University of Sheffield

Research Services

Doctoral Times

Spring 2023 - Issue 23

Planning for Timely Submission

In this Issue:

Welcome

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition of the Doctoral Times.

This issue of the Doctoral Times is focused on planning for timely completion. Managing your research to submit on time is an essential part of a successful doctoral award – from prioritising effectively and understanding requirements, to responding to challenges and utilising the support available, staying on track requires commitment at every stage of your degree.

The University expects all students to submit within their normal registration period, otherwise known as the tuition fee-paying period. For many students this also aligns with their funded period. This is because we believe that all PGRs should have a realistic prospect of submitting within the timeframe initially planned, in the interests of student experience and wellbeing. If you enrol on a three, 3.5, or four year programme, and arrange your funding for this period, clear expectations and guidance should be in place to help you finish in that time so as to avoid having to work unfunded or for longer than planned. UKRI-funded students have been expected to complete within their funded period for several years now, and the sector as a whole is starting to move in this direction.

In the past few years our approach has been to look at things the University could do centrally to support this expectation – for example increasing Sheffield-funded scholarships to a minimum of 3.5 years, developing milestones that help both students and supervisors to keep track of progress, streamlining DDP requirements, and working with supervisors. We understand that the University and the wider sector is starting to talk more about this however, and have heard from students that you want to understand more about the support available to help you meet this goal. We have therefore put together this edition which includes stories, experiences, and advice from current PGRs, as well as information about opportunities on offer to help you.

We hope you will learn something new which will be useful to you, whether it's a scholarship you weren't previously aware of, a way to incorporate work you've already done into your thesis, or a fresh understanding of what the University expects (and doesn't expect) of you and your thesis. Thank you very much to all of our contributors, and we wish you all the best of luck on your doctoral Programme.

Professor John Flint, Deputy Vice President for Research, University of Sheffield.

How I Submitted within a Planned Timescale

Ruth Thomas, PhD Researcher, School of Biosciences shares her top tips on how to achieve a timely submission.

I was a doctoral student in the School of Biosciences (Biomedical Science) and submitted my thesis just over a week before my official deadline. In this article I've outlined some of the main points I think helped me achieve this, whilst also enjoying the process of writing up!

Decide how you want to write

It is a common misconception that you have to try and write up your entire thesis in the three months at the end of your funded deadline. For some, this suits them well, they need to completely step away from practical work and just focus on writing. Others (including myself) are not so keen on sitting behind a computer, the practical work is why I did a PhD in the first place! So I planned my writing around still doing experiments, using them as a break. I also found that I was much more productive knowing I only had an hour before I needed to go into the lab. There is no 'right' way to write, decide what works for you and will keep you happy and interested.

Planning

The clue is in the title of this article: planned. If you create an achievable timeline early on, it will make writing your thesis much easier. I found that planning to finish a week before my actual submission deadline helped with keeping stress levels low, leaving room for PDF conversions, websites crashing, and emails not being answered. You'll thank yourself for not submitting at the last second.

Stick to your plan

You should create your plan with reasonable goals in mind. Don't say, 'On Tuesday I will write 10,000 words,' it's unlikely to happen and you'll end up behind your plan, forever playing catch up. Make the goals small: 'I will write 100 words,' or 'I will write this method.' That way, you're likely to hit your goal and may even surpass it, leaving room for some days that are less productive.

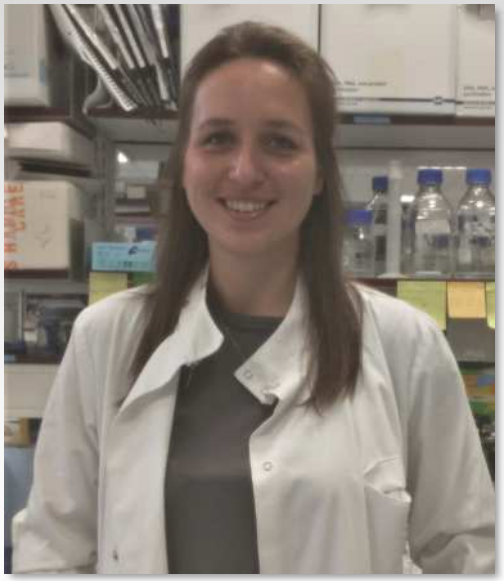
Stay motivated

Change locations – writing in one place will cause you to not look forward to walking into that room. Take breaks – no one can work efficiently for 10 hours straight. Remember to take a walk, go for lunch with a friend, or even just make a cup of tea; it all makes a difference. Try not to work at weekends – you need time to switch off. Mondays were my most productive days because I was looking forward to writing again as I had taken time away to do something I enjoyed!

Get ahead of the game

Now this depends on what stage you are at in your doctoral programme as to how relevant this will be. I was in my second year when the COVID lockdown happened. As we couldn't access the lab I decided to write up all my results, materials and methods, and even some introductory sections to my thesis. Coming back to those documents two years later when I was writing up made my life a lot easier as I already had words on a page. I would highly recommend taking a couple of weeks at the midway point of your doctoral programme to write up what you have done so far. It may feel like a waste of time at that point but trust me, your future self will thank you for it!

Advice Looking Back



Ruth Thomas, PhD Researcher, School of Biosciences shares her advice looking back.

Enjoy the flexible working!

Some labs may have 'core working hours,' but outside of these you are free to work as you please. If you're an early bird like me, start the day early. If you're a night owl, don't come in until later! Find the way you work best that will keep you happy and motivated.

On a similar note, don't assume you *have* to work at the weekend to be a good doctoral student. Occasionally an experiment may need to be started/finished at a weekend but that shouldn't be a regular occurrence. Start as you mean to go on, it can be a slippery slope.

Be honest with your supervisor

If they know what is going on in your head, they can help. If you keep saying yes to more experiments, to the detriment of your thesis and mental wellbeing, without talking it through with them, they may not understand why you are struggling!

Don't compare your PhD to others

Everyone has different experiences and goals through their PhD. Just because your friend has published three papers doesn't make you a bad student. Perhaps you're working on a new method, a different organism, or the machine you needed broke down for a month! Have confidence in your own work.

Make friends with other doctoral students

These don't necessarily have to be in your lab, or the same year as you, but having people around that can relate to your current situation is useful should you have questions or need to vent!

Make friends that are NOT doctoral students!

The PhD bubble is real, you can be sucked into a world that revolves around being in the lab and all you do is talk about your PhDs. Yes, it's a large part of your life, but find hobbies and interests outside this bubble and it will allow you to stay interested in the PhD itself. Be it sport, music, board games, or a good book.

I really enjoyed my doctoral programme. Not every second, I had months where experiments were not working, but because I had interests outside the lab, kept my working hours consistent, and had other doctoral students to talk to, I was able to see the bigger picture and enjoy the full four years!

Working with your Supervisor to Manage your Project

By Beverley Thomas, PhD Researcher, School of English.

A definition of a supervisor according to the University of Sheffield's portal is a 'subject expert who will guide you through your PhD studies.' When starting doctoral studies, we may have this idea in mind, but not necessarily understand the culture of academia from the perspective of the institution. Also, we may not fully understand *ourselves* and what we truly want from the PhD.

When I began my project, I took it fully onboard that my supervisors would guide me as experts, thereby looking *outward* for them to identify what I needed to do. This, I thought, meant directing my unorganised thinking and championing the relevance of my work. But how could they? They did not have my life experiences, nor my relationship with Black communities and Black culture. For example, the initial purpose of my research was to capture stories of the Windrush Generation and their descendants. This meant gathering tales from my family, my grandmother, my people; analysing their lives and experiences in Britain and the profound effects of ancestral enslavement and colonialism.

In the initial phase of my research, I was fearful of failing and disappointing two White men I hardly knew, as I had conceded they 'were the experts'. This thinking led to communication failures in the first few meetings, and so I began to email them, to explain myself. This was the *first turning point.* Their emails back to me were always gracious and thoughtful, changing my thinking, feeling, sense of self, and thus my relationship with these academics. They were human. They were kind and understanding; interested in me and in my cultural background.

