The supervision relationship … and becoming an independent researcher

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From **student** to **researcher**

- You’re not a “postgraduate student”
  … you’re an HDR – a *higher degree researcher*

- The HDR process involves *identity work* as you move away from being a student and towards being an independent researcher
The supervisor’s role

- Your supervisor/s are your mentors on this journey toward being an independent researcher
- They have successfully made this shift and have helped others make it before you
- They are not your “teachers”!
So, what is a researcher?

Knowledge
- Expert / specialised

Skills
- Conceptual / intellectual
- Academic
- Research
- Personal
- Social

http://port.modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/researcher
• Identifying and framing key problems
• Thinking critically and analytically
• Generating and communicating interesting and original insights.
Skills

- Conceptual / intellectual
- Academic
- Research
- Personal
- Social

- Producing scholarly work (books, journal articles, thesis document) …
- with high-level arguments and the evidence to support them …
- written in specialist language …
- to be communicated to a specialist audience.
Skills

- Using sources effectively
- Gathering and organising information
- Analysing text, data and theory.
- Thinking and working independently to high standards
- Taking initiative and responsibility
- Being well organised and balanced in judgment
- Collaborating well with others where appropriate
- Taking on board and incorporating constructive criticism.
- Liaising with different types of people from your own and other institutions in effective and appropriate ways
- Being able to adjust to different circumstances required by academia
- Integrating yourself into the larger community of scholars.
Future You, the independent researcher

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Skills

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So – how do you get there?
So – how do you get there?

- Four key ways of learning and developing your skills as an independent researcher:

  - Learning by doing
  - Learning by reflecting
  - Learning by reading
  - Learning from peers

All four, all throughout the HDR journey
So – how do you get there?

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The care and management of your supervisor
Some things to remember …

- Your supervisors are busy people with heavy workloads.
- They will not have all the details of your study at their fingertips – especially in the early stages.
- They will have their own strengths and weaknesses as researchers and as supervisors …
- … and they will have their own preferred ‘way of working’ with HDR candidates.
More things to remember …

- Your supervisors are expert researchers and are there to mentor you as you become an independent researcher.
- They are not there to hold your hand as you handle administrative issues (except where they need to sign forms or you genuinely can’t find the information you need through other channels).
- Your supervisors do want you to succeed and receive your degree – but they won’t do it all for you or ‘chase’ you along. The onus is on you to take initiative, manage the 2-3+ year project, and keep things moving forward.
Some things to discuss at the outset …

- “How do you usually like to work with your HDR candidates?”
- “How often would you like us to meet?”
- ... Shortly followed by: “Can we schedule in our first few meetings now, and note down what you’d like me to do and bring to each of those?”
- “Where is a good place for me to start?”
- Important: “Do you have any extended periods of leave scheduled in the next 12 months?”
If you have more than one supervisor …

- “How do you see the joint supervision arrangement working?”
- “Who should I come to for what sort of issues / topics?”
- “Do you both want to be CCd in emails / sent copies of what the other is receiving?”
- “How are our meetings going to work? How often will we all meet together vs me just meeting with one supervisor?”
Genuine issues

- The supervisor provides an inadequate level of feedback
- Poor quantity and quality of communication
- Occasional arguments and clash of personalities
- The supervisor treats the student as an efficient or specialised research assistant
- Conflicts between multiple supervisors
- Issues over publishing research results or authorship of publications.
Keeping it all in perspective …

- Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We760YM5-iM
Keep the end in sight!

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Supplementary slides – Useful books

Hugh Kearns & Maria Gardner:

- “The seven secrets of highly successful research students”
- “Defeating self-sabotage: Getting your research finished”
- “Planning your PhD: All the tools and advice you need to finish your PhD in three years”
- “The imposter syndrome: Why successful people often feel like frauds”
- “Time for research: Time management for academics, researchers and PhD students”
Supplementary slides – Useful books

Pat Thomson and Barbara Kamler:

- “Detox your writing: Strategies for doctoral researchers”
- “Writing for peer reviewed journals: Strategies for getting published”
- “Helping doctoral students write: Pedagogies for supervision” (*a glimpse into the ‘other side’ of the HDR – supervisor relationship!*)
- “The Routledge doctoral students’ companion” (*particularly relevant for Education and Social Sciences*)
Supplementary slides – Useful books

Other:

- “Postgraduate study in Australia: Surviving and succeeding” – edited by Christopher McMaster, Caterina Murphy, Benjamin Whitburn and Inger Mewburn
  *(Books in this same series have also been published for New Zealand, South Africa, USA, UK and other contexts)*

- “How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing” – Paul Silvia

- “Air and light and time and space: How successful academics write” – Helen Sword
Supplementary slides – Useful websites

- ‘Doctoral Writing SIG’ blog – www.doctoralwriting.wordpress.com
- Also follow related Facebook / Twitter channels so you keep seeing relevant content e.g. @ThomsonPat, @ithinkwellHugh, @thesiswhisperer, @DocwritingSIG …