed by the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG) to serve as a useful guide to navigating this journey. It contains advice on research skills as well as social and practical support. Articles are comprised of newly commissioned and recent past articles from our publication: *PsyPAG Quarterly*. This publication shares tips from psychology postgraduates, for psychology postgraduates.

PsyPAG exists to support the success of UK psychology postgraduates. This publication coincides with PsyPAG’s 30th Anniversary Conference, which took place at the University of Glasgow in July 2015.

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