



The PhD Survival Guide

Top Tips for PhD Students

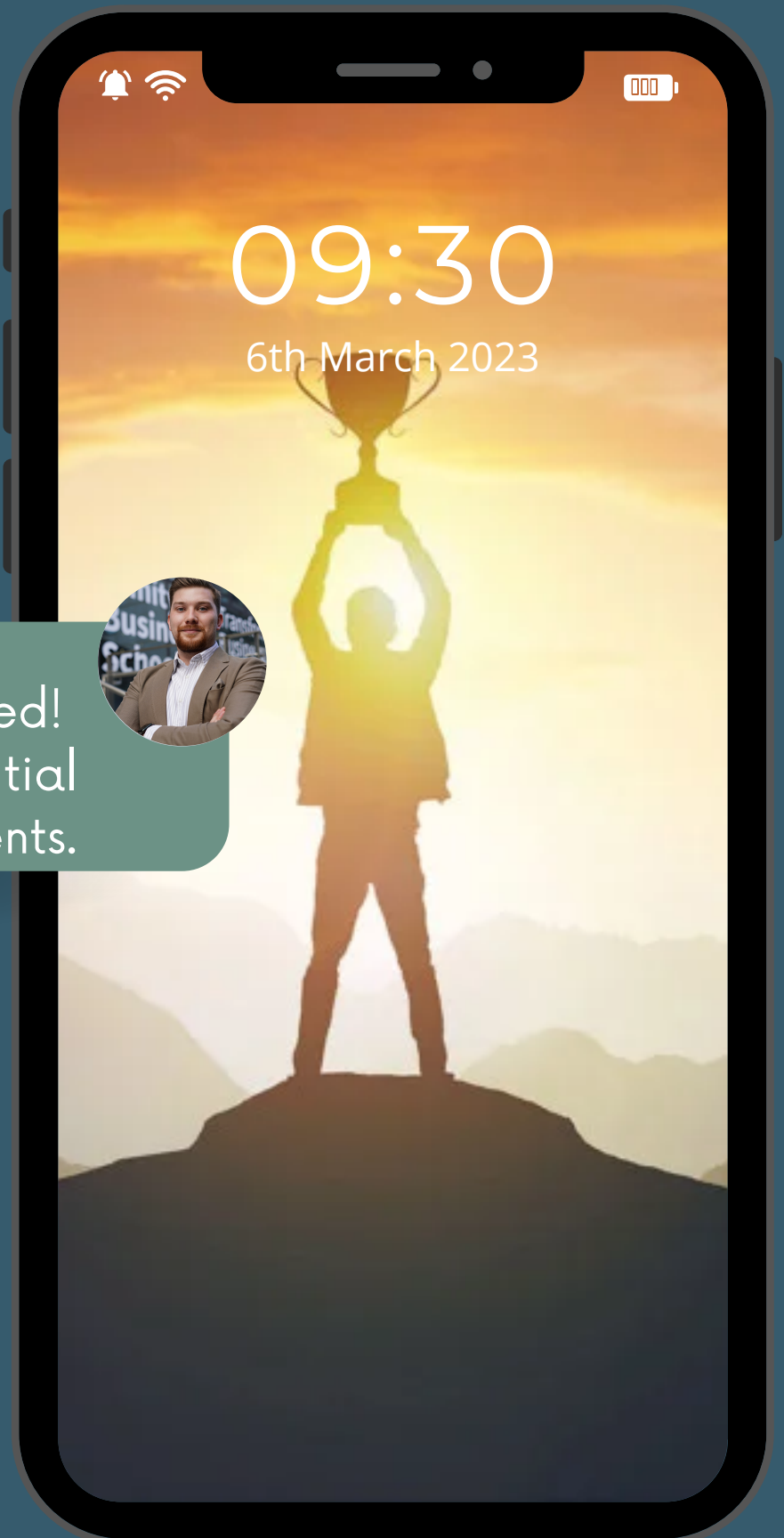


Hey Oisín, I'm starting my PhD in the fall and don't know what to expect. Have you got any advice?

I got you covered! I've put together the essential points for all PhD students.



Thanks so much, I'm gonna note these down. You're a lifesaver!



Author

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PhD Candidate, School of Medicine



PhD life can be tough and figuring out how best to manage everything is difficult.

So I've gotten rid of the stress, hassle and time for you.

