

## PGR Tips on getting the balance right and “Saying No”

It is good to be proactive and engage in as many inspiring, broadening and challenging activities as you can during your doctorate. However, you are likely to be offered more opportunities than you will reasonably have time for, considering you have your thesis to complete as well. To allow enough time for activities that will really work for you, you will need to say no to any others.

For most of us saying NO is not easy. The following tips are based on advice Hugh Kearns <http://www.phdinprogress.com/> gave in the Vitae workshop ‘Strategies for Busy Researchers’ held in December, which expanded on the [‘Balanced researcher’](#) booklet.

### Don’t say yes

This may be an obvious starting point, but is an important strategy to allow you time to think whether you really want to take on the task. Many of us are inclined to say yes straight away to please the person asking. But consider asking for some time to get back to them (then you can always say yes, after giving the matter consideration).

### What happens if I say no?

Be honest with yourself about what is likely to happen if you say no and compare it with what would happen if you say yes. (Consider the additional time pressures- what will you need to give up to make way for this opportunity?). It is quite likely that, initially at least, Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) will dominate your thinking:

### ANTs

Examples of ANTs are thinking the other person will be very disappointed or upset or they will question your commitment, that you should be doing it or that you will now miss out on chances in the future.... Check whether you may be overestimating either probability or consequences. It is important to make time for More Accurate Thoughts (MATHs):

### MATHs

It is more likely that although people might be a bit disappointed they will just ask the next person on their list. On questions of your performance and commitment people will judge you on your overall performance rather than on this single request.

### Alternatives

When you decline, cushion the blow with alternatives: Other people they could ask, a different time scale, a different level or type of involvement from you.

Hopefully these strategies will allow you to spend your time doing a variety of things that will energise and inspire you.