2
HOW CAN YOU MAKE A GOOD START?

In this chapter, we will consider how to:

- Prepare for new roles
- Research your supervisor and department/school
- Develop good habits and work routines
- Contact potential supporters
- Identify resource sources
- Read and begin writing
- Review your expectations
- Prepare a plan

The scientist and inventor Alexander Graham Bell is reported to have said, 'Before anything else, preparation is the key to success,' whilst the great teacher and philosopher Confucius taught that, 'success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure'. Although more than two thousand years separate Confucius from Bell, they both recognised the same vital principal, which is that good 'prep' (as chefs say), or preparation, would seem to be an essential ingredient for success in most things, and this is especially true of research. As with any venture, adventure, expedition or activity, such as making a cake, it helps, first, to lay out your equipment, resources, maps, mixing bowls or other much needed materials that will help to get you started and, as with all longer journeys (making a cake is miniscule compared with a research project), you can lay down the basic preparation for your research project in the first 100 days.

As a *professional researcher*, you should think of undertaking doctoral research more as being appointed to a new (and important) job, rather than being a 'student' who largely is instructed and directed by others.

We think language is very important in this respect because the terms you use to describe yourself and your work – because it is work – will influence your own and others' perception of your status and standing. You may receive a good deal of instruction and direction in the first year or so, as a student might, but the aim and goal is for you to emerge, as a well-honed professional person with a doctorate! So, you should think of yourself in professional terms. Even if your department/university does not refer to you in this way, you can rise above any limitations by beginning your journey in a professional frame of mind.

There has been a good deal of focus and debate about the first 100 days in a new role, much of it generated by presidents of the United States. Ostensibly, it began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) in 1933, when he used his first three months in office to lay out the foundations of his 'New Deal' by getting an incredible volume of legislation passed into law. Since then, 'the first 100 days' have been an important period for newly elected American presidents. However, as David Greenberg (2009) pointed out in a *Wall Street Journal* article entitled 'The folly of the First Hundred Days', the first 100 days are an 'unreliable indicator of future performance' and, although first impressions count for something, the success or failure in the first 100 days is no indicator of what may follow. In the case of US presidents, as Greenberg noted, although some got off to a flying start (he cites Reagan and FDR as two of the most effective), most performed their overtly significant work later in the presidency. We agree that it is unfair to judge an individual, even a new president, by the actions of their first 100 days in a job since we can all make mistakes in eagerness to make a good impression. Nevertheless, this period of the first few months is important for initial establishment in all roles. The early stage of any role is the time to get most of the basic requirements out of the way and to use the time to lay down good foundations for the future. Employers would certainly expect a new manager to 'bed in' within three months. You need to use this time to get some of the basic issues out of the way and to make sure you can comfortably and confidently manage the remaining years. A researchers' first 100 days are only the start of a marathon, so you need to pace yourself. There are lots of views on the first 100 days on the internet and many publications on the subject; we list a few at the end of the chapter in the further reading.

Laying down the basics

There are three key areas that affect how well a researcher settles into their new role:

1 The people – who are the people you need to know, and care about, and how will you build relationships with them or for them?
2 The environment – what is it like, what are the cultures and traditions, what resources are available or need to be identified?
3 Aspects of the role itself – what is expected, what is the 'doctorate' about and how can you ensure you are prepared for it?

You will need to work on all three areas concurrently, although some may take precedence over others at key stages, but by the end of the 100 days, if you have addressed those questions well, you should be in a good position to begin your research project effectively. Make a start right now by engaging in Reflection Point 2.1

REFLECTION POINT 2.1

THE BASICS FOR A GOOD START

Reflect on what you would like to have achieved by the end of 100 days. Make the generic questions above specific to your context by, for example: challenging yourself to introduce yourself to named people in salient roles such as your subject librarian; asking about regular seminars, or expected conference attendance; checking with more experienced peers about local traditions related to the doctorate.

The people

You might be enthusiastic and eager to get stuck into the research, and that is, indeed, an excellent ambition; however, the sensible thing to do is to get to know your supervisors first. At least track them down in the first few days of enrolment (within a week of your arrival) and arrange an introductory meeting – s/he/they may do this first, but you should not be shy and wait around to be invited to say 'hello' – especially if you are new to the department or university. First impressions count for a lot, so signal that you are a professional and friendly person, willing to make contact and establish a working relationship (NB: it is not necessary to become best friends with your supervisor, because you are aiming to establish a professional relationship). Once you have made 'first contact' and introduced yourself, more formal and work-focused meetings or 'supervisions' as they might be called, will be set up. Your first formal supervision may not take place for a few weeks, depending on how busy your supervisors are and what induction events are available, but we would certainly expect that meeting to take place within the first four weeks – ideally sooner rather than later in that period.

