

the



secrets

of highly successful

PhD students



By Hugh Kearns & Maria Gardiner

ithinkwell.com.au

Who am I?

- Live in Adelaide, South Australia



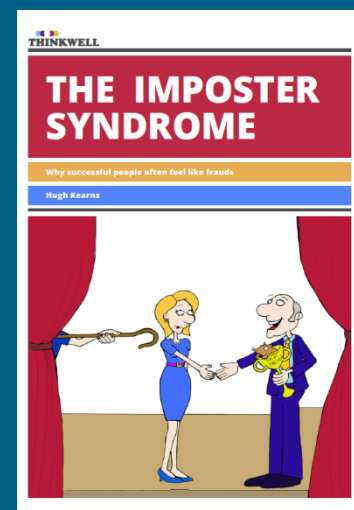
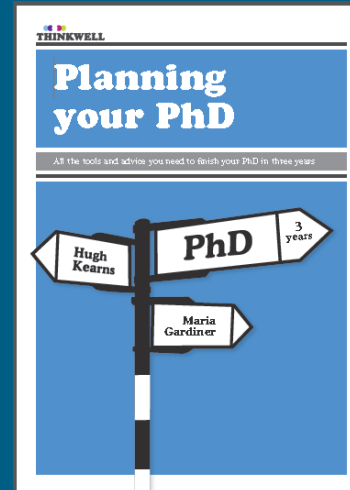
Flinders University • Lecture • Research • Self-management



Ben Bulbin, County Sligo, Ireland



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- set goals and achieve them
- achieve sustainability in their career
- think more clearly and make better decisions
- reduce stress
- find out what is making them stressed
- learn how to evaluate and deal with emotions
- feel more content and confident
- spend more time with their family and those who matter

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New edition of The 7 Secrets

This favourite has been given a new look and feel.

Interview on ABC 891

Hugh and Maria talk about feeling overwhelmed.

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COLUMN

The care and maintenance of your adviser

Graduate students bear as much responsibility as their mentors for ensuring that they are well guided through their degrees, say Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner.

Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and soon. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must get the deficiencies.

It is not surprising that advisers figure large in graduate students' conversations. In 2009, the US Council of Graduate Schools in Washington DC reported survey results showing that 6% of the 1,856 doctoral students who responded identified mentoring or advising as a main factor in PhD completion. Our own research at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and our experience at graduate-student workshops across the world suggest that the adviser-student relationship has a big impact on completion time. It certainly influences whether students are still smiling at the end of their degrees!

Students often assume that once they call someone an adviser, he or she automatically acquires all the skills of advising. After all, if your adviser is the world leader in stem-cell technology, he or she must excel at the seemingly simple task of advising — not to mention possess highly developed interpersonal skills and a keen interest in graduate-student development. Sadly, that is not the case.

Sometimes, advising is a weakness of an otherwise very accomplished scientist. This is not surprising. Mentoring tends to be a private business, and often the only model available is an adviser's own experience of having been advised. If it was good, they decide to copy their own methodology; if it was bad, they do the opposite. There is no guarantee that either approach will provide the student with the guidance he or she needs.

A proactive approach is necessary. If your adviser isn't looking after you in the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point in the PhD journey most graduate students come to an important realization. This is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver. The sooner they

can do this, the better. If you're not getting feedback, clear direction or the necessary resources, then you must do something about it. What does this mean in practice? Let us take some examples.

MEETINGS

A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.

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do in the next two weeks, the next meeting. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

FEEDBACK

Again, in an ideal world, you should be skilled at articulate in a polite and deft way that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.

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COLUMN

Waiting for the motivation fairy

It's easy to give in to procrastination — but Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner offer some tips for getting your drive back.

"I love deadlines. I have the whooshing sound they make as they go by!"

— Douglas Adams

If you were trying to set up ideal conditions for procrastination, conducting a research project would provide them. Such projects tend to be large and time-consuming, completing a doctoral research project, for example, often takes three years or more. Deadlines and endpoints are often fuzzy and ill-defined. Then there's the reward structure you can put in a lot of effort with little to no positive feedback along the way, and the rewards, if there are any, take a long time to come. Add to this the fact that scientists are often perfectionists with demanding, if not idealistic, expectations, and it is little wonder that procrastination is the most discussed topic in our graduate-student and researcher workshops. Many researchers simply take for granted that they are at the mercy of the forces of procrastination, doomed to increased stress levels and stretched deadlines. But there are simple strategies for pushing yourself to get engaged. The first is to recognize the patterns that you're falling into.

ADVANCED DISPLACEMENT
Some procrastination activities are pretty obvious. There's the morning coffee break that creeps into lunchtime. Or watching videos on YouTube and sending them to all your friends. Or updating your Facebook status when you should be updating your lab book. But most procrastination is far more subtle, and can even be mistaken for productive work. For example, you might try to track down that elusive reference, even though you've already got more than you will ever have time to read. Or you could start a new experiment instead of analysing the old one. Or take stock of the glassware in the lab. Or check your e-mail. These activities make it seem as though you're doing something

useful, and you may well be, but it's not the thing you should be doing right now. So why is housekeeping, for example, so much fun when you're supposed to be working on your dissertation or a paper? It's a displacement activity used to dispel the self-reproach or discomfort that we feel for not doing something else. Reading a novel or taking a nap

not keep get. Of course motivated i strategies ca ditions that's the first plac ken down it steps, but tin you'll maket — which pro ing — the t you'll read ti or you'll m Second, yo deadline by tin step. Se tomorrow is line needs to to it. Third, immediate ri ing the com 10:00 a.m., y have a coffi

causes too much guilt. But have you ever, say, reorganized your folders to make it easier to find the files? It would speed up your writing after all. Or perhaps you've diligently labelled all the cupboards in the lab to make it easier to find things.

Although these activities or excuses seem acceptable, their final flaw is that once they're over, you still haven't finished that article, started that experiment or written your dissertation. You probably have an increased sense of guilt because you're not making progress on your goal. And although you've found and read that reference, you still don't feel motivated to write. Sadly, while you are answering e-mails or counting the glassware, the motivation fairy didn't stop by and make

perhaps you should g... time you catch yourself engaging in displacement activities, remember that there's a way to recover that elusive drive. Follow out these rules and watch your motivation grow. ■

Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner lecture and conduct research in psychology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and run workshops for graduate students and advisers (see thiswell.com.au).