From a myriad of online resources, I have synthesised and compiled the top tips so you don't have to.



Oisín C. Joyce is a final year PhD student in the School of Medicine and the former President of Neuroscience Ireland's Early Career Research Network.

His doctoral research aims to determine the impact of cardiovascular risk factors, concussion and exercise on brain health and cognition in an ageing population with a measure of multisensory integration.

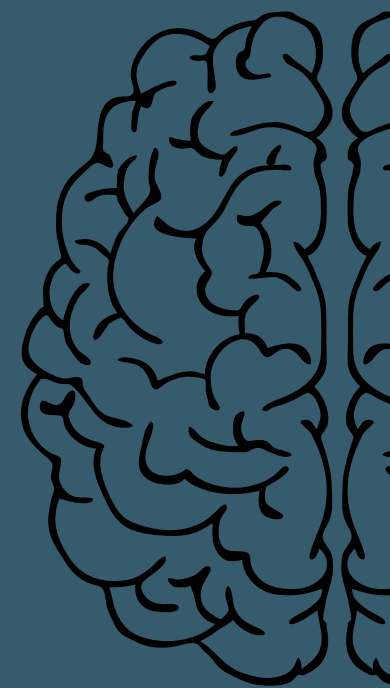
Having recently graduated with distinction from his Post-Grad Cert in Innovation and Entrepreneurship from Tangent, Trinity's Ideas Workspace, he is looking to bridge the gap between the startup world and academia with an interest in the MedTech and Biotech ecosystem of Ireland. He aims to bring people together by tapping into the innovation and entrepreneurial mindset amongst us all.

Outside of the lab, he likes to read and collect comic books which he feels aids in his passion and creativity for neuroscience, innovation and entrepreneurship among the start-up ecosystems.

His superpower lies in finding diverse solutions to both simple and complex problems by embracing his ability to foster creativity and innovative capabilities beyond the norm.



Personal Tips





NO. 1

*No One
Expects You
to Know
Everything!*



Ask questions.

Discuss & Unravel.

*You're thinking what
someone else was
probably also
thinking.*





NO. 2

Imposter Syndrome



*It manifests differently for everyone
and is real! Tackle it by accepting
failure.*

*Be resourceful and creative in
building your confidence.*

*Overcoming failure is only achieved
through exposure therapy.*

Believe in yourself.





NO. 3

*Avoid
Perfectionism
and Prevent
Procrastination*



*It's better to inform yourself
how perfectionism and
procrastination manifest in
your feelings about writing,
research, or teaching.*

*Journaling has helped me
greatly since I started.*





NO. 4

Independence



Your research is yours and you will take responsibility for moving your project forward.

Whether that's the research topic, tasks, experimental design, presentation and writing - that is on you!





NO. 5

Public Speaking



*Get very good at explaining
your research succinctly
and to all types of
audiences.*

*Present whenever you can.
The more you do it the
easier it will be come your
viva-voce.*





NO. 6

*Keep a Source
of Positive
Energy*



A PhD can be draining so look to those you trust for support, guidance and love.

Work on something that excites you and follow your curiosity.

Intrinsic motivation can be kept constant with help, as external rewards during your journey are too often infrequent.





NO. 7

Know your Limits:
Rest



A PhD is a massively steep learning curve.

Take breaks and switch off.

Have fun.





NO. 8

Routine



Morning worker, evening worker, exercise, video games.... Whatever works for you works for you.

Work when and where is most effective for you.





NO. 9

The power of Habit Building



Decide on your goals early and develop productive habits to achieve them.

Reinforce them through social accountability - talking to others, or record your progress publicly with a blog.





NO. 10

Learn from Others



Personal stories create a guide to your success.

Departmental seminars on topics vastly different to yours will help you, your work, and your creativity for innovation and project planning.





NO. 11

*Your Health
is your
Wealth*



Take time for self care and use the college counselling service and postgrad support services for help.

You are not alone.

There's no shame asking for help.