It is important to repeat the point 'depending on how busy your supervisor is' because sometimes researchers are unaware of the volume and range of work that supervisors will be doing alongside supervising doctoral researchers, i.e. they may be teaching undergraduate and master's courses, doing administrative work, attending committee meetings, conducting their own research, attending conferences, managing a team or department, writing their own papers/books and putting together funding proposals, etc. Whilst almost all supervisors enjoy the time they spend with doctoral researchers, as a new researcher you will probably need to be more pro-active in managing this relationship than an undergraduate or master's student is expected to be in their relationship with a lecturer (see Chapter 6 on the relationship with your supervisors), which means you will also need to manage your own diary in respect of theirs. They may only be able to meet with you for an hour or two every couple of weeks or once a month (although weekly interaction is best in the early stage), so you will need to accept that you should work around their availability but still ensure that you do meet regularly.

Use this early relationship-building time with your supervisors to find out how they would like to work with you, what their expectations are (for example, whether they expect you to record or log your supervision meetings) and what kind of timetable (if any) they have in mind for your research. This can then be negotiated and incorporated into an overall work schedule or plan (see the final section below). Ideally, as a new researcher, you can warm up your research skills by approaching your supervisors' existing doctoral researchers, if any, to gain another insight into your supervisors' way of working – that is, specifically ask for views on the supervisors' strengths and any weaknesses that you may have to work around or manage if their style differs from yours.

Other people will also be crucial to your research success, so use the first 100 days to get to know other staff in the department and especially take time to get to know your peers in the department. Your peer researchers will be an important source of friendship and support, but also will be valuable later in your career. It is surprising how useful contacts from your doctoral research days can be as you progress through your careers at roughly the same pace (see Chapter 6 on networking).

If you are new to the university or local area, there may be other practical people-matters to take care of: you must register with a local medical practice and general practitioner (GP), you may want to register with a dentist and, if required, attend to any visa registrations/requirements. If you have family, especially if you are an international researcher, you will be juggling the demands of getting children registered and settled into local schools or nurseries while also ensuring your spouse is also adjusting to the

new way of life. Often, as Stephanie Doyle et al. (2015) have pointed out, this aspect of postgraduate life gets overlooked by supervisors and universities. It is very important that you resist the pressure, from external sources or internal panic, to focus solely on getting on with the research. Use the first three months to focus as much on helping you, your spouse and/or children to settle into the new environment as on orienting yourself to your actual research project. This will prevent many later traumas but it is a tough balancing act, and one that part-time researchers will also be facing even if they live relatively locally. There are two ways in which both international and part-time researchers can help themselves with this transition:

1   Find out what kind of support your institution offers to international researchers and their families or how they support distance learners if you are part-time. Some have informal networks for international visitors, or societies/clubs for specific interests, or they may deploy spouses in more formal ways.
2   Track down and talk to people in a similar situation – these colleagues will be a vital source of information and insight, and will, likely, recognise the challenges you will be experiencing and can provide pertinent advice from their own experience, something your supervisors may not have had.

The whole point of the first 100 days is about building relationships and laying the foundations for your future networks. Use this time to find out about who you are working with and for, and enable those people to find out about you.

The environment

Your immediate 'place of work' will need the first attention so that you can settle in quickly and have a base from which to become more adventurous. Departmental secretaries/administrators are likely to be your best resource in this respect because they can guide you in a variety of areas; for instance, they will know where doctoral researchers usually work, if there is allocated desk space and how the allocation system works. They will also be familiar with other aspects of the system, such as what resources are available, who holds them and how to gain access to them. They will also, along with any research administrators, be able to give you insights into departmental customs and practices such as regular meetings or seminars, who usually attends them, who contributes to them, whether attendance is obligatory, superficially voluntary but expected, and so on. Such people will be pleased if you check with them about such social niceties as whether

there is a shared obligation to contribute to funding coffee/tea/biscuits, a rota for bringing in milk or tidying the fridge; it will demonstrate your willingness to become part of the community.