The confidence gained from this first proactive step led me into the second phase: sharing my thoughts and feelings verbally. At first, I was uncertain. How could two middle-aged, middle-class White men possibly relate? So, I braced myself for the knocking that would come from allowing

myself to be so vulnerable... but it never came. They were curious. They followed my comments with questions and interesting perspectives that led me to reconsider and reorder my understanding of myself, others, and our world. My *second turning point* was allowing myself to be *vulnerable.*

None of these steps were easy, but led towards a far more practical, *third turning point*: convincing my supervisors I understood my role as 'project manager' of the doctorate, giving them the confidence to know that I could complete the research in a timely manner.

I presented this as the following 'Plan of Action':

1) A detailed plan of when each of the chapters will be done. This enabled them to see that I had thought about how the project would progress, thus easing their anxieties. After all, it's in their best interest that students succeed.

2) SMART targets that I shared with supervisors through the GANTT management project tool: GanttProject - Free Project Management Application. The targets were:

Specific: Goals should be for a specific purpose that add to the research.

Measurable: The goal should allow for progress tracking.

Attainable: Achievable on a set time scale.

Relevant: Questions I asked myself: With this course of action, are you setting yourself up for your next phase of research?

Time-bound: A target date for completion – such as a week, a month, or for the next supervision meeting.

By doing these steps, I showed I was indeed the 'project manager' of my doctorate, with my supervisors as an essential part of my support team. Later, one of them described me as 'resourceful,' because of my ability to manage the project.

Although I recognise, I have been fortunate with my supervisors, the various actions I actively took gave me confidence in dealing with them, ultimately creating a trust between us; and always having a plan to reference back to can clear up any future misunderstanding.

The last idea I would like to suggest is to join groups of other researchers and garner other people's experience of working with supervisors. Here are some suggestions:

Think Ahead Writing Retreat: The retreat provides protected and focused academic writing time, and you do the writing. You can find further information about the Writing Retreats in the video below:

Centre for Equity & Inclusion: seeks to enhance the university experience for University of Sheffield PGRs from racially marginalised backgrounds via a programme of events and training.

To conclude: ***Start Where You Are and Find Yourself*** and understand that your supervisors are human, too. Remember you already have life experiences that can help with project managing the thesis process, so your confidence in knowing this will transform your relationship with your supervisors significantly.

Supporting Doctoral Students to Submit in a Timely Manner

By Professor Lorraine Maltby, Sheffield University School of Biosciences.

I have had the pleasure of supervising over 40 doctoral students, all of whom have been passionate, motivated, creative, ambitious individuals who strive to succeed. It is my role as their supervisor to encourage, guide, train, and support them to realise their academic potential and to submit their thesis in a timely manner. Doctoral researchers are not all the same; they are individuals from diverse backgrounds, with diverse skill sets and experiences, working on diverse projects. Consequently, doctoral students need individually tailored supervisory support. However, there are several common elements.

Clarifying and managing expectations

I have seen first-hand how stressful and challenging it can be for students to complete their PhD thesis outside their funded period. Either financial pressures (if unemployed) or time pressures (if employed) can impact on their mental health and wellbeing. A key part of facilitating submission in a timely manner is managing expectations – of both student and supervisor – and central to this is clarity on 'what is a PhD'. A PhD thesis is an original contribution to knowledge that shows evidence of systematic study and is worthy of publication in full or in part. Doctoral students need to demonstrate that they meet the criteria for award of a PhD and evidence a set of core competencies, which they develop and refine throughout their doctoral programme. Discussing these expectations throughout the doctoral programme can help to frame discussions on progress and to support timely thesis submission.

Doctoral students make valuable contributions to our research, teaching, impact, and outreach activities. I encourage and support my doctoral students to take advantage of the opportunities available to them to develop their wider skill set, to communicate their research, and to build their networks, whilst maintaining their focus on the end goal of timely thesis submission. This requires providing advice and support that helps them to keep a clear focus on what they need to achieve in the short and medium term and to manage their time effectively.

Designing a feasible PhD project

Most doctoral students have a tuition fee-paying period of between three and four years and every doctoral student should have a realistic expectation of completing their doctoral programme within their tuition fee-paying period. Whatever the programme length, project design is key to timely thesis submission. I support my doctoral students by helping them to formulate their research questions and guiding them in designing a research project that is novel, innovative, and feasible within the time available. In my experience, developing a thesis plan and timetable within the first few months of the doctoral programme is key to timely submission. However, a timetable is only useful if it is realistic. Novel research is uncertain and therefore it is important that timetables have contingency built into them. Not unexpectedly, doctoral students often find it difficult to judge how long specific elements of their research project may take and are generally over ambitious. An unachievable timetable results in research objectives not being met on time, generating a situation of increased anxiety, stress, and a sense of failure. By drawing on my research and supervisory experience, I can help my doctoral students to develop a viable thesis plan and a realistic timetable.

Keeping the research programme on track

Revisiting timetables and expectations on a regular basis to ensure that they are appropriate, is an important component of timely submission. Research is open ended – there will always be more questions to investigate – and the end goal of a PhD thesis can seem very daunting and a long way off. Identifying shorter-term goals, such as writing up part of the research or presenting it at a conference, can maintain focus, as well as providing an excellent training in research communication and networking opportunities. In my experience, most doctoral students go through a period where their motivation dips, often because their research is not progressing as planned. Tasks may be taking longer than expected, techniques may not be working, research outcomes may not be 'as expected'. Frequent supervisory meetings are important to enable progress to be discussed and for concerns to be raised at an early stage, so that they can then be addressed in a supportive and constructive way. This may mean restating and clarifying expectations, revising the research plan, identifying additional training needs, reviewing working patterns, or revisiting the number and type of supervisory meetings.

Having open and honest conversations

Undertaking a doctoral programme can involve many personal challenges. These include effective time and workload management to maintain an appropriate work/life balance, separation from friends and family resulting in feelings of isolation and loneliness, and lack of self-confidence and not feeling good enough ('impostor syndrome'). I support my doctoral students through these challenges by providing objective and constructive feedback on the quality of the research and on the amount of progress being achieved. I provide encouragement, suggest ways to alleviate issues, and signpost them to other sources of support provided by the University. However, to do this effectively requires open and honest conversations that are enabled by establishing a supervisory relationship that is built on trust and confidentiality.

I appreciate fully how difficult it can be for doctoral students to discuss very personal issues, especially if they feel that they are 'failing' or are letting me down. I am therefore extremely grateful that my doctoral students feel that they can disclose and discuss their personal issues with me so that I can help them get the support and advice they need. I take a great sense of pride in the achievements of all my doctoral students and it is wonderful to see their joy and sense of achievement at graduation. However, I am especially proud of those students that I know have overcome considerable challenges – personal, medical, or academic – during their doctoral programme. Having honest conversations may means discussing pausing the research and taking a leave of absence, curtailing the PhD research programme and transferring to an MPhil, or even stopping research and withdrawing from the University. Deciding to transfer to an MPhil or to withdraw from a PhD programme are very difficult and stressful decisions for a doctoral student to make and require considerable support, understanding, and time. It is very important that these decisions are not perceived as 'failure'. The doctoral students that I have supported through these processes, have felt that it was the correct decision for them and have been able to take a number of positives from their experience.

Research quality and quantity

Doctoral students often ask how much research is needed for a doctoral course. Of primary importance is the quality of the research that is produced rather than the quantity. Doctoral research should be of publishable quality and the volume of research should be what can reasonably be expected of a diligent and capable student within the time available (i.e. length of tuition fee-paying period). Keeping these two criteria at the forefront of supervisory discussions and acknowledging that all research is open ended, can help doctoral students decide when they have sufficient material of appropriate quality. My doctoral students are research collaborators and we publish together. However, their role is not to undertake research for me or to generate data for papers that I wish to publish. It is therefore their decision when to stop generating new information and it is my role to provide advice and reassurance of the quality and quantity of the research produced.

