



CURTIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

# THESIS FEST

## How to finish your PhD

*...based on wisdom from 80s rock ballads*

### Advice for supervisor relationships

*If I could only reach my supervisor, if I could make them smile, ..., that would really be a breakthrough!*

- HDR supervisors are paid for 30 minutes of interaction/candidate/week, keep your (time) expectations realistic.
- Find out who each of your supervisors is, i.e. research background, including research methodologies employed, publication history.
- Organise to meet them early for a 'get to know you' chat.
- Find out how many HDR candidates your supervisor has.
- Don't only go to your supervisor when you're in academic strife! Share your positives 😊
- Do go to your supervisor if you are having emotional/mental health issues, they will be sympathetic and point you in the right direction for appropriate support.
- Don't inundate them with requests for information/support/direction – they would prefer you to ask 'do you think this is appropriate?' i.e. show initiative.
- Don't expect your supervisor to 'correct' your academic writing – it's your responsibility to develop your own academic literacy skills (you'll need them). Get in touch with Faculty or Library staff if you need help in this area (details below).
- Remember that your supervisors are not meant to answer every question you have, it is your thesis, and you will have to make some decisions yourself.
- Expect your supervisors to act as critical friends. Although at times you may not feel it's very friendly, you will thank them in hindsight.
- And remember, your supervisors are only human 😊

### Advice on how to make the most of feedback

*And I know, dear student, just how you feel - you got to roll with the feedback and get to what's real.*

- What is feedback? It is meant to be constructive help. Remember that critical feedback is there to help us grow – though it can hurt as we all want praise.
- If you don't understand feedback, ask for specific details on what you need more clarification on.
- How to respond to feedback:

- Interpret the feedback as best you can – think about what works for you. No need to take it all on board but you do need to respond to it.
- Talk to your supervisor for more clarification.
- Try not to take it personally although this can be a hard thing to do.
- Build on your strengths.
- Work on your weaknesses – seek out additional resources and support provided in the university (see below for details).
- Don't judge feedback immediately – take time, step away, digest and come back to it.
- If you feel you are only ever receiving negative feedback – that is your supervisors helping you to improve. Ask that your feedback also contains the positive aspects of your work.
- Ask for specific feedback and set expectations - *this is just an early draft and I'd like some feedback on the main themes...*
- Get feedback from a “third party” – family or friends.
- Remember it's your PhD – it is ultimately your decision on how to react to feedback. You can be thankful for the feedback and acknowledge it, but not follow up on it.

## **Advice on how to overcome obstacles**

[You know you're gonna live through the difficult phases in your PhD - you got to keep the faith and be resilient.](#)

- You need to acknowledge that there will ups and downs in your “quest” to get to the PhD. It is a very large and complex project so there are bound to be some problems. Be kind to yourself and understanding when you come across issues.
- Look for supportive networks of other PhD students - create or join a study group. Also social media groups can be a good place to find ad-hoc support and access to people who understand your struggles.
- Look after yourself – exercise and eat healthily. Find things that make you happy and make time for them. Don't feel guilty about taking time off, you need your breaks in order to be able to keep going.
- Keep your eye on the prize; imagine yourself walking the stage at the end of the PhD, wearing the graduation gown with your loved ones in the audience.
- Remind yourself of reasons why you started the PhD in the first place, use them to keep motivated when you are feeling stuck.
- Break the research project down into manageable chunks/small steps; otherwise, it can be overwhelming. Just keep on working on it – eventually all the small steps you take will add up to an entire thesis and it will be done.
- [Seek counselling](#) when you get stuck – don't wait until things are really very difficult. You will be able to talk to a person who is qualified to help you, understands your struggles and will be able to point you in the right direction.
- Find a good support network and people who cheer you on – they don't need to be in the academic sector.

## Advice on how to stay motivated

*[You can't finish your PhD without a spark!](#)*

'Good' ideas (search within yourself... but don't forget to look elsewhere!)

Action	Details
Go back to the beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What was your initial spark? What has changed? Can you address the changes to rekindle the spark?</li><li>• Is it your approach, perhaps? Are there any questions you haven't answered?</li></ul>
'Look inward'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a 'mantra' so that you can explain to yourself why your project is important, why you are doing it, and where it will lead you</li></ul>
'Shared suffering': talking about the challenge with other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speak to other research students who are going through the same thing, or start a study group/'spark support group'</li><li>• Speak to other people who have experienced similar issues (e.g. jobs – even Usain Bolt struggled for motivation ahead of Rio 2016!)</li></ul>
Look 'elsewhere'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leave time for other passions so that you don't burn out</li><li>• Spend time away from your project – this doesn't detract from your passion, and can actually enhance it</li></ul>
Find new ways to communicate your research in a compelling way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in 3 -minute Thesis Competition, Poster competition or similar. Finding ways to communicate your research creatively might remind you why you were passionate about it in the first place...</li><li>• Participate in conferences and speak to other people in your field</li><li>• Share your research with others if they sound vaguely interested 😊</li><li>• See other people <u>inspired</u> by your research</li></ul>
See your topic in 'the real world'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• See your research in situ and how it is seen as helpful or useful (it is much easier to be excited by something tangible)</li></ul>
Take care of yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sleep, food, hydration, and exercise</li></ul>

**Don't forget:** Be organised and disciplined. Discipline and resilience are not diametrically opposed to 'spark'; on a day-to-day basis, it's the to-do lists, organisation and writing targets that get the job done. The 'spark' is what keeps us sane and gives us the underlying reason for doing something.

- You may not be able to start a fire without a spark, but you also can't keep one burning for very long without a lot of hard work!

## Get in touch with us if you'd like to continue the conversation:

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