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that difficult task!ec
This's just not how m
Most people have a standing, we like to leads to action, or, n you feel like doing s
This model might we doing, such as watch walk. But it's not par tasks with fuzzy dea that you may never f and remind that pa a hard-and-fast dead different model.

MOTIVATION #10

Some psychology ms leads to motivation, more action. You have ready, then you'll fe then you'll take mo ally had this experier running an analysis! decide to do it, and o yourself. "This isn't a

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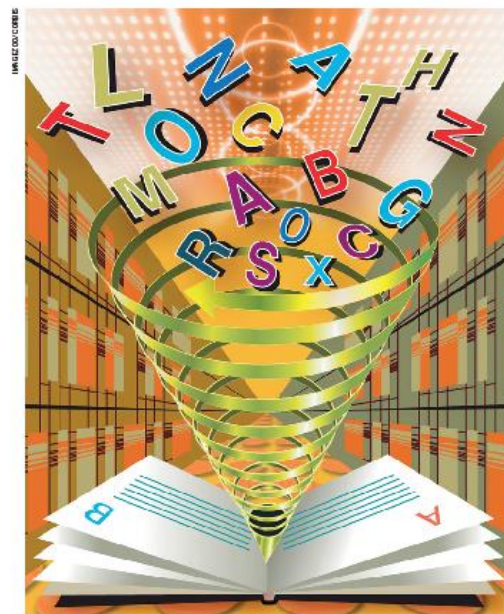
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EDUCATION US needs to improve science literacy to prepare workforce p.110

TURNING POINT Biochemist's high-risk research direction pays off p.101

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CAREERS



COLUMN

Turbocharge your writing today

Before you can tackle the overwhelming task of huge writing projects, you must first put aside some widely held myths, say Maria Gardiner and Hugh Kearns.

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As a graduate student, you might find yourself well on the way with your education and 'ABD' (all but dissertation). Day after day, you tell yourself that you really, really intend to start writing your paper. After all, you've collected all the data, analysed them many times and entered them into tables. But then you start thinking that maybe you need just a few more data. Perhaps, too, you should try a different analysis technique. And what if the tables you used aren't the right ones, or need to be formatted differently?

Many of the thousands of researchers we have worked with are constantly being tripped up by finicky, nagging details that keep them from writing up their research. Every day, they mean to start, but every day, something gets in their way or seems more important — and this can go on for years. Some very common obstacles get in the way of high-quality, high-quantity scholarly writing, but powerful, evidence-based techniques can help researchers to overcome repetitive and unhelpful habits and get moving (see 'How to get out of a dissertation-writing rut').

WRITING MYTHS

The biggest impediments to scholarly writing are long-held myths that seem to get passed down through the academic ranks like precious but unhelpful ancient wisdom. The first is the Readiness Myth — "I should write when I feel ready, and I don't feel ready yet". The secret to high output is that you have to write before you feel ready, because you might never reach that point. Researchers read endlessly and conduct countless experiments in the belief that it will eventually make them feel ready to write — we call these habits readiness and experiential. But ironically, all that reading and experimenting often makes them less likely to write, and more confused. So the first way to speed up your writing is to stop waiting, stop reading and experimenting, and start writing. You won't feel ready, but you have to do it anyway.

This brings us to the second myth, the Clarity Myth — "I should get it all clear in my head first, and then I write it down". This isn't how writing works in practice. You have probably had the experience in which you were sure about how a paper would go until you started to write it. Then you discovered that there were inconsistencies, or it didn't flow well, or the links didn't make sense. This tells you that it wasn't all that coherent in your head, after all. In fact, writing clarifies your thinking. Writing is not recording — you don't just take

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Introductions

Introduce yourself

- Discipline?
- How long have you been advising?
- How many students do you have currently?

The Rollercoaster



Before you start

Should you take the student on?

Questions to ask?

- Time – other commitments, absences, x1.5
- Interest
- Resources
- Student capacity
- Compatibility
- Dating
- Pre-nuptials
- Co-supervision – supervisory team

Starting

- Be there!
- Settling in
- Building relationship
- Agreeing expectations

Expectations

- Why are they doing a PhD?
- Role of advisor – role of student
- Meetings
- Written work
- Feedback
- Formality
- Addressing each other
- Raising issues

Expectations

- Level of work
- Argument
- Independent thought
- Expressing opinions
- Directness
- Disagreeing

Expectations

Expectations in Supervision

Name: _____ Supervisor: _____

Course: _____ Department: _____

Read each pair of statements below and then estimate your position on each. For example with statement 1 if you believe very strongly that it is the supervisor's responsibility to select a good topic you would put a ring round '1'. If you think that both the supervisor and student should equally be involved you put a ring round '3' and if you think it is definitely the student's responsibility to select a topic, put a ring round '5'.

1	It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic	<u>1</u> 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic
2	It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	Students should decide which theoretical framework or methodology they wish to use
3	The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	The supervisor should leave the development of the program of study to the student
4	The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is introduced to the appropriate services and facilities of the department and University	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	It is the student's responsibility to ensure that she/he has located and accessed all relevant services and facilities for research
5	Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	Supervisors should feel free to accept students, even if they do not have specific knowledge of the student's topic
6	A warm, supportive relationship between supervisor and student is important for successful candidature	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	A personal, supportive relationship is inadvisable because it may obstruct objectivity for both student and supervisor during candidature
7	The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	The student should decide when she/he wants to meet with the supervisor
8	The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	The student should work independently and not have to account for how and where time is spent
9	The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support & encouragement to the student	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	Personal counselling and support are not the responsibility of the supervisor - students should look elsewhere
10	The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	Students should submit drafts of work only when they want constructive criticism from the supervisor
11	The supervisor should assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	The writing of the thesis should only ever be the student's own work
12	The supervisor is responsible for decisions regarding the standard of the thesis	1 <u>2</u> 3 4 5	The student is responsible for decisions concerning the standard of the thesis