Once you have found out about your immediate environment and colleagues, you can then begin to look to the broader environment and context in which you are working. This entails finding out what you need to know so that you can do the job brilliantly. Initially, you will need to find out what resources and information are there to help you and then begin to refine this to the needs of your specific project. You will need to build a picture of what this thing called 'doctoral research' is about in your specific context. Initially, your supervisors will be a great resource but do not underestimate the knowledge of librarians, researcher developers, careers advisors, postgraduate administrators and fellow researchers who will value being asked for information and advice. Indeed, the wise researcher learns very quickly to draw in the resources they need from a variety of sources. Do not expect your supervisor to know everything – part of being a professional researcher is being able to track down the expertise needed if it is not readily to hand. We cannot provide details of such things as availability of computer terminals, **inter-library loan** schemes, cost of or how much photocopying is free, and so on because these not only differ between institutions but between departments too, since they are budgetary items. Thus, do not assume that because a colleague in another department has certain privileges then you will too. However, it is essential that you get yourself set up with referencing software as soon as possible and you should aim, by the end of the 100 days, to know how to use it properly. Your institution may provide some software, but there is free software available. Using the search terms 'Comparison of reference management software' within Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org) provides a summary of the different formats and what operating systems they require. It would be wise to check with peers and your supervisor which ones are regularly preferred in your discipline/geographical location. The advantage of cloud-based systems is that you can use them anywhere and anytime, after you have successfully completed your doctorate and perhaps gone to another institution or organisation.

Another area of difference is that some institutions may have formal contracts or agreements that researchers and their supervisors need to adhere to. These may specify contact hours, how supervisions are recorded, and what is available to the researcher and what is expected of them, such as lab duties or teaching/tutoring, as well. There is a UK national code of practice that includes a section on researchers, the Quality Code – Chapter B11, that researchers are advised to read to find out about the expectations surrounding research degrees. There is also a national

statement, the Researcher Development Statement, that identifies areas of learning that all researchers in the UK are expected to cover (especially if they are funded by the research councils) and a fuller framework, the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, that all researchers should find useful as an overview of the researcher role and as an aid to professional development (see our companion book for more detail: *Success in Research: Developing Transferable Skills*, Denicolo and Reeves, 2014).

In Chapter 5, we consider other resources and opportunities that you should avail yourself of, either in your department, school or in a facility especially focused on the needs of postgraduates or doctoral researchers, such as Graduate Schools and Doctoral Colleges. Such entities are likely, as are departments/schools, to have some form of induction event at the beginning of the academic year or each term/semester during which facilities, activities and resources will be summarised and key people introduced.

Even if you have completed your undergraduate and/or master's studies at the same institution as the one in which you are undertaking your doctorate, do not underestimate how different the doctoral process is and what is available only to doctoral students and research staff. Our advice is, do not skip any induction events on offer or tours of library resources. You may think you know how to use the library already, but that may turn out to be a self-limiting assumption and cost you time later. There may be disciplinary resources you have access to as a postgraduate researcher (PGR) that are not generally shared with other students. Similarly, learning to use social media for research or identifying useful software available to researchers will set you up for the project ahead.

Special note for part-time and/or distance learners or those who start their registration on a non-traditional date: Planning ahead of your first registration date should, if possible, include taking an opportunity to attend the inductions available in your institution, even if they do not coincide with your actual start date, since they will be the source of much useful practical information and provide opportunities to meet significant people (supervisors, administrators, peer researchers). If this is impossible, then seek out all the documents that were provided at the last induction and a contact email for a peer attendee who might be willing to talk through with you (even via Skype) what s/he found out.

The role

Transitioning into the research process is a progression that should not be underestimated or ignored! One of the biggest problems facing new researchers is failing to reflect on their expectations – so we have provided

Activity 2.1. Until you have completed the whole process, it is difficult to appreciate just how different undertaking doctoral research is from all other roles in higher education, whilst it is widely acknowledged that it entails one of the more challenging of **pedagogies**, a point we discuss further in Chapter 10. Two questions (and our suggested answers) may help you to reflect on the difference:

1   Dealing with uncertainty: How will you manage the unknown? This is likely to be the first time that you are seeking not simply a new answer to a project question but, in the initial stages at least, a new question within the discipline. *Answer:* You must adopt a flexible attitude so that you can manage the changing environment, your changing expectations, the excitements, occasional disappointments and even fluctuating levels of motivation. It is inevitable that things go wrong or you encounter unexpected barriers to progress, but this can open new avenues for research and often leads to better ideas, so should not always be viewed negatively. (Experienced researchers do often forget to warn new recruits of the truth of the adage 'if anything can go wrong, it will' because they have become acclimatised to it.)

