

PhD round table 2018

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The only way to find out
how to do a PhD is
to do one.
Therefore all advice
is useless.

A joke to get us started...

Why did the scarecrow get a promotion?



Because he was outstanding in his field!

Overview

- **Why are you doing a PhD? Good and bad reasons**
- **How to make the most of the relationship with your supervisors**
- **Why do some students take a longer than 3 years?**
- **What can you and your supervisors do to finish on time?**
- **What will the examiner be looking for?**
- **How can you be well prepared in your written thesis and viva?**

What is a PhD?

- In most countries a PhD is a basic requirement for a career in academia. It is an introduction to the world of independent research — a kind of intellectual masterpiece, created by an apprentice in close collaboration with a supervisor. *From The Economist, 2016*



- A PhD is about wandering, getting lost, not knowing anything, being scared, getting help, not listening, trying everything, failing, failing again, still trying, learning a few things, getting small wins, trying harder - this time wiser, more minor successes, fewer failures, putting them all together to tell a story that does not have an ending, and then making a decision to leave the unfinished parts for better people that will come after you. *Quora, 2017*



Why are you doing a PhD?

Good reasons:



- Enthusiasm for research
- Wanting to become an expert in your field
- Enjoying the academic environment
- Developing important transferrable skills

Why are you doing a PhD?

Bad reasons

- ...Peer pressure
- ...Horrible job
- ...Fulfilling the ambitions of others
- ...Rebelling
- ...Misplaced genius complex
- ...Insecurity
- ...safe option

Suggestion: Listen to and manage your supervisors

- **Manage** them
 - meet regularly
 - with both at the same time every couple of months (to keep to a single agreed plan).
- Write written action points and circulate them after each supervision.
- **Believe in the importance of your research as a brick in a wall of knowledge**
- **Be very ready to collaborate**



Why do some PhD students take longer than planned?

Factors most important in determining delay:

- constant changes to the research topic;
- avoiding communication with the supervisor;
- PhD candidates isolating themselves;
- avoiding submitting work for review.



- *Ref: Van de Schoot, R., Yerkes, M.A., Mouw, J.M. and Sonneveld, H., 2013. What took them so long? Explaining PhD delays among doctoral candidates. PloS one, 8(7), p.e68839.*

What the institution can do to overcome delay:

- ensuring PhD planning takes place within a reasonable timeframe;
- by conducting structural reviews of PhD progress;
- working to ensure effective communication between candidates and supervisors;
- and providing structural support to PhD candidates, for example support for those individuals with caring duties
- *Ref: Van de Schoot, R., Yerkes, M.A., Mouw, J.M. and Sonneveld, H., 2013. What took them so long? Explaining PhD delays among doctoral candidates. PloS one, 8(7), p.e68839.*

1. Top tips on finishing your PhD

- **Make sure you meet the PhD requirements for your institution-** Check the current regulations
- **Keep perspective-**Think of your PhD as an apprenticeship
- **Write the introduction last**
- **Use apps**
- **Address the unanswered questions**
actively draw attention to them; identify them in your conclusion as areas for further investigation
- **Checking is important**
when your brain is too tired to write, check quotations, bibliography etc so you're still making progress
- **Get feedback on the whole thesis**
- **Make sure you know when it will end**

<https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/aug/27/finishing-phd-thesis-top-tips-experts-advice>

2. Top tips on finishing your PhD

- **Prepare for the viva**
ask your supervisor to arrange a mock viva
- **Remember that more is not always better**
- **Get a buddy**
Share with them your milestones and goals, and agree to be accountable to them
- **Don't pursue perfectionism**
Nothing more self-crippling than perfectionism
- **Look after yourself**
Go outside. Fresh air, trees and sunshine and exercise do wonders for what's left of your sanity

