

Becoming an independent researcher

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The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research



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stuff I believe:

- science is a discourse
- research is opportunistic
- good collaboration is powerful:
greater than the sum of its parts
- community is good
- bureaucracy is to be avoided (or at least managed)
- you never lose by giving credit

how to get ahead in research

do good work	←→	tell a good story
rigour	←→	rhetoric
internal drivers	←→	external drivers
idealistic	←→	pragmatic
research skills	←→	craft skills
instrumental	←→	expressive

Why is a PhD a good foundation for a research career?

What skills / knowledge / experience does it
provide?

What doesn't it provide?

A typical PhD...

gives me...

- writing as a way of thinking
- insight into a topic
- contacts, network
- organisation skills
- knowledge of a literature
- presentation skills
- ...

doesn't give me...

- sleep, relaxation skills
- teaching experience
- grant writing skills, funding experience
- experience interacting with infrastructure
- conference organisation skills
- social and political skills
- management skills
- ...

independence

Means...

- able to identify an area of research
- sufficient confidence
- able to plan and follow through
- able to think 'outside the box'
- having a vision; taking initiative
- being responsible
- asking good questions
- ...

Doesn't mean...

- “on his/her own” – avoiding collaboration
- arrogance
- avoiding help
- knowing everything
- doing everything
- deciding everything
- ...

What does success look like?

- sound scientific knowledge
- broad knowledge base – literature, methods, theory, people
- publication record
- reputation
- impact, citation
- passion
- vision
- balance: life-work, professional-private, freedom-obligation
- ...

the realities of funding:

- bid early and often
- bidding is an ongoing activity
- learn the business
- read and follow the instructions
- get the proposal read before it's sent
- sort out 'cautious' management structures in advance
- small money can have big impact
- grants can make your life easier – or more difficult
- some funding requires having a position in a key community

publication:

- targets
- exemplars
- readers

about publishing:

- Aim high, be prepared to revise and re-submit.
- Learn from referees – even from rejection.
- Always address referees' comments.
- Use workshops as rehearsals for conferences, and conferences as rehearsals for journals.
- Study the target.
- Get a mentor.
- Persist.

the economies of consultation:

- pointers into new literatures
- pointers to interesting people
- setting out 'markers' in the domain

Pay tax.

true or false:

Never turn down an opportunity; it

try:

Seize strategic opportunities.
But opportunities tend to repeat
themselves, and people tend to
forget...

true or false:

Never renege on a commitment.

try:

If you really must back out of a commitment, then do it early, for the 'right' reasons. If possible, find a substitute.

true or false:

Research must be your consuming

try:

To succeed in research, you need
two passions – and only one of
them can be your research
(John Domingue)

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instrumental ←————→ expressive