

Navigating Doctoral Studies: The Doctoral Process

Embarking on a doctorate can be a vital and rewarding step on your research journey. If you are thinking about a doctorate, understanding the process will help you decide whether this path is the right one for you. This leaflet provides a handy 'Top 10 Tips' to the doctoral process.

Tip 1 – Entry requirements

Check specific entry requirements for your chosen course. Generally, you will need an upper second-class honours undergraduate degree. However, for some courses, you may require a Master's degree. You may also be asked to attend an interview in addition to completing an online application.

Tip 2 – Choose your research topic or project

Think about an area of research that you are passionate about. Undertake evidence scoping and formulate a research question, using the PICO method or similar. Seek out mentors locally, nationally or internationally who can help you to refine your research topic or project.

Tip 3 – Supervisors and advisors

Whether you are undertaking a professional doctorate or PhD, the University will usually appoint at least one supervisor per student with whom you will meet regularly. Advisors, with extensive experience in components of the project, may also be selected. Think about the expertise potential advisors can offer, not only in terms of your project, but also in supporting your research career.

Tip 4 – Meeting your offer conditions

Part time or full time Doctoral studies are self-directed with academic supervisors appointed by the University. The process involves three phases; preparation for research, doing research and thesis writing/preparation for the oral examination or viva voce. To ensure students are on track, Universities will have processes to support you. These may include assessments, a progression/transfer process to move from a MPhil to a PhD pathway and annual reviews.

Tip 5 – Fulfilling course requirements

Be organised at the start of your doctorate. Find out about any mandatory courses and formulate a timeframe to complete these. Identify when critical milestones take place for example, assessments, progression onto a doctoral pathway, annual reviews and thesis submission. Be aware of requirements for each of these milestones. Outline a plan for achieving each one and seek support to ensure goals are attained.

Tip 6 – Nominate examiners

Check your academic institution's guidance on nomination of examiners. Discuss and agree potential examiners with your supervisors. It is usual for the lead supervisor to gain approval of the examiners via the University system. Examiners will need to be confirmed by the University before your viva occurs.

Tip 7 – Submit your thesis

Different types of doctorate programmes will have specific thesis word count and format requirements. Check requirements in advance. Find out whether your thesis is submitted electronically or whether paper copies are needed. Get help in advance with formatting your document. Ensure sufficient time for paper copies to be printed and bound. Plan thesis submission to the University by the required deadline.

Tip 8 – The viva

Your doctorate is likely to involve a final oral examination or viva voce. Approach this as an opportunity to share knowledge of your specialist area. Prepare for the oral examination by reading your thesis carefully and practice via participating in a mock examination. Understand the rationale for any analyses you have chosen. Be ready to defend your methods and explain your results. Also be prepared to discuss your future research and the dissemination/publication of your research.

Tip 9 – After the viva

You will be given feedback on your thesis after the viva. It is not unusual for minor or major corrections to be suggested and you will be given a relevant timeframe to complete these. Take time after the viva to reflect on your achievement and celebrate your success. Failure of a viva is not common but can happen if things go wrong with the doctoral process so follow all the advice you are given by your supervisors. If major corrections are needed a further viva may be necessary.

Tip 10 – Awarding of doctoral degree

Once any corrections have been completed, these will need to be approved by the examiners. Once approved you will then receive confirmation that your degree has been awarded. Later, a degree conferring ceremony will be arranged. Don't forget to think about and plan your post-doctoral career so that you can continue your clinical academic journey. Publications are key to getting to the next stage of your research development.

For contact details about your local hub and for further information about **cahpr** please visit our website <https://cahpr.csp.org.uk>

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