

Description

Completing a PhD course is undoubtedly one of the most fulfilling pursuits for academics. Recently, however, a new term arose: ABD (“All but Dissertation”). ABD refers to students who have completed their coursework and passed the exam, but have yet to complete and defend their theses. Indeed, ABD students are more common than previously thought. The PhD Completion Project revealed that the ten-year cumulative completion rate for PhD students ranges from 64% (engineering) to 49% (humanities). While not all students advance to the doctoral writing stage before dropping out, a significant portion do, based on these numbers. Leaving graduate school without finishing your thesis has psychological and occupational consequences. Completing your thesis on time is, therefore, essential for career advancement and personal growth.

Overcoming a Time Crunch

Being pressed for time will likely happen, especially if you are holding down a part-time job during your doctoral studies. The pressure to finish is greatest during the last year of your PhD and this is usually the time when conflicts and tensions arise. There are tips that can help you finish your PhD on time, even when you’re pressed for it.

- Prepare an action plan for your last year. This will help you optimize the time that you have left and avoid feeling overwhelmed by all the things that you have to do.
- Clarify your priorities. Ask yourself what you intend to finish first and stick to it. It may be helpful to break down your priorities into smaller and simpler tasks.
- “The truth can wait.” That is, it is vital to start writing your doctoral thesis once you have your data, even if more can be done.
- Know all the rules and regulations of the university. Prepare a list of all the documents and papers that you will need before you need them. This will help you avoid pitfalls in your last year.
- Familiarize yourself with software. Producing scientific documents entails the use of specific programs, such as LaTeX. While the program may not be as easy to understand as other editors, there are marked advantages such as ease in publication and faster manipulation of images.
- Pay attention to your career. While you may think that this is not the best time to think about your career, it is. Your career should follow suit after your doctoral studies, and focusing on what lies ahead will help you frame the current situation.

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Key Tasks for Finishing Your PhD on Time

Finishing your PhD thesis on time is not as daunting as it sounds. Although many students will be pressed for time, completing your study is possible with a little ingenuity from your part.

- First, ensure that you meet all the PhD requirements set by your institution. Never presume anything without double-checking with your institution and your supervisor. This can save you from a lot of wasted time and stress.
- Keep a good perspective. Your peers are unlikely to read your thesis, but they are likely to read journals and articles resulting from it.
- Contrary to what most people say, your introduction should be written last. Breaking your thesis into defined stages is important for success. On that same note, your conclusion also should be written last.
- Get familiar with project management applications, such as Trello.
- Buy your own laser printer. This will save you from having to rush elsewhere to have your drafts printed. It will save you time and money as well.
- Get feedback on the entire thesis—from start to finish. Getting feedback for individual chapters is fine, but you should aim to get feedback on the entire work.
- "Begin with the end in mind." Make sure you know when your doctoral studies are supposed to end, and when your work will be considered as done.

Planning and Writing Your Thesis

Breaking down your tasks into manageable blocks is one way to ensure that you actually finish the entire thing. There are plenty of techniques to help you along the way, such as the 25-minute Pomodoro for academic writing. Undoubtedly, writing your thesis is at least as hard as performing the actual study, but it is never impossible. With the right tools at your disposal and a positive mindset, you can finish your PhD on time. Below is a checklist of things that you need to do to get to graduation day.

- Draft your proposal and research design
- Acquire IRB consent
- Pilot study
- Gather data and information for your study
- Analyze your data
- Write, write, and write some more. Ideally, aim to write for a minimum of 30 minutes a day
- Defend your thesis
- Finish

Completing your PhD paper on time is definitely possible. Knowing the tips and tricks of the trade can help you to get on your way towards a life in academia.

Category

1. Career Corner

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2. PhDs & Postdocs

Date Created
2017/10/26
Author
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