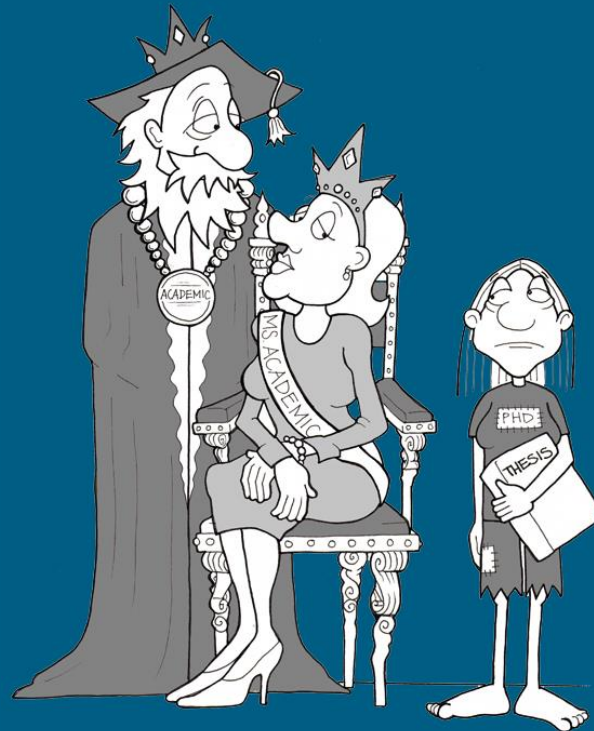
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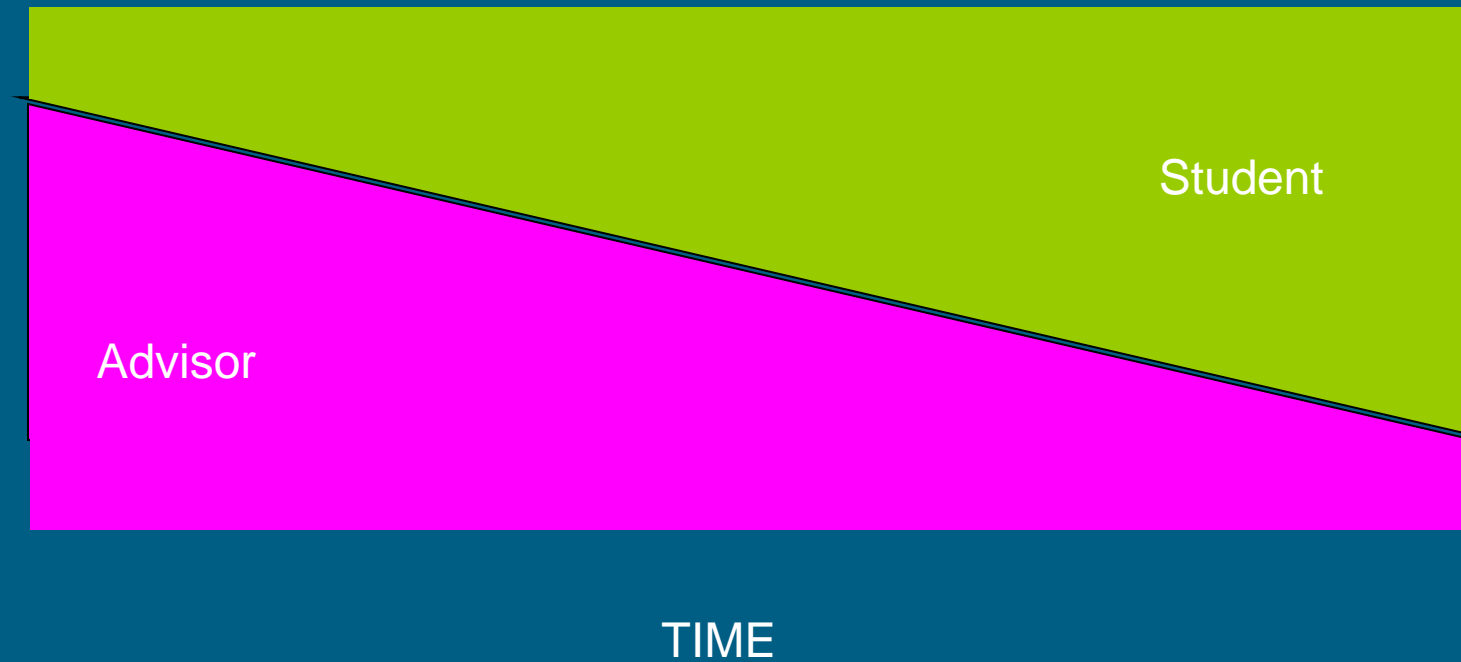
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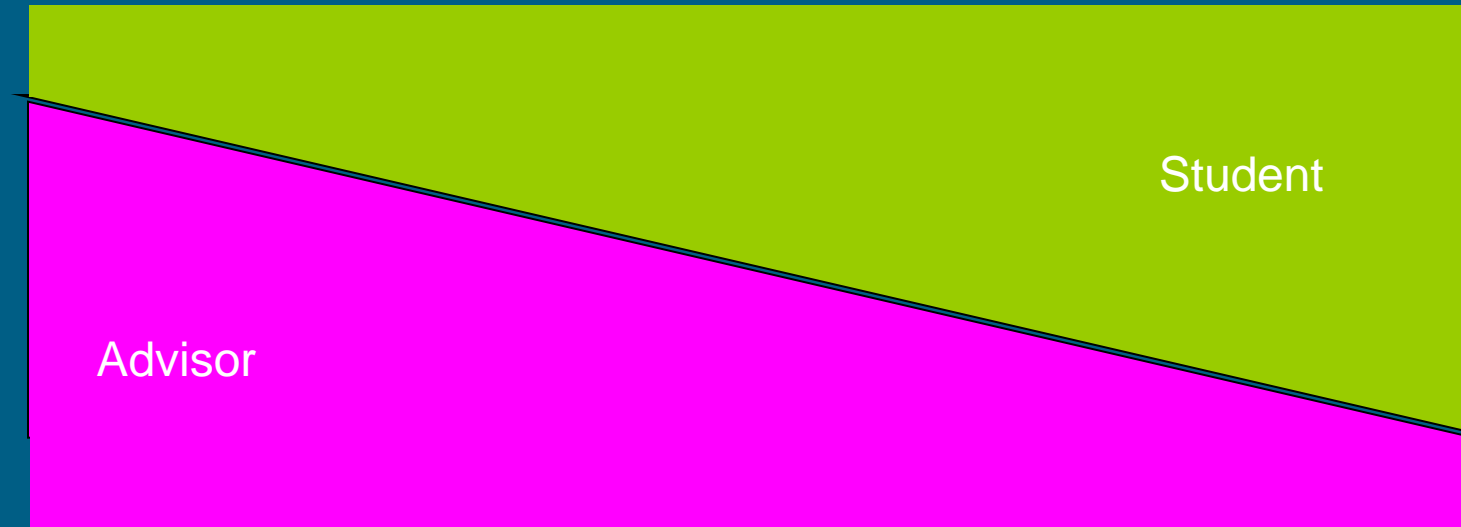
Care and Maintenance of your Supervisor