Thesis production and publications

Encouraging and supporting writing throughout the doctoral programme is an important component of timely thesis submission. A thesis does not have to be a

monograph. If appropriate, the research can be written up as a series of manuscripts (publication format thesis) or include a practical element alongside a smaller thesis (practice-based thesis). I encourage my own students to write their main data chapters in manuscript format and some PhD theses include submitted or published papers. Publications are an important outcome of PhD research. However, they are not required for successful completion of a PhD and their production should not hinder timely thesis submission. Submitting a publication format thesis and applying for a three-month publication scholarship is an excellent way of achieving timely thesis submission and publishing doctoral research.

Publication Format Thesis

The University of Sheffield allows a range of formats for thesis submission, depending on the nature of the research. As well as a traditional monograph, some departments also offer a PhD by Practice model, and **all** students are eligible to submit a publication format thesis if preferred. A discussion with your supervisory team at the beginning of your programme is beneficial to determine which thesis format would be the best option for you. You can read more about the format options available to you on the Thesis Format web page.

The Publication Format Thesis allows you to include in your thesis papers that are in a format suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. This may include scientific papers, book chapters, or other appropriate published formats. The paper or papers may appear alongside traditional thesis chapters, or they may comprise the majority of the thesis as a collection that forms a substantial and coherent whole, supported by a commentary that links the submitted works and outlines their coherence and significance. This is a valuable option as it provides the opportunity to produce papers during your PhD programme without having to re-write the same research for inclusion in your thesis.

Materials included in the publication format thesis may include those that are solely or partly authored by you. The papers or chapters may have already been published, be accepted for publication, or be planned for submission for publication where a specific format is expected. Even if there is no intention of submitting the papers for publication, this format allows you to get yourself accustomed to writing for publication as opposed to just for thesis submission.

What are the Benefits?

- It supports you to publish during your doctoral programme.
- It saves you time re-writing the same research.
- It encourages you to write throughout your programme.
- Papers **do not** have to be accepted or even submitted for publication to be used in your thesis.
- It's flexible – you can include one paper in a mostly monograph thesis, or have your whole submission based around papers.
- It's easy – you don't need special permission or to do anything differently during your submission, it's an accepted format so just agree plans with your supervisor and submit as normal.
- It's for everyone – any student on any research programme in any department can do this. It's standard practice in some disciplines already, but open to all!

Adapt and Overcome: Having Twins Midway Through a PhD

By Laura IH Bennett, PGR Researcher, Sheffield University Management School.

I am writing this in January 2023, in the strange limbo time that exists between having 'finished' my PhD thesis and actually submitting it; I am waiting for any *final* comments from my supervisors ahead of submission. My viva is likely to be in the Spring of 2023. It is a good time to reflect on how I've been able to get to this point, as it certainly hasn't been a straightforward journey.

I started the PhD in October 2017 as a full-time student. I was also working part time, but thankfully my hours were flexible so I was able to fit everything in. Things started to go off track, shall we say, in my third year. I found out that I was pregnant in the summer of 2019, so I took a Leave of Absence for maternity leave, starting in March 2020. Our boy-girl twins, Max and Hester, arrived at the beginning of May 2020. I was very grateful and lucky to be able to take 12 months of maternity leave. I returned to the PhD as a part-time student in March 2021, and then a couple of months later, returned to my part-time job. By the time I opened my laptop, it had been a full year since I had given a moment's thought to the PhD, and a good 18 months since conducting my last interview in August 2019. Not only that, but the whole world had fundamentally changed due to the impact of coronavirus. And on top of all of *that,* my whole life had been turned upside down by the arrival of Max and Hester! By the time the twins turned one in May 2021, they were in full-time childcare, and I was working half the week on the PhD and half the week in my part-time employment.

The simple answer to the question, "How did you find the time to write up the thesis?" is that I treated it like a job, and my partner Simon and I paid for full-time childcare. I set aside two days a week for my PhD (I increased this to three days a week after a few months), and on those days, I knew that I had between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. in which to move the thesis forward. There was no way that we could afford for me to *not* work alongside the PhD, as our monthly childcare bill ran high, and the part-time PhD bursary alone didn't cover it.

The existence of Max and Hester has been the biggest obstacle and the biggest motivator to getting the thesis finished. As anyone with family responsibilities will know, especially those who have young children or who are caring for family members, there simply is no slack in the day, week, or month. Long gone were the early days of my PhD when I had the luxury of time. The strict 5 p.m. deadline hung over each of my 'PhD days'; knowing that I'd have

to close my laptop and engage in the exhausting evening shenanigans that come with young children (alongside Simon of course). I would go from coding my interviews or writing up my findings, to making dinner, feeding the kids, doing bath time, reading stories, putting them to bed, getting their clothes ready, tidying up the chaos, etc.
My mornings, evenings, and weekends were devoted to the children and to household chores. This presented some challenges – if I was fully in the writing flow, it was hard to tear myself away – but on the whole it was hugely beneficial for me to have those strict 'writing' and 'non-writing' times. Young children demand every ounce of your attention; this forces you to switch off from the PhD. While it isn't exactly relaxation time, engaging with and looking after young children certainly gives the PhD part of your brain a rest.

It is a cliché for a good reason, but Max and Hester certainly brought very immediate clarity about what is *really* important in life. With Maslow's hierarchy of needs in mind, fundamentally we need shelter, food, warmth, security, and love. It is my job as a parent to provide all of that for my children, and that must *always* be prioritised, no matter what. The PhD sits right at the top of Maslow's pyramid, under 'self-actualisation': it is important, but it is more the cherry on the cake than the cake itself. It is a real privilege to do a PhD: children or no children, the financial and time cost is significant.

At times I felt very selfish and guilty, especially when protecting my PhD time over and above parenting or working extra days to bring more money into the family finances. I used this as motivation to be very disciplined with the time that I had. I developed a Gantt chart, mapping out the months to my desired submission date alongside my target word count for each chapter. (Spoiler alert: I had aimed to submit in September 2022, then November 2022… and am finally submitting in early 2023, so things do not always go to plan despite best intentions and neat Gantt charts!) I kept a log of the number of words written per day, and colour-coded each day to indicate whether I felt that I had been productive or not. My colour-coded gauge for productivity was deliberately not linked to the number of words I wrote; rather, it reflected whether I felt that I had moved the thesis forward in some small way. (This was a tip I learnt through coaching sessions with Prolifiko. Check out their recently published book, *Written*, which is full of helpful tips for establishing your own best writing practices.)

It would be dishonest to say that I was always super productive; there were many days when I felt frustrated by my lack of progress. This frustration was compounded by the guilt I felt that this 'wasted' time had come at the cost of spending time with my children or paying for their childcare. Those were the 'Bad PhD Days': we all have them for various reasons. The important thing was to put them behind me and move on.

And now, as I wait for my supervisors' feedback, I find that I am hugely looking forward to pressing that submit button once and for all. I will be dedicating pockets of time over the next few weeks and months to prepare for the viva. I am excited about the prospect of just having two jobs (parenting and my part-time work) instead of three (those two plus the PhD), and I am equally excited for the day when I can finally call myself Dr Bennett! Of course, there are many wonderful things about having kids despite the focus of this article being on some of the challenges and how I overcame them. Hopefully my experience will be relatable and useful for anyone else who has got young children, or can provide a hint of what's to come for anyone who is soon to return from maternity leave.

You can also find further support and information on the Parents Network. They provide a parenting newsletter and share the support available to parents at the University of Sheffield.

Researcher Development Training and Support

In the Researcher Development Team, we understand that your doctoral programme can be exciting, gruelling, stimulating, and overwhelming – sometimes all at the same time!

We also know that, whether due to funding, or just because you are keen to get the flipping thing finished so you can take your next step (whatever that might be), completing your doctoral programme on time is really important to most of our postgraduate researchers, and we're keen to support you to achieve this.

Of course, one of the most important ways to keep you on track with your doctoral programme is maintaining a productive relationship with your supervisory team, who will be able to give you advice and support throughout your project. Sometimes it can feel a bit difficult to navigate the relationship with your supervisors, or to know what you can expect from them, and what they expect from you. The university's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes can give you a lot more information about this (https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/code) and this short Biteable video can help you think about how to work with your supervisors.

In addition to the support offered by your supervisors, there is a range of training and development activities available to you as a PGR at Sheffield to enable you to manage your work and to finish on time.

