

## Optimising performance and minimising stress as a HDR student

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## Key messages

You are not alone

- ⌘ There are people and services who can assist you
- ⌘ There are other students who can assist and support
- ⌘ Your supervisor is there to guide you
- ⌘ Speak to the people around you and get their support

## What is different about a research course that makes it a unique challenge?



## Key messages

Ask for help, sooner rather than later

- ⌘ Get help with the planning and topic early
- ⌘ Seek regular feedback from your supervisor(s)
- ⌘ Let your supervisor know when things aren't working
- ⌘ Speak to Health and Wellbeing if you experience poor health or a family crisis

## Key messages

- ⌘ You are not alone
- ⌘ Ask for help, sooner rather than later
- ⌘ Look after the yourself
- ⌘ There is a toll on other parts of your life
- ⌘ Exercise, exercise, exercise

## Key messages

Look after yourself

- ⌘ This is a marathon - not a sprint
- ⌘ Build in self care and re- creation
- ⌘ Poor sleep means poor cognitive functioning
- ⌘ Plan things to look forward - regularly

## Key messages

There is a loss in other parts of your life

- ⌘ You are already busy so what will you give up to fit this into your life?
- ⌘ Self discipline is essential - use it or learn it
- ⌘ How will you say no to friends and family?
- ⌘ Eliminate anything that is not absolutely necessary

## HDR - BENEFITS & COSTS

<p>⌘ <b>Benefits:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Life is unique.</li> <li>2. You control what you do and when it is done.</li> <li>3. You own your goals.</li> <li>4. You own your achievements.</li> </ol>	<p>⌘ <b>Costs:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hard to follow what others are doing</li> <li>2. What works for others is not always not going to work for you</li> <li>3. More opportunities to make mistakes</li> <li>4. You own your failures</li> </ol>
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## Key messages

Exercise, exercise, exercise

- ⌘ Exercise is like plant food for your brain
- ⌘ The cheapest and best thing for your physical and mental health
- ⌘ Build it into your day - every day
- ⌘ It is not a luxury - it is essential

## ADJUSTING TO CHANGE

**SHOCK**      **ADJUSTING**

Have I made the right decision?

## Self control

University life, in general, typically involves more self directed choices than most other environments.

- Unlike coursework programs there is no set schedule or readings for you to follow
- Unlike work environments there is no boss to track whether you are performing - you are your own boss - you are self employed

**HDR students your responsibility increases again – how?**

## The three key challenges to HDR students

- Knowing what is expected
- Planning your response
- Initiating your response

## KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED

- ⌘ A research student with a full time workload can expect to have to spend the equivalent of a full time employment workload on their studies. 30-40 hrs per week **ONLY!**
- ⌘ More than 40 hours is starting to be a concern
- ⌘ There will be busy periods - the whole period should not be busy though

## KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED

- ⌘ When students participate in more than 16 hours of paid work on top of their research, they generally hit some roadblocks.
- ⌘ Paid work provides money, social contact and a break
- ⌘ Too much paid work provides pressure and can take you away from your day job - your thesis

## KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED

- ⌘ Planning out when you study and for how long can help minimise procrastination and stop your studies from taking over your life.
- ⌘ Establishing a daily routine will help
- ⌘ Working out your plan with your supervisor will help you know what you are doing
- ⌘ Setting realistic timeframes will help you stay on track

## KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED

- ⌘ Try to set clear boundaries and expectations with your supervisor and co-supervisor. Having this in document form can prevent misunderstandings and unmet expectations later on
- ⌘ It may also help to seek out other postgraduate students who are further on (preferably completed) in their studies. They may have found ways of tackling some of those difficulties that come up all too often
- ⌘ It can be reassuring to know that your situation/feelings/worries/responses are normal or it can alert you to an issue that needs further attention.

## KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED

- ⌘ Studying normal hours like you would if you were working full-time helps create a balanced life.
- ⌘ You are self-employed and need to set your own routine
- ⌘ Stopping for lunch and having regular breaks will help
- ⌘ Make the time to converse and consult with colleagues

## 2. PLANNING YOUR RESPONSE.

Set out goals for tasks based upon their importance to you

-Allocate time to goals/tasks

-Use Daily / Weekly / Monthly / Session Planners

### STEP 1:

Create a list of must do tasks for the length of your thesis:  
e.g. topic > design / run experiments 1,2,3,etc. > introduction > method > analysis > discussion > conclusion > references > appendices > revision, etc.

## 2. PLANNING YOUR RESPONSE.

STEP 2: Identify add-on tasks

e.g. HDR annual reports, department presentations

Remember to add in holidays and family events too

## 2. PLANNING YOUR RESPONSE.

**MASTER TIP:**

*Work backwards from your desired submission date and then push things forward 3 months.*

## 2. PLANNING YOUR RESPONSE.

STEP 3:

Identify conferences (national/international) + journals

Workshops and consultation with colleagues

Any joint projects

## 2. PLANNING YOUR RESPONSE. IDENTIFY A BALANCED ROUTINE

UNI

STUDY

WORK

ME

## 2. PLANNING YOUR RESPONSE.

STEP 4:

Choose all your non-mandatory due dates for the coming session (e.g. presentations in workshops to fit in with **YOUR** thesis timeline).