The Changing Relationship



A progression

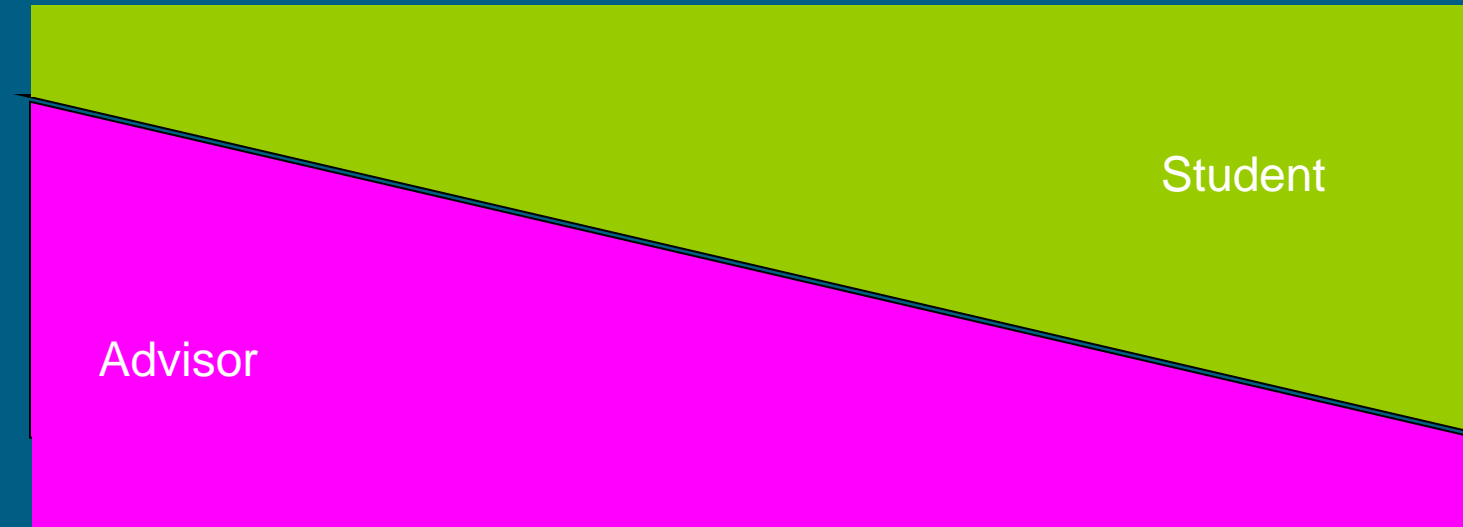


Beginning style TIME

Start with close supervision

Then move
to looser

A progression



Clear tasks

TIME

Specific reading

Specific writing

Meetings

Care and Maintenance Tips

- Meetings
 - The open door policy
 - Regularity v frequency
- Different frequency at different stages
- Even if you've done nothing!

- An agenda
- Email before and after meetings

An Agenda

1. What I've done since last meeting
2. Questions/issues
3. Feedback on writing and work
4. What I will do in the next two weeks
5. The Next Thing
6. Next meeting



Meetings

- Face to face
- Skype
- Email
- Group
- All supervisors?