Some of the Researcher Development Team's upcoming workshops might be of particular interest to you if you're thinking about how to make sure you finish your doctoral programme within your fee-paying period.

If you're struggling with the challenge of your busy workload and all the demands on your time, our upcoming online course, ***Ease the Load***, might be of help. As well as helping you to plan and progress your projects, prioritise your goals, and effectively manage boundaries, this two-half -day course will enable you to get technology working for you to streamline your work.

Ease The Load will run in May, and you can book via myDevelopment here.

We're sure you've heard that the final PhD doesn't always look very much like the one you started, and that some changes are an absolutely normal and necessary part of the process. That's entirely true! As you begin your research, it might become apparent that some of the work you'd intended to do won't fit as you thought, and that's okay. However, from time to time, you might find the change a lot more dramatic than you were anticipating. This can be difficult to deal with and can really throw you off your stride, putting your plans for a timely submission under pressure.

If this sounds like you, our brand new workshop, ***PhD: Plan B-Z,*** is here to help! If you're facing a challenge because your project has changed significantly, or the research you're trying to undertake isn't working out, this workshop might be useful for you. PhD: Plan B-Z aims to equip you with a range of tools to help you navigate the often uncertain trajectory of a PhD. You will learn strategies for planning ahead, adapting to change, and creating coping strategies for moving away from research pathways in which you've already invested significant time and energy.

PhD: Plan B-Z will be a face-to-face workshop, on 23rd March. You can book your place via myDevelopment here.

If you're a PGR in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, you will have been invited to attend the recent ***Managing Your Time and Your Project*** workshop. This new online provision will be available to other faculties over the coming months, so keep checking the new Learning and Development Hub, ***myDevelopment,*** which is the place to find workshops, events, and other learning resources that can help you. You can find myDevelopment under My Services in MUSE.

Of course, a huge milestone and accomplishment in completing your doctoral programme is writing your thesis; we also know that for many PGRs this can be a complex and challenging task. Perhaps you are struggling with writing behaviours such as procrastination and perfectionism, or have questions about how to balance writing with all of your other deadlines. Maybe you want to speak to someone who has previously written a thesis and to have a non-judgemental, confidential space to ask questions about the process. If so, ***Thesis Mentoring*** might be for you. Thesis Mentoring is a bespoke mentoring programme to support PGRs as they write their thesis. Running twice an academic year, the programme pairs a PGR (you'll typically be 12-18 months away from your submission date) with an early-career researcher who has written their own thesis and has been trained in mentoring skills. Many PGRs find working with a thesis mentor to be beneficial for their thesis writing and you can join the programme for support with anything thesis writing related. There are more details, including information on signing up for the next round, online here.

If what you really need is some focused time and space to get on with your thesis writing, then you might want to sign up to attend writing retreats run by the Researcher Development Team; they give you two hours of quiet time to write, alongside other researchers who are working on their own writing projects. If you have previously attended our thesis writing retreats specifically for PGRs working on their thesis, these are due to be relaunched shortly, which will give you another opportunity for supportive, focused writing. You can find out more about writing retreats and book to attend either an online or hybrid retreat through myDevelopment here.

However you choose to access our resources, we're here to support your training and development as you progress through your doctoral programme. If you have any questions about your development needs, how we can help, or if you just want some help to navigate it all, you can contact your faculty's Researcher Development Manager, and we'll do our best to help.

Coming up: PGR Voice Survey

In May the University will be running the **PGR Voice Survey**, the first institution-wide PGR satisfaction survey since 2019. This will be your opportunity to let us know about your experience as a doctoral researcher at Sheffield to help us to understand and improve provision for PGRs across the University. We look forward to hearing your views – keep an eye on your inbox in May for your invitation. ***pgrvoice@sheffield.ac.uk***

Submission Review and Submission Pending – changes from 22/23

To support students approaching the end of their programmes more effectively, the University of Sheffield have made a series of changes which launched this academic year.

Submission Review

Many departments already conducted Submission Reviews, but this has now been confirmed as a compulsory milestone which all students will complete six months before the end of their tuition fee-paying period. This will take the form of a structured discussion with your supervisor or an independent reviewer in the department to check on your progress to date, look at what's left to do, and confirm your plans for completion within your tuition fee-paying period. There is no formal written submission, just a form which will be completed in collaboration between you and your reviewer. This should be a supportive conversation and provides an opportunity to explore any potential obstacles to successful completion, so you

and your supervisory team can identify any additional support or changes which might be required. More information (and the form itself) can be found in the Code of Practice here.

But what if the plans I make at my Submission Review don't work out, and I don't submit by the end of my tuition fee-paying period?

Submission Pending

If you do not submit by the end of your tuition fee-paying period, most students will automatically enter the Submission Pending period. This was previously known as the Continuation Period, but it has been adapted from this year to make clear that this time is intended for completing your thesis and submitting as soon as possible. The Submission Pending period is any time you have left between the end of your tuition fee-paying period and your time limit – most students have a tuition fee-paying period of three or 3.5 years, so a Submission Pending period of 12 or six months respectively. If your tuition fee-paying period and time limit are the same length, you do not have a Submission Pending period. Where relevant, you will move into the Submission Pending period automatically. A Submission Pending fee is payable at this stage, but full tuition fees are no longer charged to you or your sponsor.

It is important that you use this time primarily for finalising your thesis however, and you are expected to submit as soon as possible. Most funded students will no longer be receiving a stipend by this stage, so it is in your best interests to do so. This additional time should not be used for other activities, for example, continuing active research, writing standalone publications, or undertaking other activities unrelated to your thesis. More information about this period and the University's expectations of you during this time can be found in the Code of Practice here.

If you do wish to pursue other publication opportunities, the University has some mechanisms to help you do this after your thesis is submitted. You can apply for funding via the Publication Scholarships Scheme, or request an Affiliate Research Account Extension to retain your IT and Library access for up to six months after your degree is awarded.

But what if I still have essential research I need to complete during this time for my thesis?

Continuation of active/core research

It *is* possible to continue with core research during the Submission Pending period, but you need permission from your department in advance in order to do so. 'Core research' varies by discipline, but it essentially includes any research that isn't writing your thesis e.g. data collection, experiments, fieldwork. It is important that your department has oversight of any research taking place, and can confirm that facilities will still be available (if relevant). It's also an opportunity to explore the plans you have for any research remaining – it may be the case that you are deemed to have enough research for a doctoral standard thesis already, and that it would be in your best interests to focus on writing. Requests should be made at least three months in advance of the start of your Submission Pending period. The form, guidance, and criteria for assessment can be found in the Code of Practice here.

Planning for Publications and your Thesis Structure

By Dr Lova Chechik, Graduate, Department of Materials Science and Engineering.

I was fortunate enough to be awarded a publication scholarship in 2022 after submitting my PhD thesis in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering. Going into the fourth year of my doctoral programme, I had made the classic mistake of performing sufficient lab work, without having written much of my thesis. I had a vague thesis structure, but as I hadn't finished analysing my results and I didn't quite understand how the various chapters would link together.

When planning the structure for a large body of work, it's very easy to list vague heading titles and call that a plan. However, what I found most useful was forcing myself to write out a more detailed plan; notably, explicitly summarising the take-home messages from each results chapter. For this, I sketched rough ideas of figures which I would make (even if the results weren't yet finalised); this really helped direct my final experiments and my data analysis. The final result was that I had a clear idea of what the results chapters of my thesis would contain and how they would interlink.

However, once I've been working on a topic for a while, I struggle to objectively reflect on it. For this, I find it invaluable to lean on the colleagues surrounding me, both fellow doctoral students and postdocs in the group. By presenting your thesis structure, they may notice a link between chapters that you'd missed, or that you're including data which doesn't contribute to the findings (it can be hard to remove your work from your thesis, but it will frustrate the examiners if

you include data which is not relevant). This resulted in me rearranging the order of several results chapters, as a colleague pointed out that it would make more sense to introduce the later results first (your thesis doesn't necessarily need to be in chronological order). At this point, I discussed this thorough plan with my supervisor, who requested further alterations, but I was pleased to have a solid plan going into this meeting. I would massively recommend having a discussion

with your supervisor about chapter proofreading, so you are both on the same page about how quick you can expect feedback from each chapter and whether this would be in written form or a discussion.

