

Navigating Doctoral Studies: Project management

A doctoral study can be challenging. These tips are written by healthcare professionals outside of medicine undertaking doctoral studies and by those with recent experience of successfully completing doctoral studies within clinical and non-clinical environments. This leaflet expands on the 'Top 10 tips' for navigating doctoral studies. These provide a more in depth 'Top 10 Tips' relating to project management.

Tip 1 – Begin writing early

It is important to begin planning the writing up of doctoral work early. Writing is a skill which improves with practice so regular, ring-fenced time to develop your writing skills is crucial. Writing-up should not be left to the last minute or seen as a task to be completed in the final part of the doctoral process.

Tip 2 – Set goals

The long-term goal is to graduate with a doctorate. This can be a hugely overwhelming task and progress can be hindered due to not knowing where to start. Setting short-term (monthly) and mid-term (quarterly) goals are important to keep you focussed, motivated and on target. Using the SMART format (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed) can be useful to do this.

Tip 3 – Review goals

Review short-term and mid-term goals set. Reflect on whether your goals have been partially or fully achieved. Determine reasons why you have been successful and fully achieved your goal so you can replicate this. Alternatively, try to understand reasons why you may have struggled to achieve a goal so you know what to avoid or be aware of in future.

Tip 4 – Celebrate achievements

Studying for a doctorate is a long process. Successfully setting and reviewing of short-term and mid-term goals should not just been seen as a tick box exercise. Good project management also means allowing yourself to celebrate your achievements along the way.

Tip 5 – Engage with feedback

Engagement with feedback is vital despite it quite often being a challenging process to engage with. Ensure you get regular feedback and from a variety of sources. Then ensure you allow time to then action the feedback. This will allow you to get the best out of the feedback you receive and advance your insight into your work.

Tip 6 – Publication of doctoral findings

The traditional method of dissemination is in academic journals. Identify the key journals you are aiming to submit your work to and give yourself internal deadlines of when you would like to have achieved this by. If you leave manuscript writing to the end of a doctorate your focus will be on writing your thesis not getting manuscripts published. Having your publications listed in your thesis can very much enhance the relevance and importance of your research for your examiners and other readers.

Tip 7 – Dissemination at conferences

As with Tip 6, early selection of key conferences to attend is important. Once you have identified important conferences or meetings in your field, put the abstract submission deadlines into your calendar with a two to three month reminder. This will allow you to adequately prepare abstracts and receive feedback from co-authors to ensure you submit high-quality work.

Tip 8 – Time management and organisation

Doctoral studies are substantial research projects that require self-directed initiation, planning and execution within a specified time. These projects require significant thought regarding what is achievable in the time frame. Being organised from the outset will ensure the work required for the doctorate is delivered.

Two popular methods are use of a Gantt chart and project-management software such as Trello.

Tip 9 – Build in contingency time

Many tasks take longer than you think. Having a dialogue with your supervisors will help you to gain an understanding from the outset of how long the different components of your research may take. Remember to add contingency time to allow you to learn, make mistakes and respond to feedback and avoid leaving the minimum amount of time.

Tip 10 – Get support early for difficulties encountered

Things go wrong with projects but you are not doing your doctorate alone and your supervisors, advisors and mentors are there for support when you encounter difficulties. However, it is your responsibility to keep them informed if something happens that you forecast will affect your ability to meet a goal as missing one key milestone can have a major knock-on effect.

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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