- Lab meetings



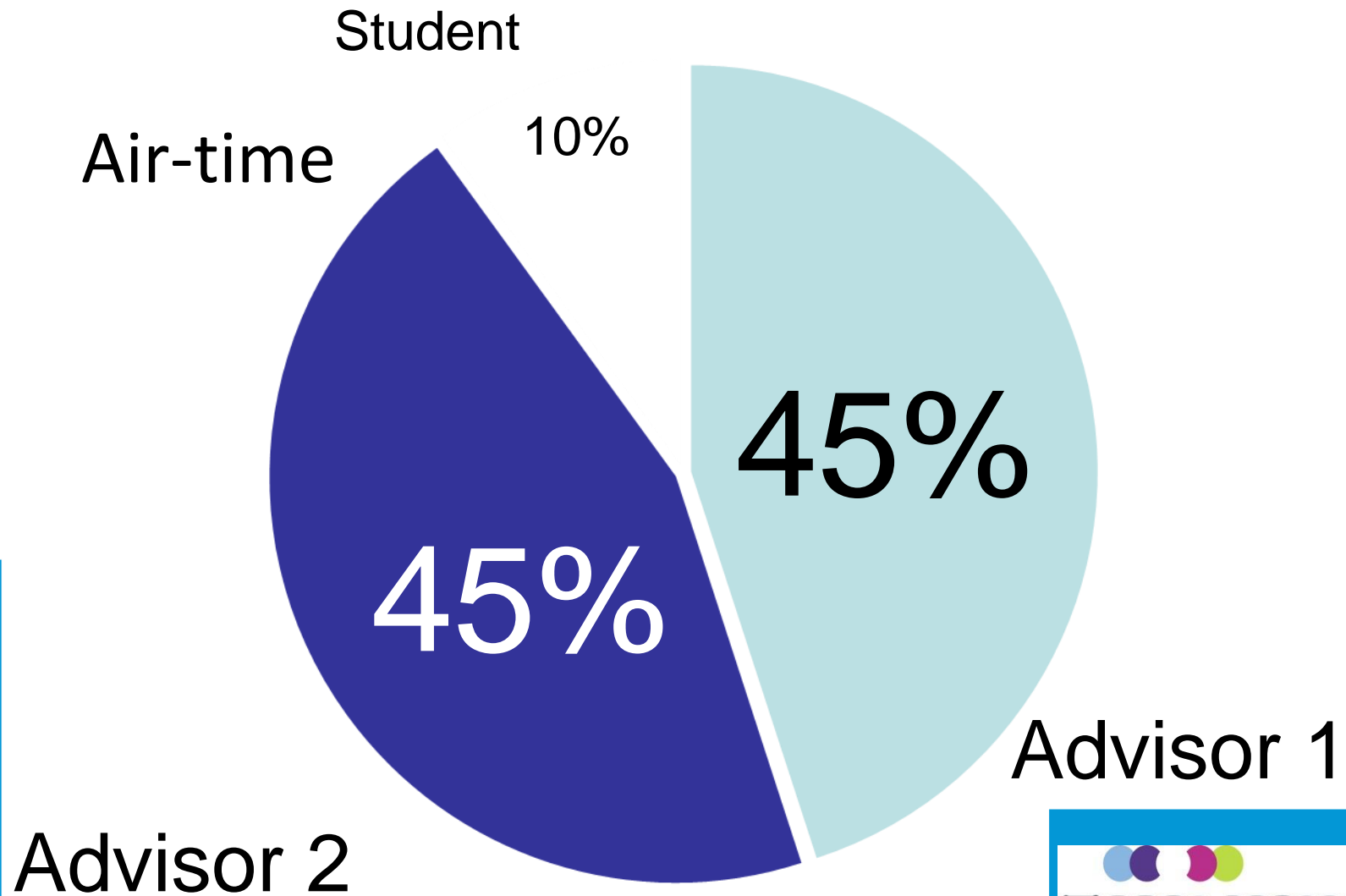
Air-time

Student

20%

80%

Advisor



Ask better questions

Closed	Open questions
All clear?	Can you tell me what you think we've agreed?
You know what to do?	Can you tell me what you're going to do?
Everything OK?	What have you been doing? What have you read? What have you written?
Do you understand?	Can you put in your own words what we've agreed/discussed?

Discussion on Secret #1

- How is the relationship?
- How you communicate?
- Understanding of responsibilities?
- Meetings?

secret

2

Write and show as you go:
This is show and tell, not hide and seek!



Write and Show Tips

MYTH 1:

I'll write when I feel ready.
I'm not ready yet.

- You may never feel ready
- You have to write before you feel ready
- That means **NOW!**



Readitis

The belief that reading one more article will solve all your research problems.



Readitis

The problems with excessive reading:

- Time consuming
- You get confused
- You forget



Experimentitis



The belief that doing one more experiment will solve all your research problems.

Write and Show Tips

MYTH 2:

I'll get it all clear in my head first and then write it down

- Writing is not recording
- Writing is a creative process
- Writing clarifies your thinking



Write and Show Tips

- Write early and often
- Bingeing versus snacking
- Write for 2 hours preferably in the morning



Write and Show Tips

Feedback

- Regular feedback will speed things up
- What type of feedback



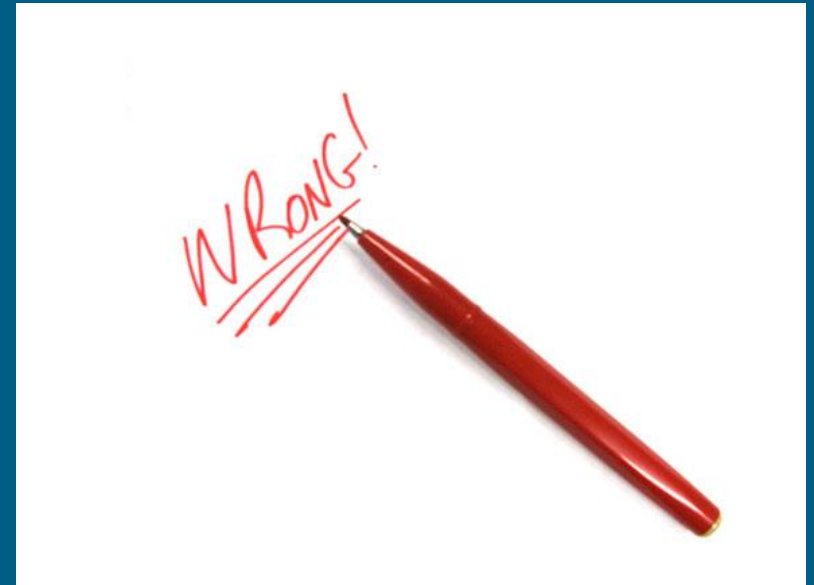
Feedback

Can be positive!
Especially at the start

A progression:

- supportive
- constructive
- Critical

The person v the thesis



Your Feedback Style

Direct

Comprehensive

Telling

Suggesting

Cultural differences

State your preference



How to ask for feedback



Ask
specific
questions

Types of feedback

- ▲ Spelling and grammar
- ▲ Facts and figures
- ▲ References
- ▲ Writing style
- ▲ Structure
- ▲ Argument
- ▲ Story

Specific questions

- ▲ This is an early draft. I'd like feedback on the structure.
- ▲ On page 4 I've taken XX approach. Do you think this works?
- ▲ I've highlighted some paragraphs that I'd like your thoughts on how relevant they are?