NO. 12

Burnout

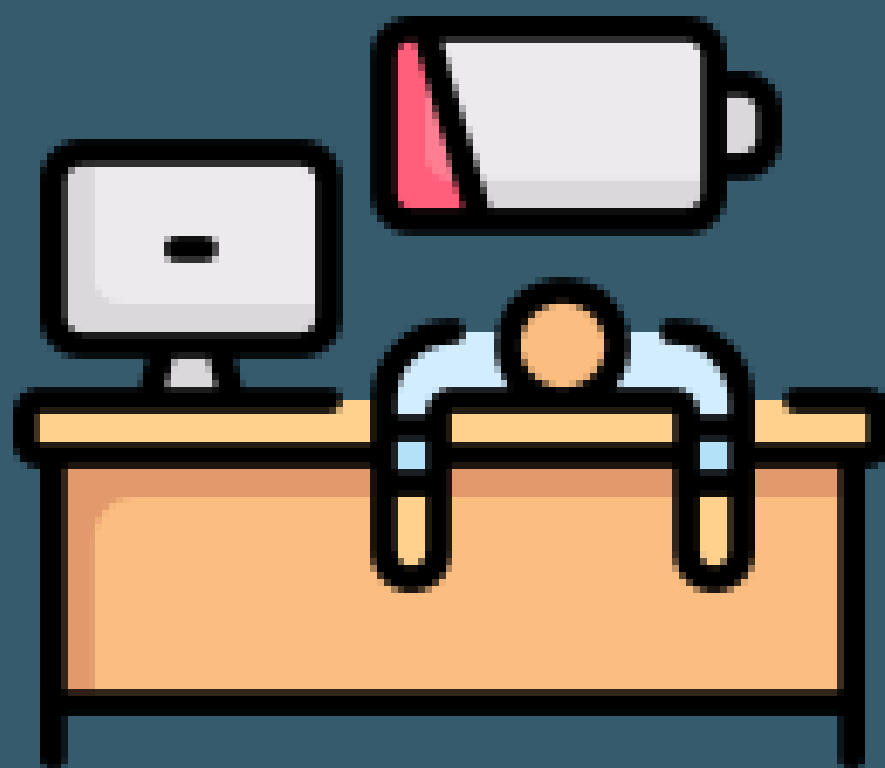


Notice the signs and be aware of them in yourself and others.

Don't work too hard.

Your work schedule is your own and flexible.

Don't waste time being unproductive.





NO. 13

Work-Life Balance



*Your work doesn't define you,
your actions define who you'll
become.*

You don't need to be on 24/7.

*Don't feel guilty when you're
not sitting at your desk typing
or reading.*





NO. 14

*Learn
How to take
Criticism*



It's not personal.

Be prepared to give and receive criticism.

Taking risks to build your resilience and learn is the path to self growth and success.





NO. 15

Enjoy it!



*It's your life and your work, put
a part of you in all that you do.*

*Know that you'll get there and
don't lose hope.*

*Whatever happens you will
finish. Celebrate the small wins!*





NO. 16

*Remember the
"Why"*



A PhD is difficult.

Isolation, frustration, and long periods of nothing are all too common.

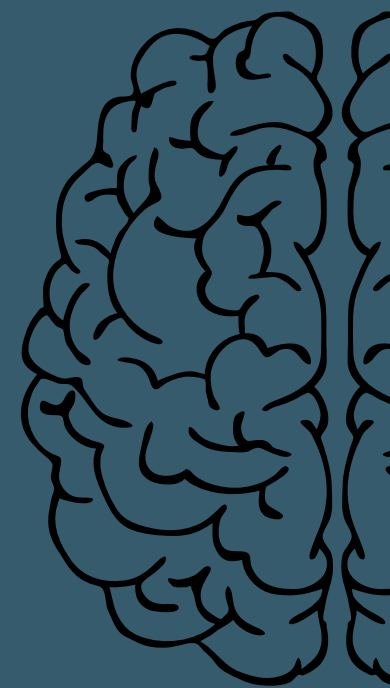
Take a step back and remember your reason and passion for starting.

It is okay not to feel motivated all the time.





Academic Tips





NO. 17

*Keep up to date
in your field*



*Never stop learning and
embrace your curiosity as
a superpower.*

*You are meant to learn
during the program not
before.*





NO. 18

Honesty



Be honest with your supervisor about where you're at and what you have and plan to achieve.

Ensure that you have clear strategic aims and objectives.





NO. 19

*Back ups of
your Back ups*



One day a week without fail make sure you save your “PhD folder” to an encrypted hard drive.





NO. 20

*Comparison
is the Thief
of Joy*



*Don't compare your project,
work or accomplishments to
anyone else.*

*Your PhD is original research,
you can't compare.*

*Everyone's PhD journey is
different.*





NO. 21

Create a Schedule



Planning is essential when pressures rise and deadlines come closer.