In hindsight, I wish I had gone through this process earlier in my doctoral programme. If I had done so, I may have had the chance to write more journal papers – rather than structuring my work as thesis chapters, I could have planned journal publications and then submitted my thesis in the publication format. If you're planning to stay in academia, having a strong publication record is critical; and having two or three published papers from your PhD would put you in a very strong position for postdoc applications.

I wrote my thesis as a monograph and rather enjoyed the fact that I could include some tangential results, which link together the various key results in my work. I'm not sure the examiners appreciated this as my thesis was rather long, but I was proud of the amount of work I had done. Having submitted my thesis, I was looking for post-doctoral positions with one first-author paper published but little else to my name. I knew that several of my thesis chapters contained interesting work and I wanted to publish these. Initially, I had planned to submit these during my doctoral course, but the thesis took priority, so this didn't happen.

When looking at potential university scholarships, I noticed the publication scholarship and I submitted an application. I was fortunate to be awarded the publication scholarship, which allowed me to rewrite several sections of my thesis into paper format and submit these to journals. I've just had my second first-author paper accepted, which I was able to submit as a result of this scholarship; this was essentially one of my results chapters, but distilled to contain only the critical results. During the writing process, you notice how different sections of your thesis link together, so I have also submitted a further paper, which combines the key findings from two chapters and presents them in a concise and accessible manner.

I have recently started a post-doctoral position at a university in Germany and think that having two additional publications from my PhD will be invaluable for my future career. By the end of my postdoc, these extra papers will have accumulated some citations, boosting my publication record and increasing my chances if I apply for my own fellowship.

You too could apply for a three month publication scholarship!

The University awards a number of scholarships every year to students who submit within their tuition fee-paying period (or within 3.5 years for students with a three year tuition fee-paying period). These take the form of a three month stipend, supporting you to refine and redevelop your research for publication after your thesis is submitted. You can apply up to six months before your thesis submission in one of two rounds every year, in January and June – head here to see the criteria and find out more.

Persistence Pays Off:

My Journey to Securing a Research Publication Scholarship

By Dr Monika Fratczak, Graduate, Department of Sociological Studies.

Last year I had the opportunity to apply for a three-month Publication Scholarship scheme. The scholarship programme provides funding for postgraduate research students who submit their thesis within their tuition fee-paying period. This funding allows them to spend extra time refining and reformatting the key findings from their research for publication.

This was not the first time I had applied for this scholarship, as I had failed twice before. But this time, I was determined to make it work. The application process was straightforward: I had to submit a proposal outlining my research project, plans for publication, and motivation for applying for the scholarship. I already knew that the application process is competitive, and I needed to put in extra effort to make my proposal stand out.

I spent a few weeks working on my application, ensuring that it was realistic, clear, and concise. I emphasized the significance of my research, which focused on emotional responses and (potential) democratic participation through data visualisation, and how it would contribute to the field of Sociology. I spent a lot of time brainstorming potential journals and settled on one that I felt was most relevant to my field and the paper I wanted to publish. I also worked closely with my supervisors to get feedback and revisions on my proposal before I submitted it.

After I submitted my application, I had to wait for a few weeks to hear back. When I received the news that I had been awarded the scholarship, I was over the moon! After failing twice, finally getting the scholarship was a huge accomplishment for me. It was validation of all the hard work and effort that I had put into my research.

This was also an incredible opportunity for me to fully focus on my publication. I had been working on my PhD for several years, and I was excited to finally have the time and resources to publish my first paper. I spent most of my time writing, trying to make my research as clear and accessible as possible. I also worked closely with my supervisors, who provided valuable feedback and helped me to refine my writing.

Getting the publication scholarship was a challenging journey, but it was also incredibly rewarding. It taught me the importance of perseverance and determination and gave me the opportunity to take my doctoral research to the next level. One of the most challenging aspects of the scholarship was the tight deadline. I had only three months to finish my publication, and I had to work very hard to meet it because, in the meantime, I got a part-time job as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield.

I highly recommend this scholarship programme to other postgraduate research students who do not have another substantial source of income following thesis submission. It provides the necessary funding and support to make the publishing process more feasible. Additionally, having a publication as a student is a great advantage when looking for job opportunities in academia and can help you achieve your goals. And if you do not get it the first time, do not give up and try applying again!

Editor's note: we have since consolidated the publication scholarship scheme into two rounds per year, with PGRs eligible to apply in the six months before their planned submission date. This means in the current system you will most likely only be eligible to apply once, or potentially twice if you are aiming for an early submission – so give it your best shot! More information and eligibility criteria are here.

Balancing Teaching Commitments with Writing a PhD Thesis

By Guy Cowman-Sharpe, PhD Researcher, Department of Politics and International Relations.

One of the best opportunities available to PhDs at the University of Sheffield is to take up a role as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), leading undergraduate seminars and facilitating discussions. While this both supplements a doctoral researcher's income and gives them vital teaching experience, it can be a cause for worry as to how time will be balanced between teaching and thesis writing – particularly when there are assessments to mark. Here are some techniques I have used to balance teaching commitments with writing a PhD thesis.

A key strategy I found when I started as a GTA is to try as much as possible to keep to the preparation time that you have been given contractually. So, if you are given three hours' preparation time, stick to that. Often seminar plans will be available from previous years that are a useful starting point for structuring a session and remember that it is OK at this stage in the academic career to not be an expert on every topic in a module. A lot of new GTAs have a tendency to over prepare to account for any possible occurrence in the seminar room but quickly realise that this is unnecessary and can eat into the time needed for thesis writing.

Committing to some form of writing every day can also aid the process. Writing something every day can seem an easy task at first, but it can be one that leads quickly to burnout. Even if a low target of 500 words, or a side of A4, is set, it can be hard to stick to this and frustrating when the target is not met. What I find far more effective is the dedicated use of a research diary. In my case, this takes the form of a Google Document that I update as often as possible with reflections on the PhD research process. In my research diary I add thoughts on any training done, reflections on meetings or discussions with supervisors and colleagues,

and particularly thought-provoking excerpts or arguments from reading I have done that day. This acts as a great reference point when approaching more focused aspects of thesis writing and exercises my writing muscles.

In terms of the writing itself, many researchers use the pomodoro method as a means of getting words on a page. The idea is to set aside a fixed time period for focused writing followed by a fixed time for a break – usually this is 25 minutes of writing followed by a five-minute break. This technique is used by the writing retreats organised by the University of Sheffield across various schools. Personally, I find 25/5 a bit limiting, and prefer a 50/10 strategy – I found that five minutes was not long enough of a break and I was frequently spilling over into six or seven, taking time out of the set 25-minute writing block. 50/10 therefore gives me a longer break but also builds a mindset of delayed gratification – something crucial when pursuing a long-term intellectual project like a PhD thesis.

Research is a thoroughly isolating exercise, and it can be hard to keep motivated when doing it alone. As someone who has worked in office environments before, the autonomy granted through writing a PhD is something of a double-edged sword – having the freedom to set your own hours looks great on paper but requires a lot of self-guided motivation to stick to targets and not fall into bad habits. Taking part in online group writing retreats using the pomodoro method can be a really effective strategy for dealing with this, and there is a wealth of free virtual retreats available online. I have found these useful for both writing the thesis and preparing for seminars.

Getting any marking that you may have as a GTA out of the way as quickly as possible is another key strategy. It can be daunting seeing the amount of assessments in the Turnitin queue and it is all too easy to put it off until the last minute. But working through assessments as quickly as possible is the best way to leave time for thesis writing, and be sure to be honest with supervisors while teaching if timescales need to be re-thought in light of the workload – it is always better to ask for more time than to not meet a deadline.

Seminar teaching can be a remarkably rewarding experience and is a great way to become more familiar with the material in your subject area and gain vital skills for your career post-PhD. By maintaining clear writing targets, taking care to not over prepare, and making sure to ask for support from supervisors or module leaders when needed, being a GTA can be a great way to enhance the doctoral experience.