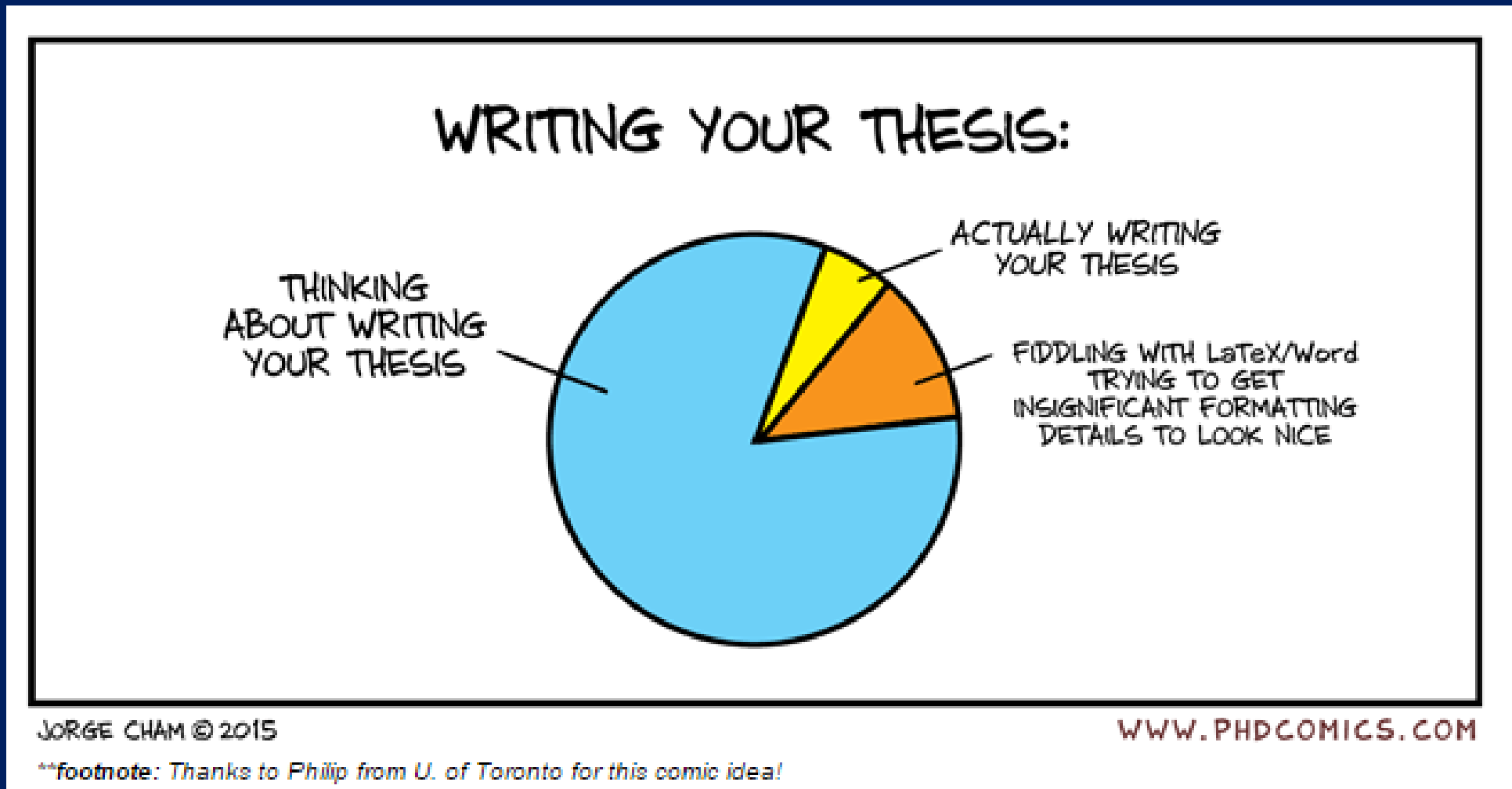
<https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/aug/27/finishing-phd-thesis-top-tips-experts-advice>

What examiners are looking for

- **Organisation**
 - **Structure**
 - **Presentation**
 - **Authenticity**
 - **Content**
 - **Publishable quality**
 - **Critical awareness of subject**
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- **Source: Newcastle University, joint examiners' report, as an example**

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What you can do when writing up and preparing for viva



Read out your work aloud

- This helps with getting sentences **short** and **punchy**
- This also is a big help with punctuation

Let's eat grandpa.
Let's eat, grandpa.
**correct punctuation can
save a person`s life.**

Make sure you really understand where your particular PhD topic/ research project sits in the history/ tradition of your discipline

**TOP
TIP**

- Go right back to the foundations of your discipline
- Trace where you have come from and where your particular contribution may lead.
- **This is probably the most important top tip.**

Take every opportunity to present your research at internal and external meetings

- Take the opportunity to go on presentation skills courses and learn how to put together a good presentation, e.g. not much on each slide, a punchy first slide and a punchy last slide and lots of pictures.
- **Own your research. Be proud of it.**



Submitting your thesis



- Don't submit the thesis until your supervisors are happy with it.
- Insist on a practice viva from someone other than your supervisors. In the viva, smile, take the examiners comments/ suggestions as constructive criticism.
- If you pass with minor changes great.
- If you pass with more major changes great too... you will end up with a better PhD thesis and in a matter of months you will have forgotten... you will still have passed.



Thinking ahead

- Building your unique selling point (USP)
- Don't suffer from imposter syndrome
- Using social media
 - Your professional webpage
 - Your professional twitter account
 - Research gate
- Keep your CV up to date
- Be polite- always ask referees when you need a reference
- Make the most of professional networks/ mailing lists
- Be proud of who you are