Creating the 7 Secrets of highly successful PhD students

By Hugh Kears & Maria Gardiner

ithinkwell.com.au
Who am I?

- Live in Adelaide, South Australia
Workshops and Books
Welcome to ThinkWell™

ThinkWell™ uses the latest psychological and educational research to develop workshops and materials to help you be more effective in your daily life.

We work extensively with doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and many others to assist them to:

- manage their time more effectively and perform better
- 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

Books

ThinkWell™ has put together a series of books to assist a range of professions and positions, including doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and many other occupational groups.

These books are available via our online bookshop.
@iThinkWellHugh
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.

Frequently the student-mentor relationship is unstable, with students having difficulty in finding the right balance of independence and guidance. This can lead to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction.

Mentors should be open to feedback, and students should not be afraid to ask questions or seek clarification. It is important that both parties feel comfortable and supported in their roles.

Regarding the academic calendar, it is essential to plan and schedule important meetings. There should be a clear understanding of the deadlines and expectations.

FUNDING

A common problem faced by students is securing funding. Many universities have a process for funding applications, which can be demanding. It is important to start this process early and to be prepared for rejection.

For those pursuing academic careers, obtaining grants can be challenging. It requires perseverance and dedication.

Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner offer several tips for getting your drive back.

One of the main factors contributing to procrastination is the fear of failure. It is important to face this fear head-on and to take action.

Another common issue is the feeling of being overwhelmed by work. It is important to prioritize tasks and to break them down into manageable chunks.

In the digital age, there is a tendency to procrastinate due to the distractions of the internet. It is important to set boundaries and to create a focused environment.

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.

One of the main factors contributing to procrastination is the fear of failure. It is important to face this fear head-on and to take action.

Another common issue is the feeling of being overwhelmed by work. It is important to prioritize tasks and to break them down into manageable chunks.

In the digital age, there is a tendency to procrastinate due to the distractions of the internet. It is important to set boundaries and to create a focused environment.

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.

Some procrastination solutions are pretty obvious. Those might include finding a quiet place, getting organized, and setting goals. But there are some less obvious strategies as well.

Before you start writing, it is important to take a break and to clear your mind. This will help you to focus and to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

It is also important to break down the writing task into smaller, more manageable chunks.

Almost all of the strategies for overcoming procrastination involve making it a part of your daily routine.

Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner describe their strategies for managing their writing tasks and for overcoming procrastination.
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 in Supervision

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'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is introduced to the appropriate services and facilities of the department and University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A warm, supportive relationship between supervisor and student is important for successful candidature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support &amp; encouragement to the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The supervisor should assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The supervisor is responsible for decisions regarding the standard of the thesis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from work by L Moses, Centre for Learning & Teaching, University of Technology, Sydney 2.1.1997 by M Kiley & K Cadman, University of Adelaide
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'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should decide which theoretical framework or methodology they wish to use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The supervisor should leave the development of the program of study to the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is introduced to the appropriate services and facilities of the department and University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the student's responsibility to ensure that she/he has located and accessed all relevant services and facilities for research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors should feel free to accept students, even if they do not have specific knowledge of the student's topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A warm, supportive relationship between supervisor and student is important for successful candidature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A personal, supportive relationship is inadvisable because it may obstruct objectivity for both student and supervisor during candidature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student should decide when she/he wants to meet with the supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student should work independently and not have to account for how and where time is spent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal counselling and support are not the responsibility of the supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Care and Maintenance of your Supervisor
The Changing Relationship

TIME

Advisor

Student
A progression

Beginning style
Start with close supervision

TIME

Then move to looser
A progression

Clear tasks
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

20%

80%

Student

Advisor
Air-time: 10%
Student: 45%
Advisor 1: 45%
Advisor 2: 45%
## Ask better questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Open questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All clear?</td>
<td>Can you tell me what you think we’ve agreed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You know what to do?</td>
<td>Can you tell me what you’re going to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything OK?</td>
<td>What have you been doing? What have you read? What have you written?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand?</td>
<td>Can you put in your own words what we’ve agreed/discussed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion on Secret #1

• How is the relationship?
• How you communicate?
• Understanding of responsibilities?
• Meetings?
Write and show as you go:
This is show and tell, not hide and seek!
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!
The belief that reading one more article will solve all your research problems.
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.
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
Feedback

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 you 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?
Vague feedback

Needs work
Looks OK
Need to restructure
Not enough depth
Vague feedback

Needs work

Which part needs work?
What type of work?
A little work – a lot of work?
Vague feedback

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.
...

Vague feedback
Vague feedback

This section doesn’t work.

Not sure what you mean here?

And?

????

..
Style v substance

Substance – the argument, the approach

Style – how you say it
My style may not be your style
Styles differ
Verbal feedback

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?
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
• How do you help your student find a realistic standard?
For each and every action towards completing your dissertation, there is an equal and opposite distraction.
Distractions

• Why is housework so much fun?

• Displacement activities
  – Tutoring, marking
  – Grants, tangential projects
  – Endnote, formatting
  – Emails, Facebook, Solitaire
• Distracted students?
• What have you done?
• What can you do?
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?
Get help:
You are not an owner-operator single person business!
What’s Okay?

• Editing ?— speling, gramar, 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

You can do it:
A PhD is 90% persistence and 10% intelligence
The Life Cycle of a PhD

Positive Feelings

Time

Negative Feelings

Things aren’t going well
This is very hard
This proves that
I am STUPID
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