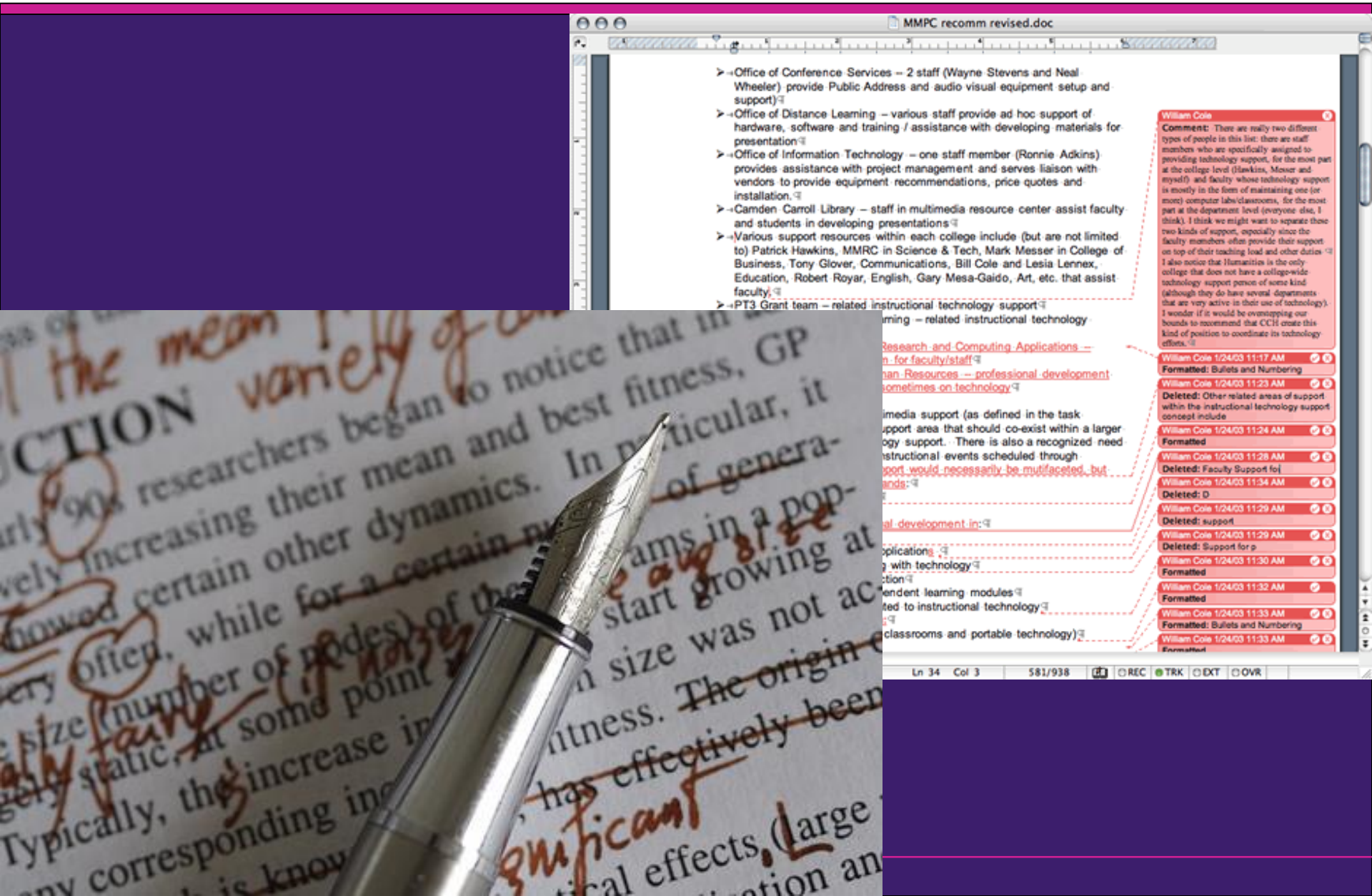
Specific questions

- ▲ This is the final draft so I'd appreciate any comments you have.
- ▲ I made the changes on page 4 that we discussed last week. Do you think this is stronger now?

A drop or a deluge?



Format?



MMPC recomm revised.doc

- > -Office of Conference Services – 2 staff (Wayne Stevens and Neal Wheeler) provide Public Address and audio visual equipment setup and support
- > -Office of Distance Learning – various staff provide ad hoc support of hardware, software and training / assistance with developing materials for presentation
- > -Office of Information Technology – one staff member (Ronnie Adkins) provides assistance with project management and serves liaison with vendors to provide equipment recommendations, price quotes and installation.
- > -Camden Carroll Library – staff in multimedia resource center assist faculty and students in developing presentations
- > -Various support resources within each college include (but are not limited to) Patrick Hawkins, MMRC in Science & Tech, Mark Messer in College of Business, Tony Glover, Communications, Bill Cole and Lesia Lennex, Education, Robert Royar, English, Gary Mesa-Gaido, Art, etc. that assist faculty.
- > -PT3 Grant team – related instructional technology support

... - related instructional technology

Research and Computing Applications --
... for faculty/staff

... Resources -- professional development
... sometimes on technology

... media support (as defined in the task
support area that should co-exist within a larger
support area. There is also a recognized need
instructional events scheduled through
... support would necessarily be multifaceted, but
... and:

... al development in:

... applications

... with technology

... tion

... endent learning modules

... ted to instructional technology

... classrooms and portable technology)

William Cole
Comment: There are really two different types of people in this list: there are staff members who are specifically assigned to providing technology support, for the most part at the college level (Hawkins, Messer and myself) and faculty whose technology support is mostly in the form of maintaining one (or more) computer labs/classrooms, for the most part at the department level (everyone else, I think). I think we might want to separate these two kinds of support, especially since the faculty members often provide their support on top of their teaching load and other duties. I also notice that Humanities is the only college that does not have a college-wide technology support person of some kind (although they do have several departments that are very active in their use of technology). I wonder if it would be overstepping our bounds to recommend that CCH create this kind of position to coordinate its technology efforts.

William Cole 1/24/03 11:17 AM
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Ln 34 Col 3 581/938 REC TRK OXT OVR

Vague feedback

Needs work

Looks OK

Need to restructure

Not enough depth

..

Needs work

Which part needs work?

What type of work?

A little work – a lot of work?

Looks OK.

What does OK mean?

OK - this is good

OK - this is OK for now but will need more

OK - this is just OK – not up to the standard

Need to restructure

Which parts need to be restructured?