Taking a Leave of Absence During your Doctoral Programme

Dr Laura Stanley, Senior Research Degree Support Officer.

When life gets in the way…

Even with the best will in the world, sometimes unexpected events occur meaning you might not be able to engage

with your studies for a period of time. This can include anything from ill health to personal problems, unexpected financial difficulties, and a wide variety of other unforeseen circumstances (and some foreseen ones like parental or adoption leave or jury service). During this time, it might be helpful to be able to take a break from your studies so that you can deal with the situation. This is exactly what the mechanism of Leave of Absence is designed to allow you to do; it provides a way to take an approved break and effectively 'stop the clock' so that you don't lose any time from your degree. Leave of Absences should be taken at the time of the disruption if possible, or at least within 30 days of the start of the disruption if not. It's easy to not think that this is a priority and then end up running out of time later on and unable to apply for the time back retrospectively.

During a Leave of Absence, you wouldn't be expected to meet with your supervisor, attend the university, or complete or submit any work. This will relieve the stress of any upcoming deadlines for you so you can prioritise the unforeseen circumstances without needing to worry about your work.

How to apply for LOA

The first step would usually be to speak to your supervisor so that they're aware of your situation. If you'd prefer you could speak to your personal tutor or your departmental PGR Tutor. Your department will be able to offer advice and reassurance on how best to proceed. You can find central guidance on taking LOA and the form to complete here.

To submit an LOA application, complete the form available above and submit it to your supervisor or departmental administrator. They will then complete the supervisor section and obtain departmental approval. They will then send the form to Research Services who obtain faculty approval before the LOA is applied to your student record.

Other support

Some students might be entitled to sick pay if the LOA is for medical reasons (UKRI and university funded students plus some external funders – if unsure check with your funder).

International students here on a Tier 4/ Student visa may want to check first if their LOA will affect their visa. You can check this using the self-help tool available here. If unsure, please contact International Student Support here.

Depending on the nature of the circumstances you may wish to contact Student Support Services.

If your situation is ongoing and unclear as to when it might resolve it could also be worth considering a change to part-time working if that's possible for you. Your supervisor should be able to help you consider the options.

If you have any questions, you can contact the Research Degree Support Team.

Adapting to My PhD after Becoming Disabled

By Holly Sutherland, PhD Researcher, Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology.

When I started my PhD in October 2018, I was apprehensive about the journey I had just begun but also excited, ready to embrace the challenges, highs, and lows that I knew my PhD would bring. However, I could never have anticipated the difficulties I would face. Just over two and a half years after starting my PhD my health began to decline. I was in excruciating pain, unable to move, and had to take the first of my leave of absences. For me, this choice was easy, I physically couldn't function let alone contribute to my PhD. The loss of interaction with my lab made my absence hard and as soon as I felt able to return, I did with little hesitation.

After returning, my physical health continued to decline. Ongoing medical care ruled out several causes, but my symptoms kept increasing and my pain worsened. After six months, I became increasingly frustrated at the lack of a diagnosis and what I'd initially hoped to be a 'quick fix' soon became the reality of learning to accept my life with chronic pain. It was hard. Comparing myself with my past self, with others, I didn't belong. I didn't deserve a PhD. I didn't know how I was going to make it through the rest of my PhD when I could barely make it through the day.

My physical health impacted my mental health. I was severely depressed and anxious, but I put on a brave face, I pushed, I kept pushing, I broke. It was hard accepting my body wasn't the same anymore, I began to learn that I was becoming increasingly disabled. It felt hard to say, 'I am disabled;' it's still difficult now. I'm young, I don't look disabled, I questioned if I was disabled enough.

Despite knowing I needed to take another leave of absence to prioritise my health, I was afraid that the loss of social interaction might worsen my mental health. I questioned if I did take time away from my PhD would I find the motivation to return? After weeks of weighing up the decision I knew it was the only choice that could mean I'd finish my PhD. I was fortunate to be entitled to a limited stipend extension as my leave of absence was medical. However, this did still impact the duration of my leave based on how long I could afford to be without income. When I made the decision to return, I was incredibly anxious. I felt out of the loop with everything in my lab, with my

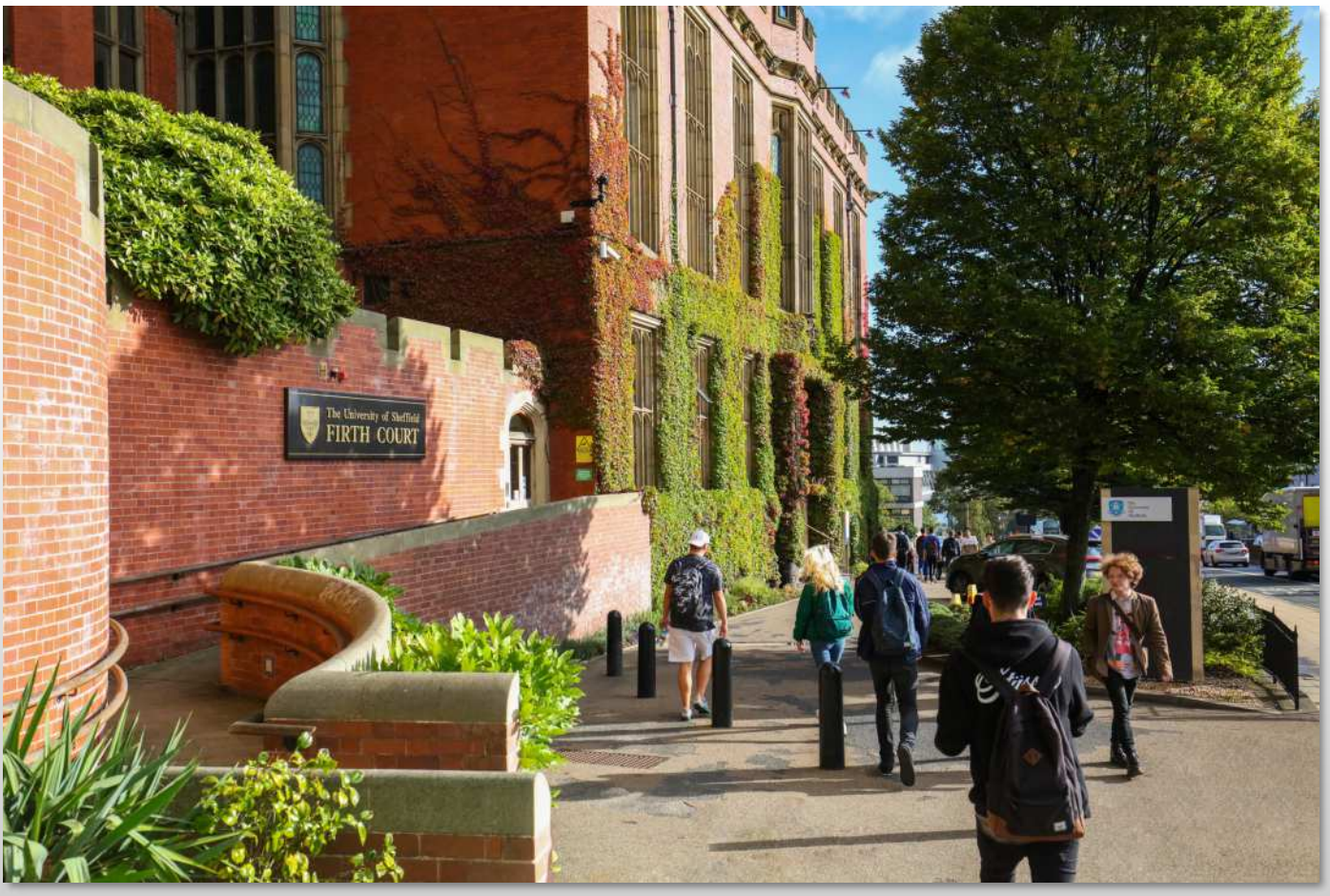
own work, with what my own physical capabilities and limitations would be in the lab. It felt like I was starting my PhD all over again whilst also learning my body and adapting my work schedule accordingly.

