

Completing your doctorate

- Helping you finish your doctorate
- Planning your career after your doctorate



Completing your doctorate...

The writing up, submission and defending of your thesis in a viva can feel like a distinct part of the doctoral process and represents the last hurdle before you obtain your degree and title. Have a look at www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrcompletion for tips and support.

> Tips on writing your thesis

The prospect of writing your thesis can be intimidating. Find a way to tackle it that suits you.

- Start to write early. Don't wait until your research is all finished to start writing. Take opportunities to write reports, papers and notes throughout your research. You will be able to use these as a starting point for your thesis. Writing is a skill so it is important to keep in practice.
- Make a rough writing-up plan early on – you don't have to stick to it, but it will focus your thoughts. Check your plan with your main supervisor.
- Review other theses in your research area to get a clearer idea about appropriate style.
- Break the projects into manageable chunks. It is easier to write a paragraph than a thesis. Start with the easiest first, you don't need to write it in order.
- Don't expect it to be perfect first time. Build in time to revise, redraft and implement your supervisors advice.
- Get friends and colleagues to read and comment on early drafts. Perhaps try pairing up with another doctoral candidate.
- Your main supervisor should read your thesis at least once, but should not be used as a proof-reader.
- Know when it is finished: There will always be more research that you could do but you have to stop somewhere. Ask your supervisor explicitly 'will it pass?' and 'should I submit now?'. Remember you are not writing for the Nobel prize yet.
- Consult www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrthesis for more in depth advice on different aspects of writing your thesis.

> Tips on preparing for your viva

Once you have submitted your thesis you will defend it at a 'viva voce' (Latin for 'by live voice'). Some find this a daunting prospect, but many people really enjoy it. It is also a potentially important networking opportunity.

You will need to devote plenty of time to the preparation for your viva. To help you prepare the Vitae website contains a viva preparation checklist, see www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrviva.

> During the viva

Be prepared to discuss both strengths and weaknesses of your research. Examiners will seek to find and discuss weaknesses in all theses. Do not interpret criticism as indication of a possible negative outcome.

- Ask for clarification of ambiguous questions or ask for the question to be repeated if necessary
- Take time to think before answering
- Be prepared to ask questions and enter into a dialogue with your examiners
- Be ready to admit if you don't know the answer to a question
- Be prepared to express opinions of your own.

> Useful publications

- **Patrick Dunleavy:**
Authoring a PhD
ISBN: 978 1 403 90584 0
- **Rowena Murray:**
How to survive your viva
ISBN: 978 0 335 23382 3
- **Gina Wisker:**
The Postgraduate Research Handbook
ISBN: 978 0 333 74777 3
- **Vitae researcher booklets:**
The balanced researcher
The creative researcher
for printed copies
email: orders@vitae.ac.uk or
download a copy from our website:
www.vitae.ac.uk/researcherbooklets

*“doing a doctorate,
you learn more about
what is important to you”*

*“...nothing at work has
compared to writing a thesis”*

*“after passing my PhD viva
I felt I could achieve anything!”*

Planning your career...

In the final stages of your doctorate, you also need to think about your next career step. The Vitae website has advice both specifically for after your doctorate at www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrcareer and about careers in general at www.vitae.ac.uk/careers.

If you are thinking of a move out of academia and have some ideas, or even no ideas, about what you want to do:

- Visit your Careers Service – speak to a careers adviser, use their tools and resources for identifying your skills, preferences and work options.
- Examine your skills, your motivations, and brainstorm all possible choices of career – do it together with friends or colleagues to share ideas.
- Consider which aspects of your PhD and extra-curricular activities such as teaching/ demonstrating or voluntary work you enjoyed.
- Look at job advertisements and collect ones that appeal to you. Consider as many as possible to start with, and then pick out the ones which may be genuine possibilities. Ask yourself what appeals about each one.
- Speak to peers, colleagues, previous researchers – use all your personal and professional networks to get ideas and advice as well as possible employment leads.
- Don't be afraid to approach people working in fields that interest you. Ask them how they got their job and whether they can make any suggestions to you. Some will be willing to let you shadow them to find out more about their role.
- Prepare different CVs tailored to different career options (you ideally should refine your CV for every position you apply for). The Vitae website contains examples of how to translate your skills to other sectors: www.vitae.ac.uk/cv

If you are keen to continue in academia:

- Talk to your supervisors – they will know where related research is being carried out.
- Consider moving to a new institution or even different country as this will expand your range of opportunities.
- Consider how your skills can be applied outside of your immediate area of expertise. It is common to shift the focus of your research as you finish your doctorate.
- Use conferences to meet people and find out about new opportunities. If you are an effective networker you should be able to meet most of the academics who you are likely to work with.
- Use directories of research – 'Current Research in Britain' is published every year and should be available in your library
- Apply for fellowships and try to secure your own funding as this will help you both to get a position and improve your long term career prospects. You should be aware that applying for funding is a time-consuming and slow process so make sure you allocate sufficient time. Talk to academics about their career and also what they look for when recruiting researchers.
- The Vitae website contains a section on academic careers: www.vitae.ac.uk/hecareers

> Useful publications

- **J. Miller Vick & J.S. Furlong**
The Academic Job Search Handbook
ISBN: 978 08 12220162
- **Vitae What do Researchers do? series** for printed copies
email: orders@vitae.ac.uk or
download a copy from our website:
www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd
- **Career stories portal** including a wide range of researchers' career stories in a fully searchable database
www.vitae.ac.uk/careerstories

> Top tip

- **Subscribe to GRADBritain, our free online magazine written by and for postgraduate researchers**
www.vitae.ac.uk/gradbritain
- **PGR tips is our monthly email, which offers tips and advice to help you through you PhD, register for our mailing list at**
www.vitae.ac.uk/pgrtips

> Useful websites

To investigate current opportunities for PhDs visit

- www.jobs.ac.uk
- www.findpostdoc.com
- www.phdjobs.com
- www.prospects.ac.uk
- <http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/>