2   Dealing with immensity: How do you eat an elephant (or a comparably large vegetable)? *Answer:* One bite at a time! This is an old joke – but a truism when faced with a very large project that stretches over years. So, to avoid choking or being overwhelmed by the size of the thing, you need to methodically munch your way through it one mouthful at a time. This is where your ability to plan is vital; dividing up the tasks not simply to undertake them in a logical order but also to check that they all can be completed in time (Chapter 3).

ACTIVITY 2.1   EXPECTATIONS AND ANTICIPATIONS

Take a blank sheet of paper and list your answers to the following questions (part-time researchers will need to adjust the time slots accordingly):

1   What do you expect will happen, what will you be doing in the beginning stage i.e., first year full-time/first and second years part-time?
2   What do you expect will happen, what will you be doing in the middle stages?
3   What do you expect will happen, what will you be doing in the final stage?
4   What do you expect from your supervisor?
5   What challenges (if any) do you anticipate?

Once you have constructed your list, compare it with the comments below provided by other researchers in their first few weeks at a university.

1	What do you expect will happen in the beginning stage?	Getting to know people – department and supervisor • Reading • Getting into field • Narrowing focus of research • Knowing the sources • Being guided about what is researchable • Chaos • Being kept on track • Gaining more insight into research • Keeping a research diary • Start writing something
2	What do you expect will happen in the middle stages?	• Gathering data, interviews, fieldwork, etc. • Going to conferences – giving papers • Writing chapters • Reading, reading, reading • Doing field/lab/archival research, etc. • This is the busy stage • May be difficulties with perseverance
3	What do you expect will happen in the final stage?	• Writing, writing, writing • Isolation • Headaches • Lack of sleep • Discipline • Dedication, commitment from myself • Look for a job
4	What do you expect from your supervisor?	• Accessibility (may expect to see them every day) • Guidance and support • Feedback • Guidance on structuring the research • Keeping me on track (telling me when to stop) • Help with time management • Help with financial advice • Help with careers • Available for personal support, family matters • In-depth knowledge of subject • Enlarge our horizons – help us to think creatively • Pushing us • Honesty • Professional quality evaluation
5	What problems (if any) do you anticipate?	• Funding • Data collection • Getting lost half-way in the process • Maintaining fitness • Exhaustion • Time management • Language • Originality in the research

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We have conducted the same exercise with research supervisors! Now, consider the supervisors' views on these topics – notice how they differ from the researchers' views:

1	What do you expect will happen in the beginning stage?	• Expect literature addressed • Selected and learned methods/methodology • Ethical considerations and procedures engaged with • Found their way around university/department • Done a lot of reading • Got some pilot data (**STEMM**) • Theoretical framework development (**HASS**) • Begun training (research methods, transferable, professional)
2	What do you expect will happen in the middle stages?	• Presentations regularly made locally • Data collection and analysis well under way • Chapter drafting (HASS) • Publications (STEMM) • Conferences presentations • Possible formal assessment/review
3	What do you expect will happen in the final stage?	• Thesis writing • Publication • **Mock viva** • Viva • Corrections/amendments
4	What do you think researchers expect from you, as their supervisor?	• Availability (but nervous about how much) • Knowledge and expertise • Guidance on the thesis (perhaps on academic career) • **Critical feedback**
5	What problems (if any) do you anticipate?	• Distraction from main project task • Research 'not working' • Second year dip in enthusiasm/motivation • Getting lost in the literature/data • Isolation

When you compare the researchers' expectations and responses with the supervisors', it becomes clear that the supervisors are very much focused on the thesis and might even be described as 'thesis-driven'! Individual supervisors may not be interested in or knowledgeable about useful things for helping their researchers with their financial problems or even time management; some might, but you need to consider how you would deal with the situation if yours does not. Similarly, although you may see your supervisor regularly, you may not see them every day as some researchers

have expected. Indeed, although you may only be expected to see your supervisor once every two or three weeks in the first few months, you may only meet monthly thereafter or even less regularly depending on your subject. This aspect of 'working as a researcher' differs sharply with working in most other kinds of environment, where you probably would see your line-manager most days, if not daily. Indeed, if you are in a lab you may see a **postdoctoral researcher** (**postdoc**) more often than your main supervisor. On the other hand, you may physically work beside your supervisor but not actually be 'supervised' in relation to your own project.

