

## BOOK REVIEW

Townsend, K., Saunders, M., Loudoun, R., & Morrison, E. (Eds.) (2020). *How to keep your doctorate on track, insights from students' and supervisors' experiences*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.

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Received: April 10, 2021 • Accepted: June 14, 2021

Published online: November 22, 2021

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The present review presents a general picture of the valuable content in which, through shared experiences and valuable advice, doctoral experts guide future doctoral students in the process. The purpose of this book is to create awareness of the commitment to the doctoral program, but despite the misconceptions and fears following the step by step of the book, reaching the finished dissertation is all possible. The friendly path towards the world to be a doctor starts with the wish to solve a question, become a researcher, or learn something new, but this process has a bridge, which entails a thesis or dissertation. However, completing this path is not a linear process; doctoral students need to understand their changing role, initially as learners and then teach the supervisor the importance of the research. In fact, positive student-supervisor relationships contribute to the success of graduates, and if the research is the path after graduation, then other tasks, for instance, supervising other students and having active research activity, are part of the training of a doctoral student.

Nowadays, there are several types of doctoral programs that differ depending on the field and how they are completed. Also, variations are dependent on the country and the names given to supervisors, advisors, or mentors. Nowadays, there are different types of doctoral programs, and graduation requirements vary. Some depend on publications, and some are awarded depending on publishing activity rather than a big thesis from which the candidate needs to publish. This book is divided into three main parts, the first ideas for the doctoral program, the path of the doctoral program itself and the last one after defending the thesis and moving on. This book offers a viewpoint from students and supervisors and invites each to reflect upon their roles.

In the first part, the authors have a compilation of stories in which information, tips and advice are given before starting and during the initial steps of starting a doctoral program. One of the first things to be aware of is that the authors collected experiences in three main settings, the UK, USA and Australia, therefore depending on where you are studying, the process is different, but we could use this as a reference point. In the United States, taking classes could lead to a late topic decision, but it is required a research topic in Australia and UK. Hence the

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interest, the topic and the supervisor alienation are the central relationships. Despite the context of the study at the end, what is needed is that an intelligent person with some previous knowledge can put a paper together in a coherent manner in a period of three to four years for full time and six to eight years for part-time students.

The process of a doctoral program can start even before the acceptance of the university. Sharing research ideas with colleagues and spending quality time designing a proposal have more chances to be read by a potential supervisor than sending randomly to supervisors who will choose based on their interest. Having a miscellaneous folder in which the ideas are organised, written, rewritten, modified, etc., contributes to improving writing, a complex skill that needs to be developed and should be highly advanced to be clear for the readers. The topic is significant since it needs to have you hooked for at least three years. The PhD starts with the research proposal, but in fact, it may start even before, meaning that by doing retrospection and reflection of who we are, our interests and professional life, we could find the right place in which we could make a contribution.

After the previous hectic going through, now we will refer to the interpersonal relationship between the student and the supervisor since this one is very important. Supervisors are the first network to establish an academically successful path. Reflection is required upon the roles of students and suggests that since this is the student's thesis, it is on him/her to take the lead and schedule meetings according to their pace, hand quality reports on time and intend to have a relationship outside the office with the supervisor. One thing to have in mind is that in the PhD studies, there are chances to have not only one but two or three supervisors, and it could become hectic to align all their comments. In addition, when we have more than one supervisor, we should take advantage that more than one head is on one research, but if general meetings are not possible, then one on one interaction could be better, and a base for the relationship can be built with co-authorship as the pathway to the academic life.

Consequently, there are four things that a doctoral student needs: Brain, passion, selfishness, and a good supervisor. The first three are under the control of the student, but for the last one, there are things to be considered, the supervisor most of the time has many things going on, and the time devoted to a student is minimum. Therefore, the expectation is that the student is prepared, records, or takes notes so that information is not repeated and shows care by sending documents at least a few days before meetings for quality feedback and finally the feedback should be reflected, and if advice is not considered to explain the reasons, then that is how the relationship takes a better step. The best supervisors are busy, and their time is gold.

On the other hand, during the writing process, grouping the readings and searches in topics will benefit the writing presenting how they differ from the contribution of the research and keep an organised process will end up in a successful doctoral degree in case of breaks and retake writing. After one knows about the research topic and reads about what has been done and what is missing, three main questions can be raised regarding the literature review. The first is about the methodology of the literature review, the second about the selection criteria and the last one the organisation of the literature review. During the writing process, there is a key aspect that can shape such writing, and it has to do with the research philosophy. One way to develop and discover the philosophy comes with the type of reading information and how to translate the philosophy into research practices and methods as they are historically and culturally situated. Some philosophies go better with certain methods, no one can say your philosophy is wrong, but they can say it is poor. Therefore, the quality of your reasoning and the completeness of the



explanation within the research are some of the most important things to be able to explain and defend.