Your first year will set the foundation for your PhD journey and ultimate trajectory so be clear, precise, realistic, and plan for the unknown.





NO. 22

*Play to
your
Strengths*



Your ideal research topic sits at the intersection of work that is impactful, work that you are passionate about, and work that you are uniquely suited for.





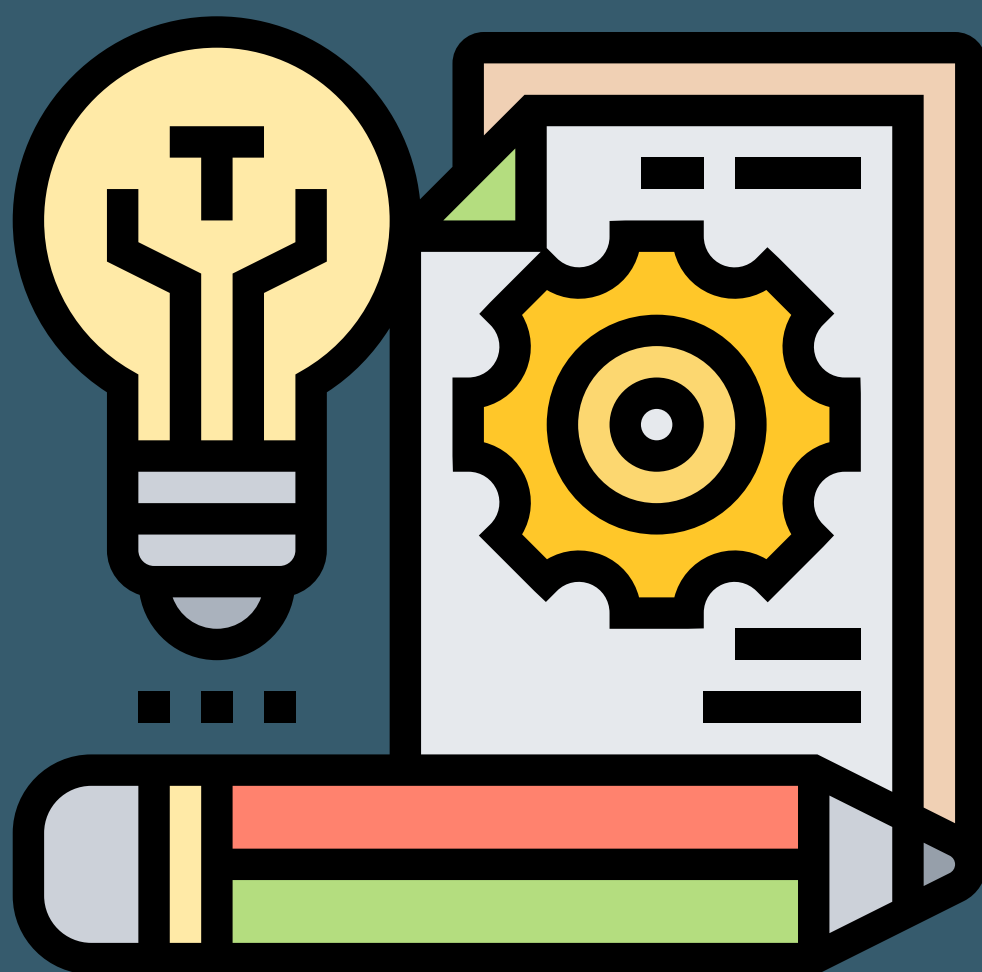
NO. 23

*Change is
Inevitable*



Your PhD project may change several times over 3-4 years.

Adaptation will be a core skill throughout your projects and future professional career.