The issue here is how you will respond if your assumptions, expectations or personal needs are not met. Examining your own expectations and challenging them – asking if your views are realistic or ill-informed – is the first sensible step. Learning to find out about others' expectations and then adjusting to them if necessary, or negotiating a mutually agreeable alternative if possible, are part of the role process of any new professional.

Did you notice that the researchers left writing until a good way into the process, that is until years three or four? This is a major but common misunderstanding of the doctoral process – all three of your present authors and probably your supervisors agree that you should be writing ALL the time. You can find in Top Tips 2.1 many aspects of doctoral study that you can make a start on during your first few months. We will elaborate on these things next and in the following chapters.

TOP TIPS 2.1   STARTING YOUR DOCTORATE WELL (YOUR FIRST MONTH)

1   Get into the habit of working set hours:

- If you are full-time, that means full-time job hours.
- If you are part-time, work the hours you have agreed with your university and supervisor(s).
- Stick to these times even if you do not feel you have enough to do (see below for tips on what to do).

2   Plan your weekly reading:

- Pick a defined area to read about.
- Identify a doable amount of reading for the week.
- Put aside a few hours for reading every day.
- Do not try to read constantly for an entire day; this is too intense and your retention will be poor.
- Mix reading with other activities.

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3   Write:

- It is not too early to start writing.
- Write notes about what your read, trying to put summaries into your own words.
- Write lists of words and concepts you do not understand.
- Write down your thoughts and ideas in a specific (private) notebook.

4   Start learning computer programs/technology/techniques:

- Even those in non-technical disciplines would be wise to learn how to use reference-managing software.
- There may also be analysis software you could start to learn.
- For those of you in lab-based disciplines, shadow more senior PhD students and postdocs to learn as many lab techniques as you can.
- (These skills you develop will be helpful later in your research life.)

5   Explore:

- Take time every week (every day, if you are full-time) to explore resources available to you within your department, your faculty and the larger university.
- If you are on a campus, take different walks and see what you can find.
- Take time to introduce yourself to administrators, support staff, technicians, fellow doctoral researchers, librarians, fellow researchers.
- If you are working at a distance, explore virtually. Find resources, and perhaps make phone or Skype appointments to establish contacts and support.

6   Build your relationship with your supervisor:

- Share with your supervisor your expectations.
- Plan meetings.
- Talk with them about what you are reading.
- Set some initial objectives.
- Ask questions.

7   Develop yourself:

- Identify training workshops that may be helpful to you and sign up.
- Identify seminar or lecture series and put those into your diary.

8   Enjoy:

- Plan time to reflect on what you are learning each day.
- Think about your subject and let your mind wander.
- Make time for those activities that help you feel energised.
- Do make sure you are getting enough sleep; your brain will be working hard and you will need to take care of it.

From those tips, you can recognise that, as much as you need to get into the habit of reading and regularly checking what is going on in your research area, you also need to get into the habit of writing and reviewing your work (Chapter 4). This achieves two things: first, it will improve your writing skills and proficiency, and, second, doing a doctorate is an iterative process, not a linear one, so developments in the procedures and in your thinking, can usefully be logged as a record.

One of the things that new researchers may not expect is how much of an emotional and motivational roller-coaster the process of researching for a doctorate can be. A doctorate is a long project full-time and even more so if you are part-time, and a lot of life can happen in that period – think about the ups and downs you may have enjoyed and endured over the past three years, and this will give you some insight into how you may need to manage the doctoral process over the forthcoming years. Knowing that there may be times of complete boredom, irritation and frustration as well as those of complete joy and a sense of real accomplishment, as there are in other parts of life, means you need to think as much about how you will manage the high points as well as the low ones. See what others from the world of research have said in Voice of Experience Box 2.1; perhaps none of the comments is an inspiring or glamorous one, but certainly they are realistic. Start as you mean to go on: use your first 100 days to find out what might be useful to know about the rhythms or life-cycle of the doctorate in your discipline, including key milestones, expectations and conventions – more advanced researchers can be a vital source of advice in this respect.