As my health continually declined, managing my own expectations of what I was capable of grew increasingly challenging. I knew that my body needed significantly more rest now, but academia has this culture that promotes dysfunctional overworking. Every time I took the rest I needed, all I felt was guilt. I slowly had to accept that rest was productive too; resting and taking breaks does not need to be earned.

As I approached my original deadline I struggled. Friends I had started with began submitting their theses and I felt like a failure. Why couldn't I do it when they could? It's always easy to say you shouldn't compare yourself to others but knowing it and doing it are two different things. I kept putting more pressure on myself, but as new challenging symptoms appeared, I stalled again, taking a third leave of absence. Of the leave of absences, this one was the longest and most difficult. I no longer felt like I belonged in the lab, that I had let everyone down, that I had outstayed my welcome. I felt like I needed longer, but could not financially afford to, so I returned, writing my thesis from home.

I have been incredibly fortunate through everything I've experienced to have received an unbelievable amount of support from my supervisor, my lab, my friends, and my family. Both the pursuit of a PhD and becoming/being disabled can be isolating and with the combination of both I have often felt very alone. I hope that it helps to know that if you are facing any similarities with my situation or any other difficult circumstances during your doctoral programme, you are not alone.

The most important thing I have learned is that taking and accepting rest is key. Please encourage yourself and those around you to take time away, whether this is a day off, a holiday, or a leave of absence. Rest does not need to be earned.



Managing your time:

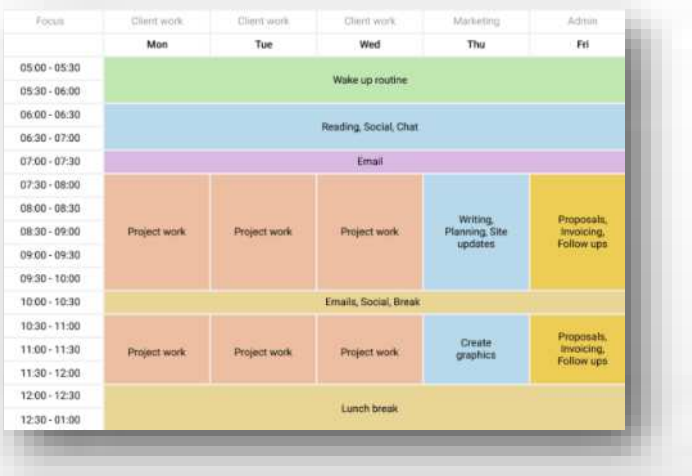
Exploring Timeboxing and the Pomodoro Technique

By Natasha Broadhurst, PhD Researcher, School of English.

The ability to manage your time is important in most job roles; we see it listed under almost every personal specification. However, in the absence of rigid working hours and the often sinuous nature of academic research, effective time management is absolutely paramount for PGRs. Whether you're juggling other commitments alongside your studies or you're prone to distraction, the open-endedness of research can make it difficult to know whether you're making the best use of your time.

I was working part time as a sixth-form Progress Coach when I embarked upon my doctoral journey in 2021. Within the role, I was required to promote the effective use of study skills. This was something I'd hated talking to my students about previously – it was a feat not to echo the group's yawns as I introduced them to VESPA and metacognition – but this year, with a vested interest in my own progress as a student, I became intrigued. I decided to practise what I was preaching and began experimenting with some study techniques myself. As a freshly stressed PGR balancing my studies and a high-responsibility job role, I was particularly drawn to the systems that claimed to boost productivity and relieve anxiety.

I'd heard of timeboxing before but had hitherto agreed with students that it sounded like a highly unappealing and somewhat unromantic way to live your life.



Focus	Client work	Client work	Client work	Marketing	Admin
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
05:00 - 05:30	Wake up routine				
05:30 - 06:00					
06:00 - 06:30	Reading, Social, Chat				
06:30 - 07:00					
07:00 - 07:30	Email				
07:30 - 08:00	Project work	Project work	Project work	Writing, Planning, Site updates	Proposals, Invoicing, Follow ups
08:00 - 08:30					
08:30 - 09:00					
09:00 - 09:30					
09:30 - 10:00					
10:00 - 10:30	Emails, Social, Break				
10:30 - 11:00	Project work	Project work	Project work	Create graphics	Proposals, Invoicing, Follow ups
11:00 - 11:30					
11:30 - 12:00					
12:00 - 12:30	Lunch break				
12:30 - 01:00					

Timeboxing encourages you to meticulously organise your life into boxes of time. Rather than unwittingly alternating between tasks, you devote a set period of time to a specific one. You add tasks to your calendar, with a start and end time, in much the same way that you would add a meeting. You might 'box' 8–11 a.m. for reading, 11–12 p.m. for emails, 12–1 p.m. for lunch, 1–5 p.m. for writing, and so on. This can be particularly useful for students who tend to work from home, where –

depending on your procrastinatory poison – the siren's calls of the laundry basket or your favourite TV show can lure you away from your research. Timeboxing claims to protect your work time, and, crucially, tells you when to stop and move on.

Within your boxes of time, though, you might still find it difficult to stay focused, particularly if you're grappling with a hefty task, such as writing up a chapter of your thesis. This is where the Pomodoro Technique steps in. A scion of timeboxing, the technique is simple: you split your time into chunks called pomodoros (typically 25 minutes) in which you focus on a very specific task, followed by a short break (typically five minutes). You dictate your targets for each pomodoro beforehand (e.g. 'work on paragraph x' or 'write 200 words'), but it's essential that they are realistic. Once you've completed the pomodoro, you have five minutes to reward yourself with a cup of tea, a stretch, or a chat with a friend.

I was surprised that when I started actively practising these techniques, I became completely hooked. Making use of my Google calendar, every aspect of my daily life was measured into neat little timeboxes. Larger timeboxes enveloped smaller pomodoro-shaped ones. No longer reserved for reading and writing, I started using pomodoros for life admin and cleaning. It turns out that the time-bound and focused nature of pomodoros – teamed with the promise of a 'reward' in the form of a short break – has no issue tricking my brain into productivity. I organised an evening workshop at work to endorse the power of timeboxing and the Pomodoro Technique. Everyone in my office began working in silent twenty-five minute chunks followed by lovely, chatty five minute tea breaks. This scrupulous time management transformed my working day and significantly amplified my productivity, and those around me seemed to be benefiting from it too.

Unfortunately, meticulous time management takes time and effort to maintain. The single pomodoro I'd 'box' myself on a Sunday afternoon invariably failed to be sufficient for planning my week ahead. Furthermore, you can be left disappointed if an unexpected commitment needs prioritising over a time-boxed reading hour, or if you don't complete a specified task during a pomodoro. Pomodoros can also work counterintuitively: I recall occasions where, for example, the time was 13:07 and I'd felt stressed that a pomodoro wouldn't be neatly framed within the hour, so I scrolled Twitter until 13:30 before beginning my work.

I continue to use timeboxing to organise my days, though I'm cautious to include gaps either side to allow for surprises. I am still a fervent 'pomoneer', but they are reserved for writing or marking. I would encourage all doctoral students to set aside their assumptions of time-management techniques and give them a go; they might be your ticket to timely submission. However, my experience also highlights how overplanning can be a thin disguise for procrastination and can contribute to a sense of disappointment when your time isn't spent as planned. Ultimately, there's no shortcut for writing a thesis, you just have to do it until it's done, but timeboxing techniques can serve to impose some order onto the weird and turbulent experience of a doctoral programme.

Planning for a Timely Submission

By Maira Klyshbekova, PhD Researcher, School of Education.

Planning for a timely submission can be quite overwhelming especially if you are nearing the submission deadline. As a third-year PhD student, I can fully relate to this statement and here I would like to share the steps to follow to make the timely submission possible for you.

Planning ahead

As straightforward as it may sound, planning ahead for your thesis writing sometimes can be time consuming and tiresome. As a famous quote says, "Planning ahead is already half of success," and I personally can agree with this statement. During the first years of my doctoral programme I tried different planning tools for my thesis some of which worked well while others did not. I believe it is important to test each planning tool for yourself to see which ones will work for you. As of now, I keep all of the thesis-related activities in my *PhD diary* and *Trello* while daily and monthly writing tasks I store in *Notion*. This way I can visually see my PhD-related tasks and aims for each month and I can also set writing tasks for my thesis.