NO. 24

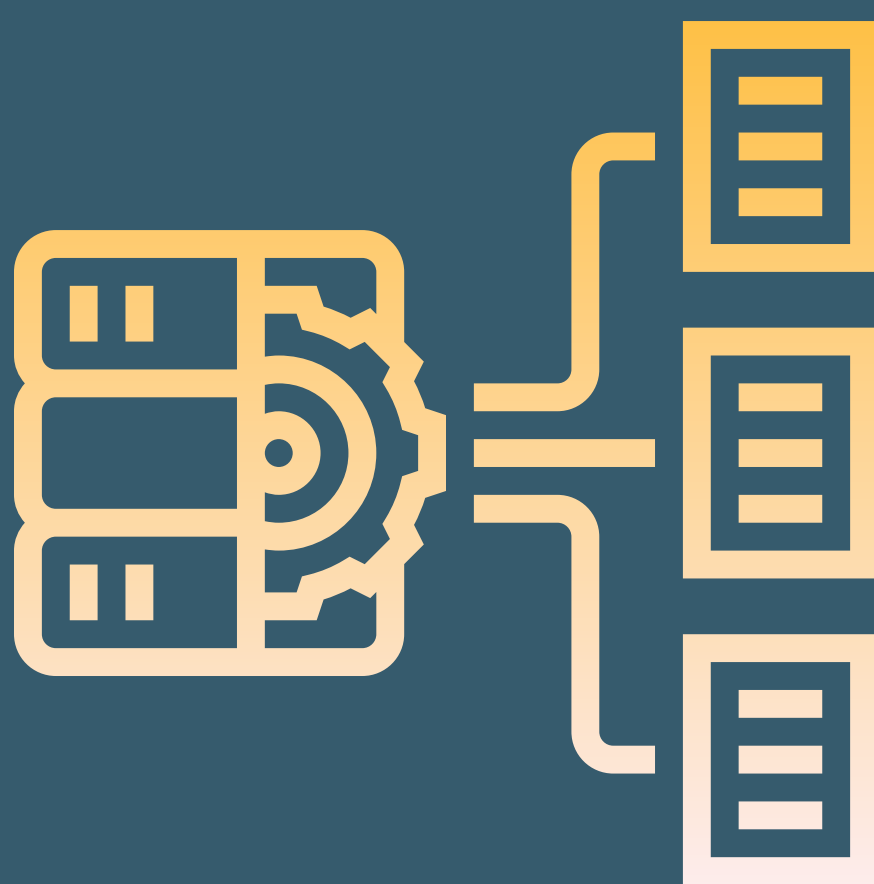
Plan B



Have a backup plan.

Something will always come up.

*Prepare actionable and simple solutions to implement.
Failed experiments lead to a successful PhD.*





NO. 25

Organisation & Time Management



To some degree you are in charge of your working hours, be as flexible as you need to be for yourself.

Be honest and accountable.





NO. 26

Academic Fitness



Your brain is a muscle. Flex it.

*Research all about your
chosen field and topic.*

*Become THE expert of what
you do.*





NO. 27

*Publications
are not
Everything*



Get a review article done early to really understand your topic and the literature.

BUT publications are not the end goal or product of a PhD.

It's called a programme for a reason - it's a scientific apprenticeship.





NO. 28

Writing Skills



Your ability to translate complex ideas to layman's terms is essential.

Whether it's to the general public or your fellow researchers.

Start a blog or LinkedIn newsletter to share your knowledge base.

Schedule weekly writing time and develop a rhythm.





NO. 29

Read Around



You can add value by making connections between different topics or entirely different fields.

Reading is crucial in the first 6 months.

Keep track of the literature you're reading with suitable software like Endnote.