One of the significant activities of doctoral students is reading, and it is a good advice to classify the information by date, by topic, or any category that allows keeping track of where to find the read information. Sometimes it is difficult to know where to stop reading, but something that is needed is to devote every day to write 800 words, having clear that what matters is not the amount but what is written in the document. Building arguments take time, but if it is done constantly, there might be good results. Also, regarding the transcription of data, depending on the purpose, it is good to transcribe all in case an examiner wants to check the data processing. However, generally, as a researcher, the students decide to choose the data to be used, relying on its ethics and transparency. Additionally, observe other people justification of their research decisions, practice why you choose the research position and methods in front of the mirror and be aware that mistakes are part of the journey and add value to the work. It is good to take some space to think and then use that reflection on paper to work on the feedback.

Finally, Time management is extremely important, especially for university students, because it will boost their grades and enhance their productivity (Laurie, A. & Hellsten, M. 2002). However, most of the time, students face problems like task aversion and uncertainty, so they start to procrastinate because they lack organisational skills and for the case of PhD students, those are owners of their time, and it is essential to set times to do something about the thesis every day as well as having a normal life.

In the second part, the focus will be on some of the issues during the doctoral process and tips to keep going in the right direction. The extensive reading and writing process has some shortcuts when the document is submitted to the supervisor, yet here I want to remind the reader of the importance of making the submission in advance. In this form, the supervisor has a good time focusing on the feedback. Giving and receiving feedback has to be carefully interpreted in order to respond accordingly. It is also important to check whom we are receiving feedback from and how to process it, as our feelings could be exposed. In such cases, knowing how to control and use the criticism into constructive feedback and improvements and being very careful on the observations and either correct mistakes or defend our position will determine the intellectual growth developed along the path.

Dealing with the supervisor's feedback is one of the first things to be learnt and handled. The first reaction is to take the comments personally, but it is important to understand that supervisors are there to help students, and the intention of the comments is far from hurting or making the students feel less knowledgeable.

The ethical part is among the most important aspects of the dissertation. In order to avoid unwanted research dilemmas, it is therefore important to ensure that careful planning and ethical standards are adhered to the procedure (Bouma, G & Ling, R., 2004). Before collecting data, the proposal has to go through the eyes of an ethical committee in order to obtain approval; in that event sending the proposal is a careful process, it is advisable to engage with the team members of the ethics committee during the process and prioritise ethical consideration early and in all phases of the research procedure, including the availability of information or publications to the participants. On the other hand, if the research is conducted with an organisation, the first step is to request approval by this one and within the benefits of a successful agreement is the accessibility to use pre-existing data. Our background and social relationship can have an impact on the way we do research and how we analysed it. Therefore,



having access to the right people requires joining research events like symposiums, conferences, seminars, etc. Then, building networks and collaboration with community partners can even contribute to unexpected ways like having a smooth data collection process. Referring to participants, depending on the position, profession or any other characteristic will require different skills to be approached. In the book, the authors made a reference about interviewing elites and advice that it is important to be persistent, prepared and corroborate the information.

Curiously, at the end of part two, the authors remark again about time management personally and professionally. It is essential to develop a plan, be consistent for a long period of time, reward oneself when accomplishing goals and ask for help if something that can take our attention comes and be aware that research takes unexpected extra time. In the asking for help facet, two tips are provided: the first, knowing the availability of supervisors is important to know about their unavailability, where availability does not only refer to frequent physical presence but also refers to having frequent meetings with the PhD student, and providing timely answers to questions via email and feedback on the student's written work (Overall, Deane, & Peterson, 2011). Additionally, engaging in activities as a practitioner, from teaching to research, is a smart decision to build up experience, networks and facilitate to erase the academic versus professional experience. The second field is the personal one as time-management is relevant to organise family and self-time activities, build a life in and outside the doctoral program, have friends who could become cheerleaders, and learn to be our own cheerleaders. Having a balance between dedication and dedicating personal time is important; studying a doctoral program should not be equal to leave life on the side. A negative consequence of not being able to manage time intelligently could end in quitting, building negative emotions towards the university, supervisor, or the topic of research. As a concluding thought, avoiding mistakes relies on foreseeing and finding the balance between academic and personal life.