Did you have any thoughts on how to restructure?

I was thinking you could do it like this.

..

This section doesn't work.

Not sure what you mean here?

And?

????

..

Substance – the argument, the approach

Style – how you say it

My style may not be your style

Styles differ

..

Get out a pen and write it down

Write it down afterwards and send it

Ask questions for clarification

Repeat it – “So what you mean is ..”

Turnaround time?

One day?

One week?

One month?

One year?

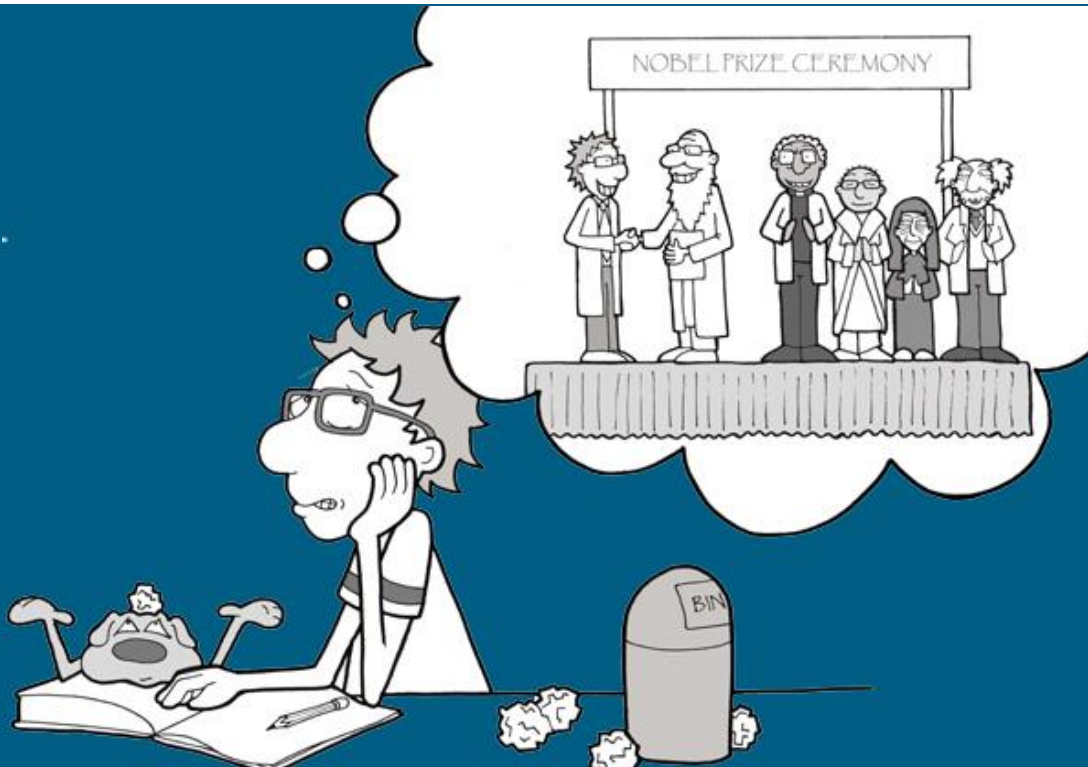
Discussion on Secret #2

- Are they writing?
- Are they showing it to you?
- What's working?
- What isn't?

secret

3

Be realistic:
It's not a Nobel Prize



An Original Contribution

- It's not a cure for cancer
- Grains of sand on the beach
- Replication in a different context
- You are learning how to do research
- (Hugh's groundbreaking thesis)

Perfectionism

- Bound but not finished
- The spelling mistake and the missed reference
- Academic culture

Being Realistic Tips

- Give them an idea of where the bar is
- Show them some dissertations
- Show them your dissertations
- Show them drafts of your work

Discussion on Secret #3

- How do you help your student find a realistic standard?

secret

4

Say no to distractions:

Even the fun ones and the ones you think you must do

Newton's Third Law of the Dissertation

For each and every action
towards completing your
dissertation

there is an equal and opposite
distraction.



The Secret Life of the PhD Student



Distractions

- Why is housework so much fun?
- Displacement activities
 - Tutoring, marking
 - Grants, tangential projects
 - Endnote, formatting
 - Emails, Facebook, Solitaire



Discussion on Secret #4

- Distracted students?
- What have you done?
- What can you do?

secret

5

It's a job:

That means working nine to five, but you get holidays



Parts of a Job

- Regularity and routines
- Plans and milestones
- Accountability

- A place to work

Discussion on Secret #5

- How is the accountability?
- Plans and milestones?

secret

6

Get help:

You are not an owner-operator single person business!



What's Okay?

- Editing ?– spelling, grammar, structure
- Formatting? – tables, figures, references
- Statistics consultant?
- Transcribing?
- Collecting data?
- Entering data?
- Technology?

- At home –cleaner, gardener, babysitter

Get Help

- Your advisor
 - advice
 - where to go (to get resources)
 - finance
- Your Department
- Find out what is available