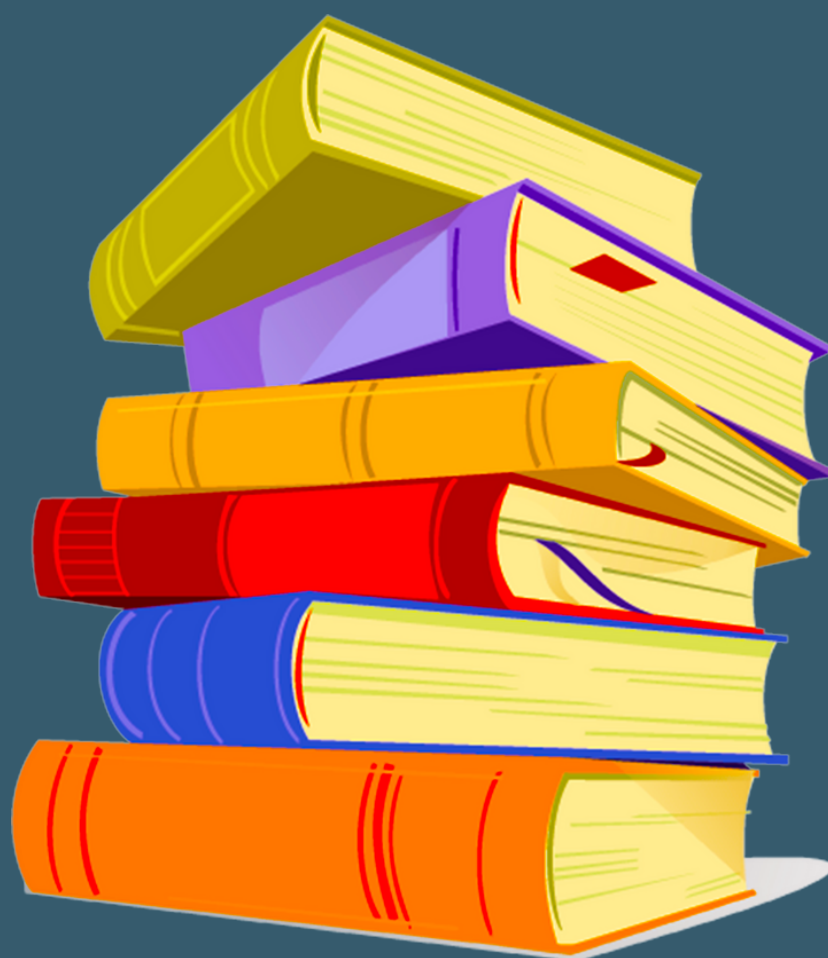
NO. 30

Read Other PhD Theses



This will give you a great understanding of what to expect and how to frame your own research when writing up.

Ask other PhD students for reading recommendations that could help in the thesis write-up.





NO. 31

*It's Never
Too Early*



*Start writing on your
first day.*

*You may not use it in your
thesis but it will be
helpful as time passes.*





NO. 32

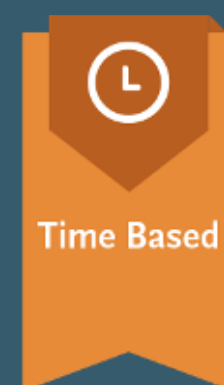
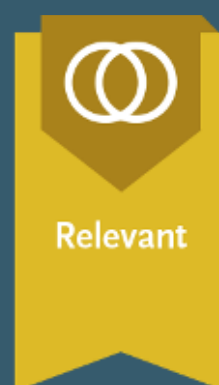
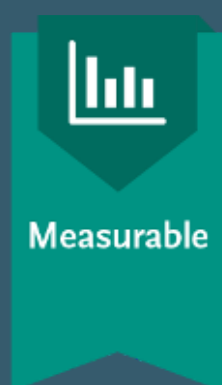
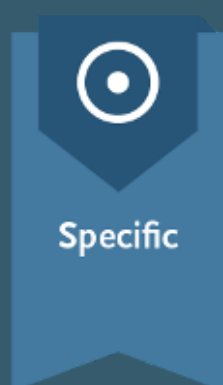
*Make **SMART**
Goals to
Complete your
Thesis*



Clear and attainable goals will be easier to achieve.

Being proactive makes it easier for people to know who you are, what you're researching and where you plan to go.

S M A R T





NO. 33

*Be Active
in your
Supervision*



Have regular meetings with your Supervisor(s).

Build motivation, focus and discipline.

Discuss expectations, productivity, be honest and realistic.

Address minor difficulties ASAP.





NO. 34

*Listen to your
Supervisor's
Advice*



*They have had PhD students
before, they've succeeded
and so will you.*

*You don't have to listen
100% of the time but heed
their advice.*





NO. 35

Write down
EVERYTHING



Make really thorough notes.

No matter who you are, you won't remember a brief note to answer a future question if you don't write it down.