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE 2.1   DOING A DOCTORATE

A PhD is as much a test of character as it is about ideas! (*Postgraduate researcher*)

You get a doctorate because you can stick it out for three years. (*Postdoc and developer*)

You should treat a PhD like doing a job – you need to work consistently as you would in any 9-to-5 job. (*Supervisor*)
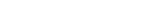
You get a PhD because you REALLY WANT one! (*Associate Dean of Research*)

To help you work your way through the doctorate (or eat the elephant) you need to develop good habits and work routines as quickly as possible. If you treat your doctorate as a job, establishing a standard working day, this can be highly beneficial. Ideally, this should be based on a 9am to 5pm routine (taking account of your own body clock rhythms, but recognising that this is also a preparation for your future working life so do not sink into an unsustainable 'lark or owl' pattern, working very early in the morning or late at night).

We do know the reality is that you will sometimes work longer than this when deadlines loom or working on data analysis, or data are difficult to obtain – however it is essential that you maintain a healthy work–life balance, which means having at least one day off a week. If you must work at weekends, limit it to a few hours. One of us began her weekdays with a walk with a friend, 8am to 8.30; then read the newspaper whilst having breakfast until 9.30 (because she counted keeping up with world events as useful background work); she stopped for lunch every day from 1pm to 1.30; worked until supper at 6pm and never worked in the evenings because of family commitments. Similarly, she only worked on Sunday mornings for a few hours, whilst the dinner was cooking. Part-time researchers will need to block out chunks of time for research and it is a good idea to put these into your work diary (which you will have set up in your first week, we hope). Part-time researchers more than any other researcher will know that you do not have to work all the time on your thesis, because for them that is not possible anyway, so that is a lesson full-time researchers should learn. Indeed, James Patterson kept a timesheet of his research and showed how important non-core PhD work was not only for his thesis but also to his wellbeing and career prospects – reminding us that doing a doctorate is not just about the research (see https://thesiswhisperer.com/2016/05/11/how-long-does-it-take-to-do-a-phd/).

Making the most of your first 100 days

To reiterate, the first 100 days should involve getting established in your new researcher role. Even if you have been at the institution for some time, you should still approach this as a new job in a new department and enthusiastically look at everything you may already be familiar with from a fresh perspective. You should think of yourself as a professional researcher and not a passive student.

By the end of 100 days (or three months), you should know who your supervisors are and how you will work with them; you should know the people who can help you with your work; have become familiar with the people in your department and be thinking about who you might like or need to know outside of your department or institution, too. You should be conversant with the university environment and what resources are available to you within it, and you should be beginning to take advantage of available opportunities, that is, accessing the training and development that you may need to help you conduct your research. None of the three key aspects (people, environment, role) are discrete or provide you with finite tasks: you will always be adding to your people contacts, which will eventually become your 'professional network'; you will always be expanding your resources and refining your plans and understanding of what being a researcher is about.

However, by the end of the first three months, you should have the basic foundations in place. Although the checklist in Activity 2.2 might seem to indicate that you could work on these three areas sequentially, that is one per month, instead you will need to work on all three concurrently.

Finally, you need to come up with an overall plan of what you intend to do. Essentially you are on a 'fixed term contract' and have a limited amount of time to work on a project with a specific deliverable (a thesis) at the end. So, it is best to plan this out and draw up phases, stages or work packages that ensure you can deliver the thesis on time. By your second or third supervision, you should be discussing your overall plan with your supervisors. This plan will evolve over time – but the important thing is that you have a sense of direction that you can build on, manage and control. With this, you will have made an excellent start.

ACTIVITY 2.2   YOUR FIRST 100 DAYS – PERSONAL CHECKLIST

When by	Activity		Done		Still need to do
Week 1	Identified and know who your main supervisor is and met her/him.				
Week 1	Found your way around campus and the local town, if you are new to the area.				
Week 1	Know where the main facilities and services are located, i.e. library, student union, post office. Opened bank account. Obtained your email and any student card for access to university facilities. Obtained parking permits if required.				
Week 1	Begun asking colleagues in department for tips on how to do a doctorate, what is involved in doing a doctorate, found other resources on the topic. (See Further Reading at end of each chapter of this book.)				
Week 1–2	Met fellow researchers and other department members.				