Discussion on Secret #6

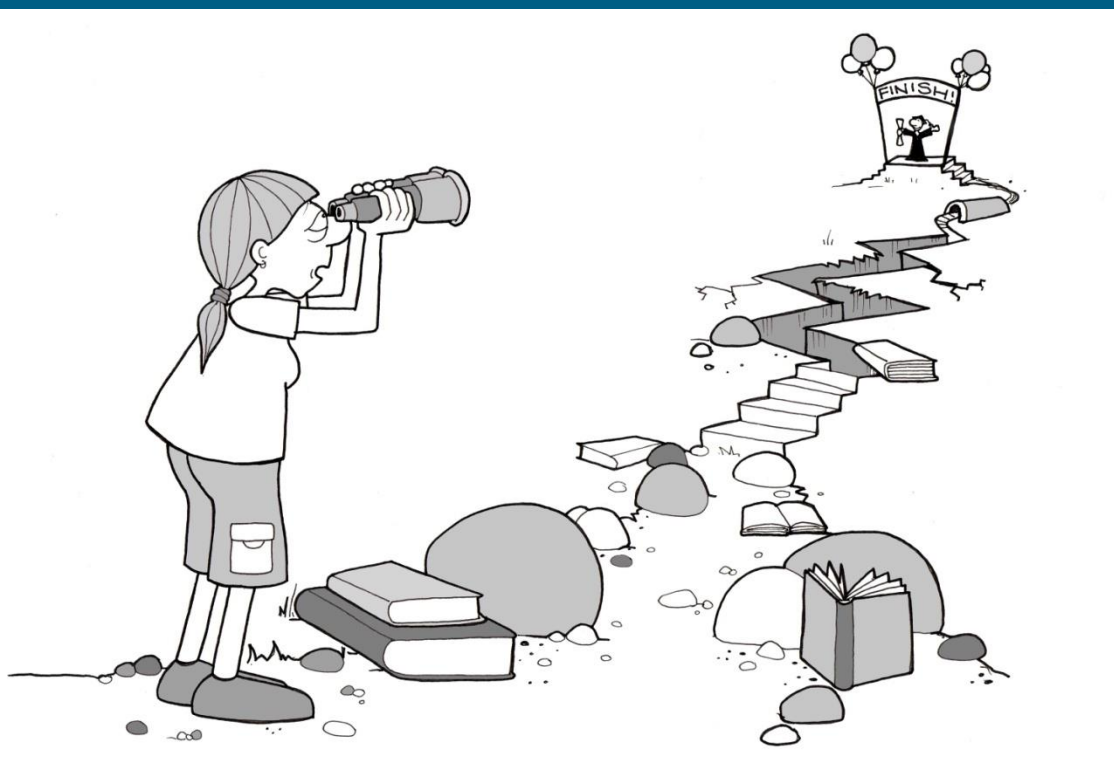
- What help can you provide?
- What help can you recommend/point to?

secret

7

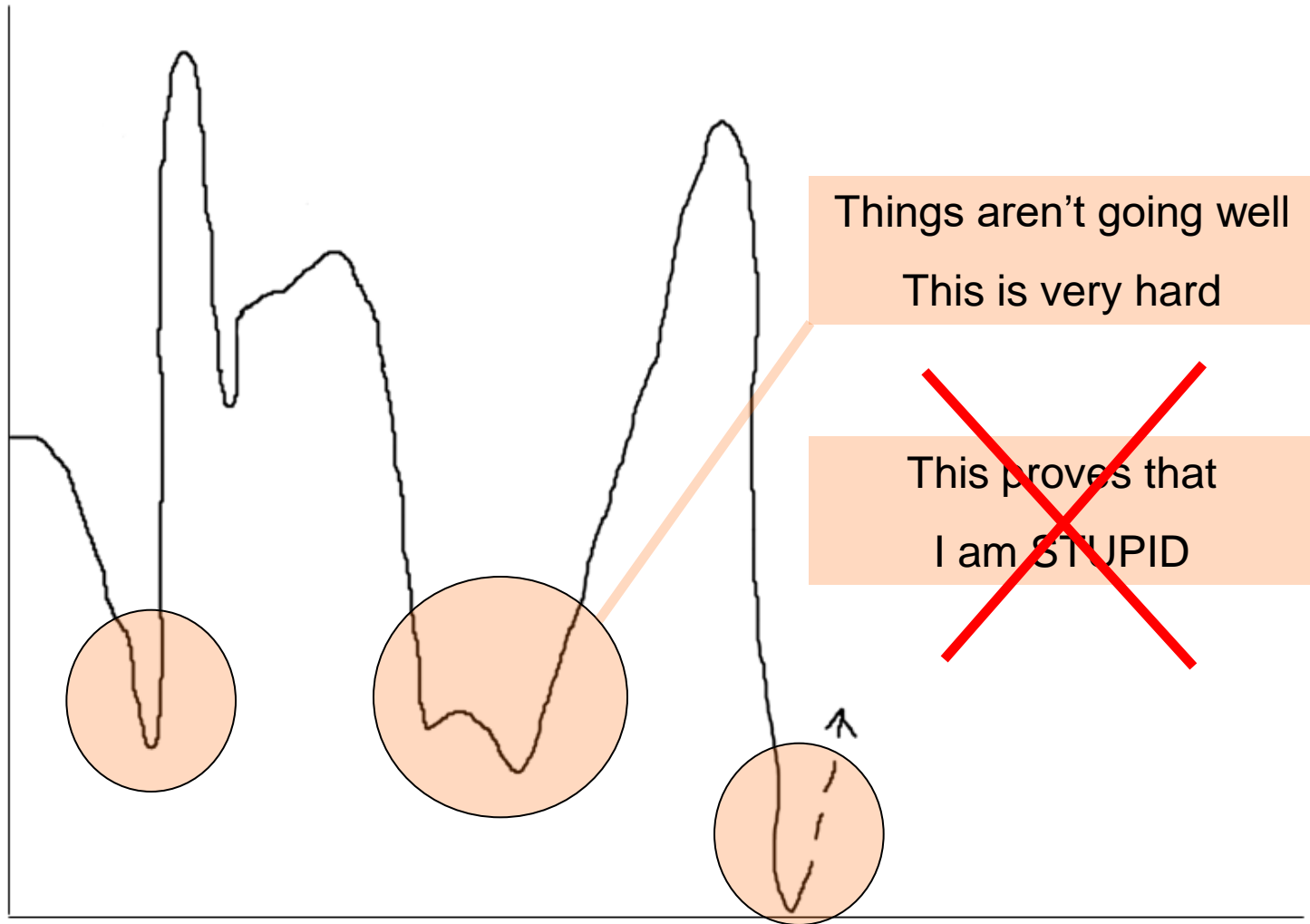
You can do it:

A PhD is 90% persistence and 10% intelligence



The Life Cycle of a PhD

Positive
Feelings



Negative
Feelings

Time

Discussion on Secret #7

- How persistent is your student?
- Give them some feedback on how they are progressing

What I'll do

- Specific actions



What was useful?

- What was the most useful idea or meaningful thing you heard

And Finally Remember it's ...

JaFPhD

And Finally Remember it's ...

Just

a

F*****

PhD