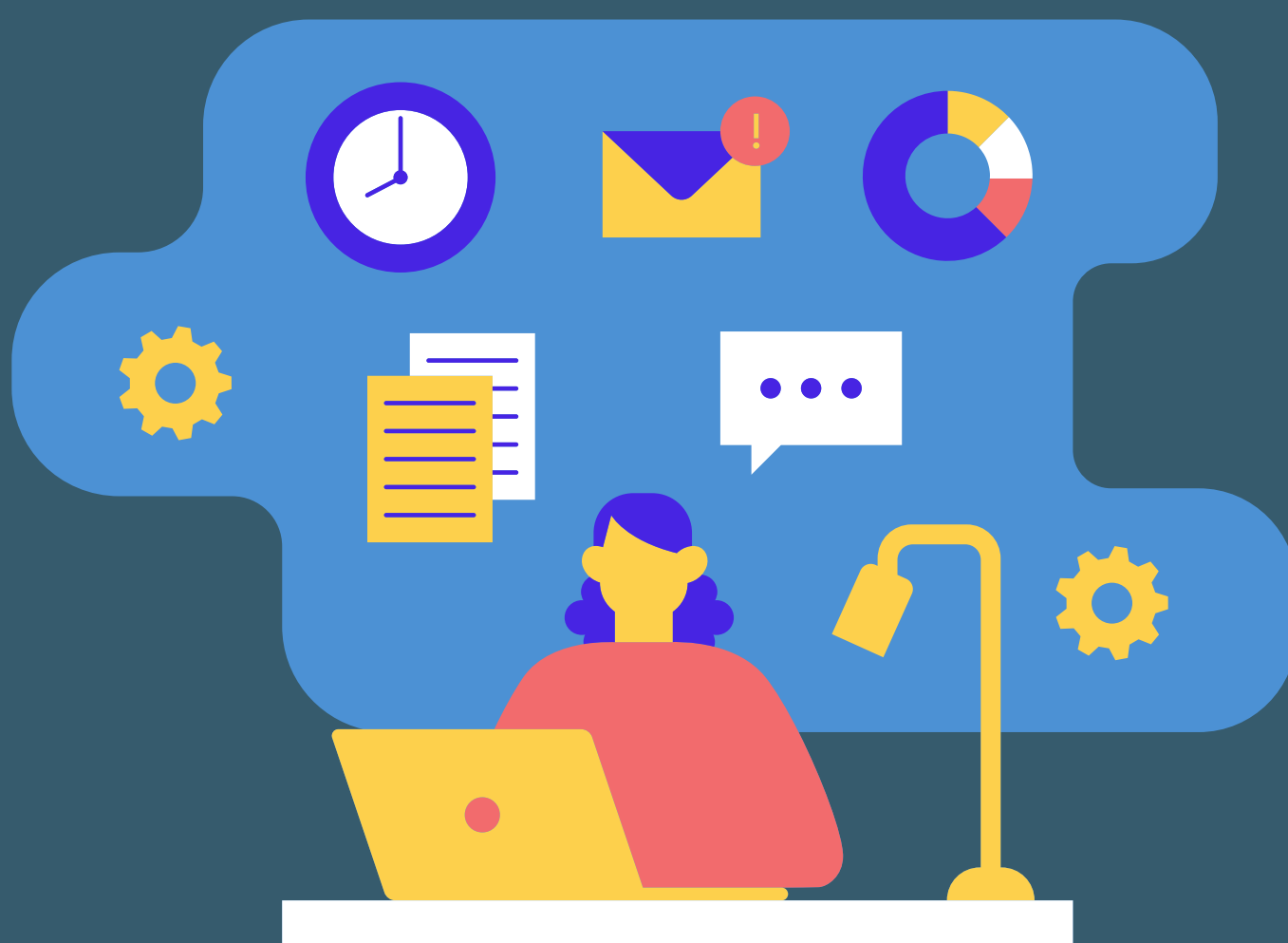
NO. 36

Don't focus on
ONE THING



If your chosen project is not going well, your motivation and well-being may suffer.

Split your time and focus on multiple things and progress is inevitable.





NO. 37

*A Good Thesis
is a
Finished Thesis*



Send drafts sooner rather than later as you will have corrections and edits to make ALWAYS.

Don't lose focus as a solid thesis helps you pass your viva.





Career Tips





NO. 38

Strong Online Presence



Create a Twitter and/or LinkedIn account and start sharing what you know and what you're passionate about.

You'll create opportunities that you once thought impossible or never imagined.





NO. 39

Network



*A PhD is not all about
academic results. Life after
a PhD is closer than you
think.*

*Whether online or over a
coffee - talk to everyone!*





NO. 40

*Connect
with your
Colleagues*



Meet and engage with other PhD students socially and in the department.

A PhD can be lonely.

Don't hide away from the academic community.





