

## PhD's; What they don't tell you

by Duggi Zoram

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a PhD student in their first year will spend most of that year sitting in a library wondering what on earth they should be doing. They will then spend the next two or more years wishing they had put that year to better use. Unfortunately nobody ever warns you about this. In fact the *Wasted First Year* is just one of many PhD hazards that nobody ever warns you about - followed by loneliness, poverty, and tutors who think that it is their responsibility to ensure that you suffer as much as they did. Here are a few survival tips;

### Time management

From the outset, you may well be given a clear timetable/plan of your project, by which time certain activities must be completed. If so, lucky you. Or, you may have to do it yourself - Background Research, brainstorm, draft chapters, collect data... what could possibly go wrong? DO NOT BE FOOLED.

PhD life is all about self-motivation. Those people who lack sufficient self-motivation will not be able to establish a good work routine, and will soon find themselves sleeping until noon, miserable and/or depressed, devoid of all social skills, and quite possibly with an addiction to tea, chocolate and day-time television. Don't let this happen to you. It is imperative that you treat it like a day job. Set strict working hours and study activities, and if you don't complete them in the time allotted then do as you would as a good employee – work overtime.

### Tutors

There are 3 main types of tutors. The "Let you Get On With it and Come to me When you Have Something" tutors. The "Breathing Down Your Neck" tutors and the "I Never Had Any Help or Support and so Neither Will you" tutors. The third variety are the most dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, in most cases you will not notice that your tutor has such a sadistic mentality until you have been working with them for months or even years. The best thing to do is to establish good communication from the very beginning. If it is clear that your tutor is incapable of listening to you - Run. The situation is unlikely to improve. Find another tutor/institution, and work with somebody who you can relate to.

## **Libraries**

Libraries are full of strange people, often with the most bizarre study habits. Possibly the strangest and most studious thing I ever witnessed in a library was a man in the Science-2-South section of the British library wearing not one, but two pairs of glasses. One on top of the other.

It is assumed that as a post-graduate student you will be aware of how to use a library. This may be true as far as the finding and borrowing of books, but library etiquette is a world in itself. Things which may have never bothered you in the past can quickly build into *Extremely Irritating Things* if you are not prepared. These may include first years “studying” in noisy groups, people who clear their throats at frequent intervals, and girls roaming your aisle wearing high-heeled shoes. So try to find a quiet section, or, if absolute silence makes you uncomfortable find a busy spot. Make sure you have plenty of natural light (as with airplanes, the window seats go first so there's another reason to get in there early), take breaks to stretch your legs and clear out your brain, avoid library fines like the plague and never ever leave your laptop unattended.

## **Other PhD students**

There is nothing more irritating than the PhD student in your department who seems to have it all worked out. They are making steady progress and can't see “what all the fuss is about”. Possibly more annoying are the students who whinge constantly about their workload or make a point of telling you that they have been working since the sun came up. Ignore these people. They are liars.

Don't fall into the trap of comparing your situation with others. No two PhD's are the same. A little competition can be a motivator, but in general try to mix with people who have a positive or helpful attitude. If this is not possible, then find a PhD blog or try to meet with other PhD students at University events.

So there you have it. The Truth. Still want to be a PhD student? Then best of luck!

*Duggi Zoram is in the third year of a PhD at King's College London, studying Transport Policy and Health. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of FindAPhD.*