In the third and last part of the book, the main ideas are focused on the writing part and the first steps of finding a job. Since both have a meaning in the head of a doctoral student, on the one hand, developing an important skill like writing and, on the other hand, making practical sense of the invested time and energy in the study period is also essential. The information provided in this chapter offers a connection with time management. The reason is that the writing process is a unique step in which putting ideas on paper requires some skills. It is suggested to establish eight daily working hours to write the thesis, read, correct, and publish. However, every person has a different process; some could be more effective in writing in less time. Either way, it is important to have a plan of tasks and deadlines. Then we need to find the approaches that work best for us, and during this overwhelming process, it is important to remember that there are supervisors, mentors and advisers who can help.

In this chapter, the authors provide four steps concerning how to write qualitative data: mind mapping, outlining the narrative, illustrating the narrative, and finally integrating the evidence. Following these suggested steps and having constant dedication will result in a well-written paper, which contributes to a richer feedback process with the supervisor, focusing on the content rather than on the form.

Writing every day helps to improve the process and send pieces of the dissertation to family, friends, writing partners and professors to be read and receive extra feedback. Some good tips are: first, when the writing is done, it is recommended to let a question or note on to know what is next so that over the day or night, you can think and start writing the next day. Second, having



an accountability coach to keep track on how many days and hours are devoted daily and weekly to writing. The third refers to freewriting, and then the fourth advice is that as we continue writing, we should see an exemplar or a thesis we can base on with a similar topic and organise the chapter accordingly, then write a key sentence for each paragraph, after checking within the sentences, and finally it comes to check the cohesion between paragraph and paragraph. In addition, ask for informal feedback before formal feedback. Readout loud to find wordiness, punctuation and make the sentences clearer. After the previous steps, send the document to your committee and let them do their job. After all the written process, the next step is defending the thesis and presenting your work to your colleagues. Critics can be challenging, but they should be accepted and intelligently respond to feedback without defending your mistakes. To minimise critics, it is advisable to practice a viva, ask for a mock with the supervisor to answer possible questions. The day of the viva is one of the most desired by doctoral students.

During the doctoral and after it, there are academic activities that cooperate in career development. Consequently, attending conferences and reviewing journals help to find researchers in the field of interest and reach to them by email, with the intention to request the possibilities of follow-up contact. In addition, publishing the work is meaningful, and there are different ways to publish, on the one hand, co-authoring with supervisors, also as a solo writer and publishing from the dissertation. For writing, it is essential to look for samples of articles and have them as a guide to accomplish what the journal unconsciously looks for. One of the most important pieces of art is to publish parts of the dissertation in collaboration with the supervisor. Finding the best journal to publish your paper could be possible by looking at repetitive names in the references of articles in connection to the research topic and checking the impact factor. Depending on the journal, the article could be returned to the author(s) two, three, or four times for amendments, responsibility for the preparation and correction of the work will fall on the author(s), which usually involves tight deadlines. Publications in high-ranking journals can take at least two years so that a publication plan can be helpful regarding submitting and publishing papers (Thomas, B. & Skinner, H. 2012). After rejection, paying attention to the mistakes and rewrite to resubmit will end up in a successful publication. One remark to clarify contributions in journals regarding publications, books reviews are not peer-reviewed and are time-consuming. They do not count, but they show engagement in the field.

Finally, after all the doctoral process, we come to realise that graduate school is about much more than dissertation writing, and it is a unique opportunity for professional growth and development (Fernandez et al., 2019); getting an academic job requires a passion for being a scholar and goals connected to our principles.

Supervisors are also a contact; some receive job opportunities that we might not even find in the searchers. Creating an online profile connected to social media and uploading work experience and contributions to the field make it look professional, which is as important as joining online platforms for researchers. For a more physical preparation in getting a job, one way to be prepared for interviews is to visit the campus, become familiar with colleagues, and a relevant point less considered is finding a workplace that fits personal needs and contributes to a successful job experience. Labour markets and disciplines are changing, so we need to adapt to such changes. A good CV and proper advice on how to present it can be decisive in the selection criteria. Then with more chances to be chosen, we should put first the strengths and the things that have been done, but for those who are not finished, it is necessary to use the proper vocabulary to write things not yet accomplished but fit the search of our job.



This book provides a close perception of involvement in a doctoral program through real participant's experiences. Different aspects of the process are covered with the respective suggestions, and it is remarked that the tips are just some of the possible forms that can be applied as it is based on personal preferences that everyone builds its own process. The three chapters and within them the 59 titles contained in the book, in my opinion, are well supported and exemplified, portraying the participants' voice. The book achieves its purpose of awareness depicting the different pictures students are exposed to during the doctoral program and provides valuable information to be considered and followed.

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