NO. 41

Reflection



*Curiosity is a PhD student's
greatest weapon.*

*Critically analyse and develop
a skillset to crystallise
thoughts into fully formed
ideas.*





NO. 42

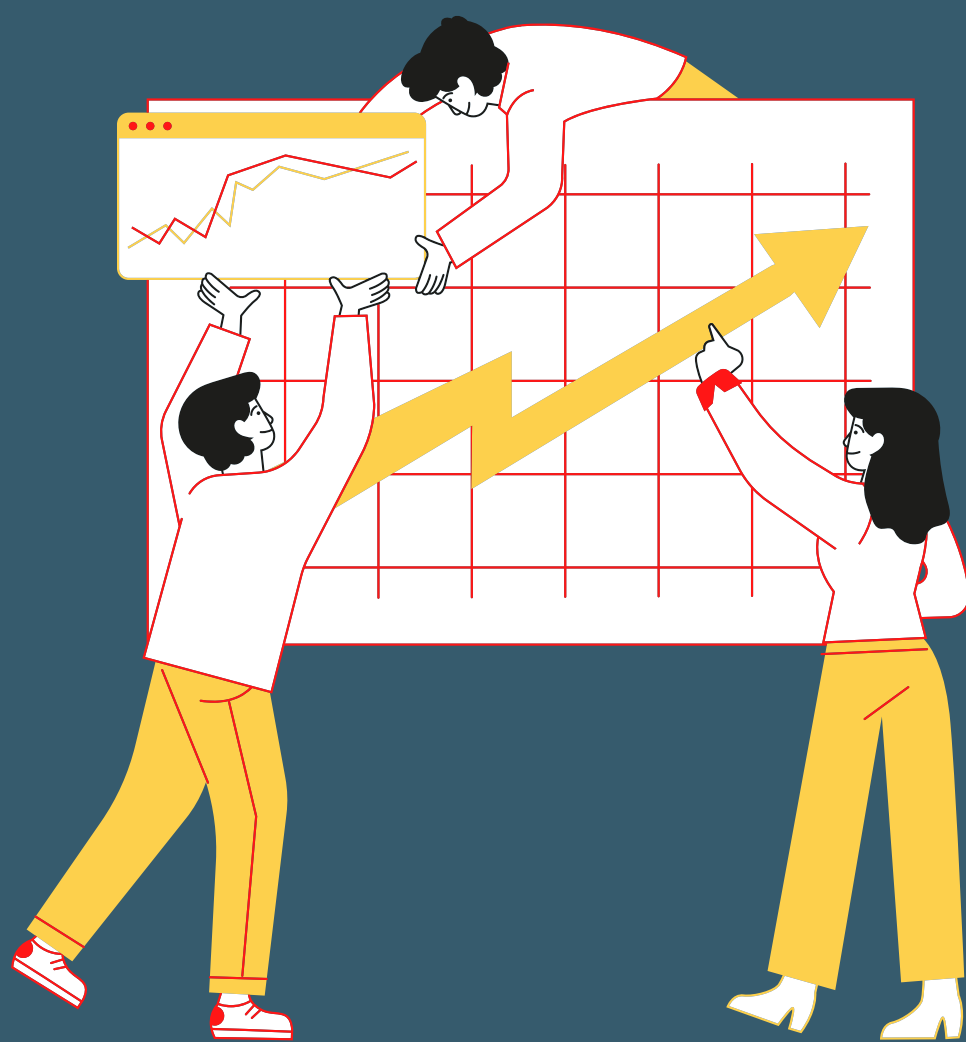
Teamwork



Be a team player.

*Don't do it solo, nothing good
will come from isolation.*

*Often it is beneficial in the
long term.*





NO. 43

Get Involved



*Understand your weaknesses
and go outside your comfort
zone.*

*Presentations, lab techniques,
analytics, networking and
collaborations.*

Go for it!





NO. 44

*Read more
than just
Research*



*Novels, newspapers, LinkedIn,
Twitter.*

*Try to read all you can with a
reflective eye - learning about
structure and story development
to apply to your own writing.*





NO. 45

*Create your
Own
Opportunities*



You carve your own path of growth and success.

Complete a certificate, take extra classes, join a society or create your own.





NO. 46

Be Ambitious



*Ambitious projects show
creativity, ideation and
design thinking which are
extremely valuable
qualities.*





"Heroes are made by the path they choose, not the powers they are graced with."

- Iron Man, Marvel Comics

This survival Guide is Intended to help all PhD students so please:

Share among your Networks.

We can all help each other!