## 3. INITIATING THE RESPONSE

& Start following YOUR thesis timeline **NOW!**

& Be pragmatic. eg.: Good referencing **NOW** of your readings (Endnote) + understandable notes has long term benefits.

& "Jumping the gun" is a great strategy.

& Reward yourself for things achieved –

e.g. if you finish a task on or before YOUR due date, buy yourself a magazine, song/album, or go to the movies.

## ROADBLOCKS

- ⌘ On different days and different times during your PhD you may struggle to research/write. This is normal, and something every PhD student experiences
- ⌘ During these times rather than procrastinate or work ineffectively, consider focusing on referencing or formatting your document or doing menial tasks that are important and time-consuming but don't require lots of brain power
- ⌘ Go for a brisk walk!

**TABLE 9-3. Cognitive Distortions Associated with Anxiety-Related Procrastination**

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**Cognitions involving lack of self-efficacy**

- It's hopeless to complete this task.
- It's too late to complete this task.
- I could never get the task done to my or my teacher's satisfaction, so why bother now?
- I'm not smart enough to do this task.
- I'm too tired to do this task well, so why bother?
- I'm too uptight (nervous or tense) to get this task done.
- I'm too inept to get this work done.
- I've missed so many opportunities so far, so why should I bother?
- People of my (race, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) can't do this type of work.

**Cognitions involving avoidance**

- I'll do it tonight, so I don't have to worry.
- I'm very good at getting things done at the last minute, so I don't have to worry.
- If I don't think about doing this task, I won't have to worry as much.
- I need to distract myself before I perform this task.
- I won't get this task done unless I relax first.
- I'm just too stressed to work.
- I can't work my best until certain times (so I won't start now).
- I can't work without (a specific person, study room etc.) being available.

## ROADBLOCKS

- ⌘ A HDR degree involves tasks that take longer than most that people outside of university life and/or postgraduate study are exposed to. This means that it is easy to lose reference to what's normal or what to expect from yourself.
- ⌘ Sometimes, our minds begin to create self doubt or avoidance...

## ANXIETY AND STRESS

- ⌘ Everyone experiences anxiety and stress. Anxiety can have some positive benefits but if prolonged over time then it can be detrimental to your studies and your health. Questions to ask yourself:
  - ⌘ Are my worries reality-based?
  - ⌘ Is there any way I can change them?
  - ⌘ Is there anyone who could help me solve the issue/s?
  - ⌘ Are they interfering with my sleep?
  - ⌘ Are they preventing me from working effectively?

**If you notice that your worrying thoughts have become intrusive and persistent then it's a good time to chat to someone about it before they worsen.**

## Overcoming Roadblocks

- ⌘ Learn to recognise achievements and positives - your mind will resist this
- ⌘ Plan things to look forward to and have some images of these around you
- ⌘ Resist your natural instincts that tell you to work harder, reduce social contact, reduce exercise and fun - your natural instincts are wrong

## OTHER STRESS SYMPTOMS

<b>PHYSICAL</b>	<b>EMOTIONAL</b>
Breathlessness	Anxious (distressed, tense, panicky)
Increased heart rate	Feeling hopeless
Muscle aches and pains	Annoyed easily
Diarrhoea, Constipation	Irritable
Nausea- feeling sick	Impatient
Tiredness, lethargy	Always feeling frustrated
Butterflies in stomach	Low mood
Feeling "run down"	
Poor sleep	
<b>COGNITIVE</b>	
Difficulty concentrating, poor memory and taking longer	

### Management suggestions

- ⌘ Identify when you are thinking negatively and unrealistically in relation to tasks for your research
- ⌘ Be willing to step back and re-examine how realistic these thoughts really are
- ⌘ If unrealistic, you need to examine evidence which doesn't support this thought and generate a more realistic (and helpful) way of thinking
- ⌘ If necessary, change your study behaviour to 'test out' the validity of your new (and more realistic) way of thinking – conduct a 'behavioural experiment'

**Look at your evidence objectively!!!**

### WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT

- ⌘ If you feel as though you are having difficulty moving through each of the three steps, please feel welcome to seek support from the counselling service.
- ⌘ Be aware, however, that process 1, "KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED" is usually best answered with contact with fellow students or supervisors.

### Management Strategies cont.

- ⌘ Maintain a strong support network with other PhD students. It can be a long and lonely journey. No-one understands PhD stress like a fellow PhD student!
- ⌘ Talk to fellow PhD students and see how they have managed stress and anxiety previously
- ⌘ Make sure you are taking time out for yourself and still maintaining hobbies and enjoyable activities, as well as exercise and socialising

### PROTECTIVE INGREDIENTS

- ⌘ Social activities – join a club, sporting team or society through U@MQ + always check out the "What's On" calendar of events in the centre of the "grapeshot" magazine
- ⌘ Exercise + 3 meals/day
- ⌘ Take "time outs".



### Management Strategies cont.

Learn some formal relaxation strategies:

- ⌘ Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)
- ⌘ Visualisation
- ⌘ Diaphragmatic breathing
- ⌘ Mindfulness

Search for these terms online and there are loads of resources available!

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

⌘ ANY QUESTIONS?

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