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When by	Activity		Done		Still need to do
Week 1–3	Received an induction to university and/or department and programme. Know what the main sources of support are for doctoral researchers in your institution and have located them, i.e. a Graduate School or Doctoral College, and websites for information.				
Week 2–3	Familiarised yourself with the professional guidance, such as Researcher Development Statement (RDS) and Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) in the UK.				
Week 3	Registered with a local General Practitioner (GP – medical doctor).				
Week 3–4	Negotiated and agreed the frequency of meetings with supervisor(s), how they will be recorded/logged, and agreed general rules for first year.				
Week 3–4	Become aware of external sources of support, i.e. Vitae, PhD comics, The Thesis Whisperer.				
Month 1	Identified and know who your second and third (if appropriate) supervisor is and met with them.				
Month 1	Settled spouse and children into new life, i.e. registered children with local school, identified the support networks or groups your institution (or local community) offered to spouses, especially if you are an international researcher and new to the area.				
Month 1 (Check national requirements and time limits)	Registered with police/border agency for visa requirements – if international researcher and applicable.				

When by	Activity		Done		Still need to do
Month 1	Found out about the doctoral process overall and the general requirements for doctoral research – i.e. read university policy and codes of practice, RCUK statement of expectations and QAA chapter B11 in UK (or found own national equivalents).				
Month 1–2	Conducted a training needs analysis (TNA), learning needs analysis (LNA) or development needs analysis (DNA), skills audit – and identified development and research needs – possibly using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.				
Month 2	Met with supervisor(s) and negotiated expectations for first year and for research period in general – set some goals.				
Month 2	Started to identify literature for review.				
Month 2	Establishing a system for managing reference materials and information related to your research – i.e., identified appropriate referencing software and learnt how to use it! Have a system for cataloguing and reviewing your research materials/information/reading/data/artefacts and/or findings.				
Month 2	Understand ethical requirements for research and researcher integrity – considered your own professional standards alongside those of the discipline.				
Month 2–3	Drawn up general plan for whole period – i.e. put goals above in a Gantt Chart (or other personal progress tracking mechanism/software)				

(Continued)

When by	Activity		Done		Still need to do
	and set milestones, including professional development goals.				
Month 2–3	Begun to find out about the process for ethical approval – even if not applicable, you should understand the process (this is very useful to know for future reference).				
Month 2–3	Started making friends or contacts with people outside of your discipline and social circle – you are now beginning to build your professional network!				
Month 3	Identified and know who any additional members of the supervisory team are (but you may not have met them all at this stage).				
Month 3	Identified and know your discipline-specific library resources and librarian, and appropriate databases.				
Month 3	Know your way around lab (STEMM) and/or have established office hours. **Have working routine and plan in place for conducting (the remainder of) research!**				
Month 3	Have started professional development or generic skills training programme, including provision for your wellbeing.				
Month 3	Attended the beginning of research methods training and begun thinking about what research methods you could use and why in your research.				

When by	Activity		Done		Still need to do
Month 3	Begun thinking about the general focus for research if you have chosen the topic, as in HASS, *or*, begun thinking about how you can make the research topic your own if allocated a project in other STEMM-based subjects.				
Month 3	Starting to attend and contribute (by asking questions) to research/ disciplinary seminars and workshops.				
Month 3	Begun to write up research to date – i.e., *started to write thesis*!				

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE 2.2   ADVICE FOR FIRST-YEAR DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS FROM THOSE IN THEIR FINAL YEAR

'Try to read a wide range of literature, even the articles you think might not be that relevant to your research, because your ideas change along the way. Trust me, you need to know more than you think to make sure your project stays on track and to be confident answering questions.'

'Write things down! New ideas pop up all the time, so you should note them. They might be useful, they might not be, but at least you know you have them noted down in case you need them. Reading loads without writing means you must read every-thing again once you need to draft your chapters.'

'I think it is important to remember that everything you do in the first year is at draft stage, both in terms of words written on the page and ideas exchanged with supervisors.'

'Try to attend training courses, public lectures, or seminars, as this helps you learn how other people conduct and present their research. This is also a great way to make new friends from outside of your research group. Having friends on campus makes the PhD experience so much easier, and you also don't know who will prove that invaluable contact when you're trying to learn a new technique or skill.'

References and further reading

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