Always set deadlines

For thesis writing, I always set deadlines for finishing a particular section or chapter. This way you will have a clear plan of what to work on and the set deadline helps to keep you productive and efficient. Apart from setting deadlines, I use tools that keep me focused, one of which is *Pomodoro*. This is a great tool for anyone who struggles with focusing while thesis writing. Taking advantage of such planning tools can be helpful and can visibly impact your productivity.

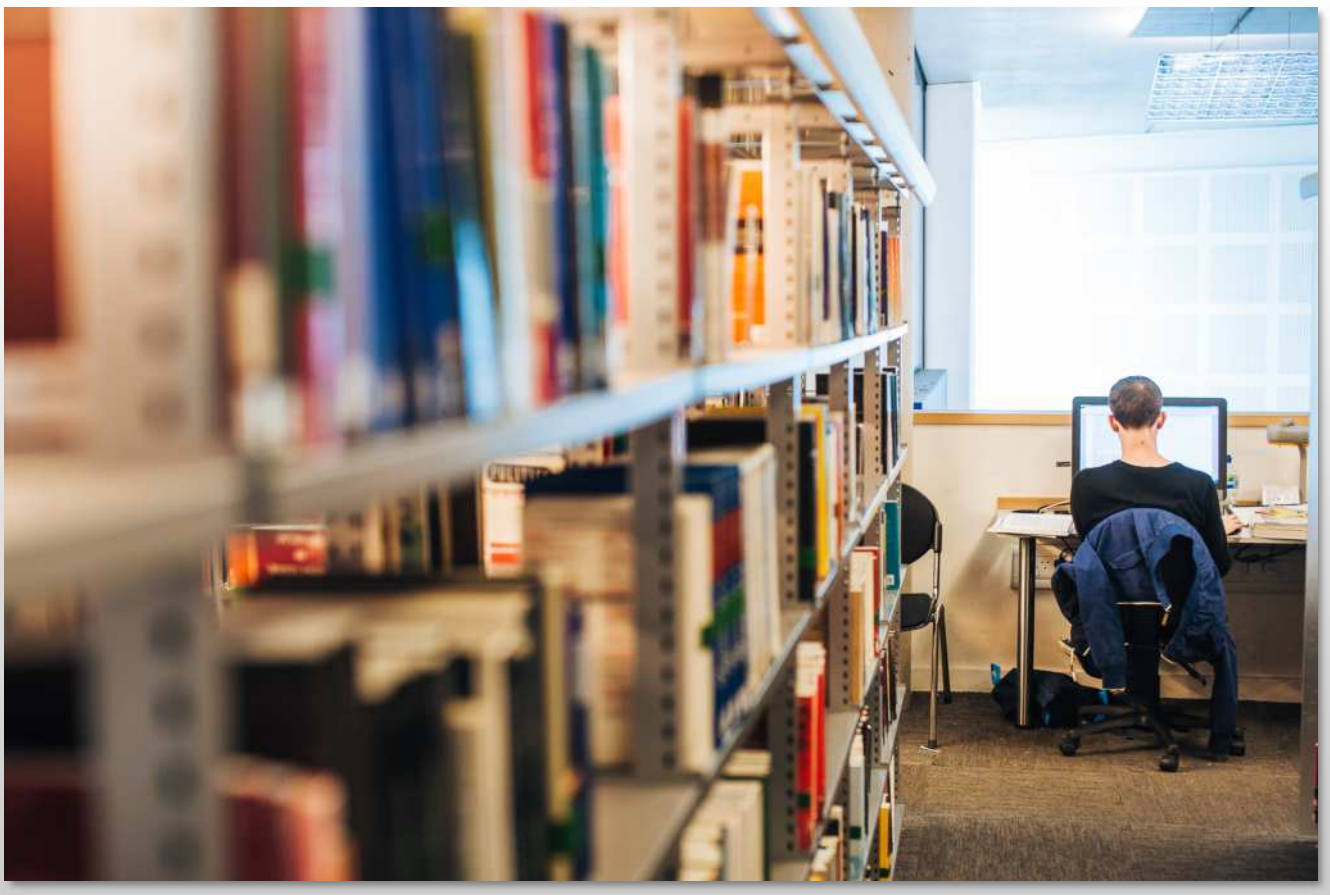
Attend writing retreats

Another way of increasing your productivity is attending writing retreats. Writing retreats are useful for those who want to stay focused and at the same time feel like a member of a writing community. In other words, such spaces provide you with a distraction-free atmosphere where you stay focused while writing and during the breaks get to chat with other attendees. There is a writing retreat particularly for doctoral students offered by Think Ahead. Make sure to attend such retreats if you are struggling with procrastination and need a boost in terms of efficient writing.

Write every day

As simple as it may sound, writing every day and writing continually will help you

finish your work on time and also save you from any unnecessary stress. As a doctoral student, you will need to produce a big chunk of work which in fact might frighten and stop you from diving right into the process of writing, but if you set your mind to writing every day you will get your project moving. So start writing every day even if it is a little section or a paragraph. Allocate a special time to work on your thesis and stick to it every day. Don't forget to keep your references organised otherwise at the end of the day you may find yourself searching for sources you have cited before. Make use of reference managers such as *Endnote* or *Zotero*. Lastly, turn your writing schedule into a habit and keep on working.



What is my Deadline?

The Doctoral Times Team have provided a useful overview of your deadline dates and where to find them.

There are two deadlines to be aware of – the end of your tuition fee-paying period, and your final time limit. You can find both dates on your offer letter, although they may change during your time at Sheffield, depending on your individual circumstances e.g. if you take a leave of absence. The best place to check is therefore on MUSE – this pulls live data from your student record, and is therefore updated if you take a leave of absence, go on placement, receive an extension etc.

You can access this information by following the steps below:

- Log in to MUSE.
- Go into 'My Services' and select 'MyRecord'.
- Log into MyRecord, and select the 'Course information' tab from the menu on the left.

The University's expectation is that all PGRs should submit their thesis within their tuition fee-paying period. Your registration will continue up until your time limit however, which is the absolute deadline by which you must have submitted your thesis. Extensions beyond your time limit can only be considered in very exceptional circumstances. Please see the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes for more information about this.

The Ultimate Guide to Thesis Submission

Dr Laura Stanley, Senior Research Degree Support Officer, provides the ultimate guide to thesis submission.

Things to consider before submission

When it comes to thesis submission there are a few things to bear in mind. Firstly, make sure you talk to your supervisor well in advance about when you're planning to submit – they will need to appoint your examiners and it prevents delays if they can do so before you submit your thesis. Also give your supervisor plenty of time to review your thesis prior to submission. A time limit extension won't be granted if you just haven't planned enough time for your supervisor review the thesis and for you to make any changes.

When you're preparing your thesis for submission make sure you have thoroughly proofread it – spelling and grammar mistakes are by far the most common complaints from examiners. You can check all the necessary things to include in your thesis in the Code of Practice.

If the pandemic has affected the work you have been able to do you can inform the examiners of the extent of these effects by submitting a Covid Impact Form.

How and where to submit your thesis

When you are ready to submit your thesis the first thing you will need to do is put your thesis through Turnitin. Your department will be able to help you find the right slot for you to upload it to.

You will then need to submit your thesis to Research Services. Since the pandemic this is now an online process you can access via a Google form.

The form will ask you to upload your thesis and any additional materials e.g. a Covid Impact Form, along with the receipt from Turnitin. Please check you are submitting the correct version of your thesis as all submissions are final! Once you have submitted you will receive confirmation from the Google form that it's gone through successfully plus an email from us in one or two working days.

What happens next?

Research Services will then wait for your department to confirm that your Turnitin report has been checked before we can dispatch the thesis to your examiners (assuming they have already been appointed by your supervisor). We will email you with confirmation once this has happened.

Your internal examiner (or coordinator) will then be in touch with you directly to start making arrangements for your viva.

For more information about thesis submission you can check out the Code of Practice or email us at pgr-enquiries@sheffield.ac.uk.

You may also find this short video guide helpful: