# Your Candidature Lifecycle: Progress and Milestones

Your progress through your candidature is monitored and documented by a series of formal progress reports and compulsory milestones. This regular reporting provides an opportunity to reflect on your progress, your supervision, resources available to you and any barriers that could impact your candidature and completion targets.

You should develop a research plan specific to your project and your particular goals and, together with your Advisory Panel, regularly review and update your plan in terms of what needs to be prioritised or redefined. Your research plan will also be submitted to the GRS along with each of the milestone forms.

Think of each milestone and progress report as a stepping-stone to completion

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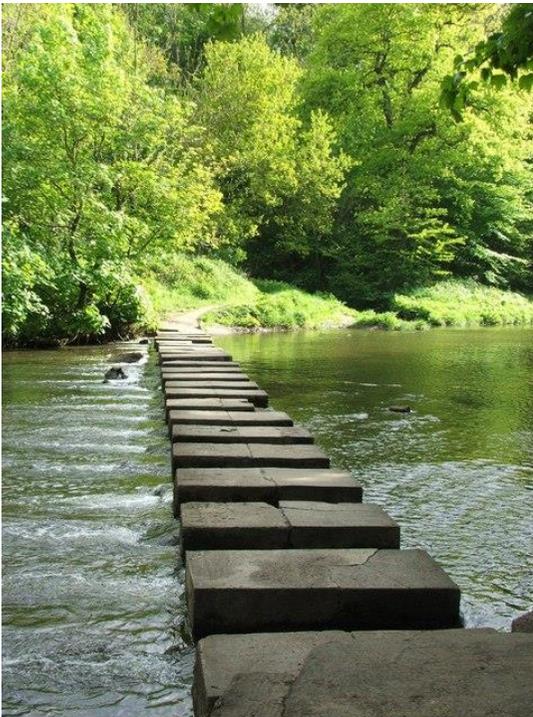
Milestones

There are six formal milestones in the lifecycle of a doctoral candidature:

- Candidate/Advisor Agreement
- Confirmation of Candidature*
- Mid-Candidature Review*
- Pre-Completion*
- Thesis Submission and Examination*
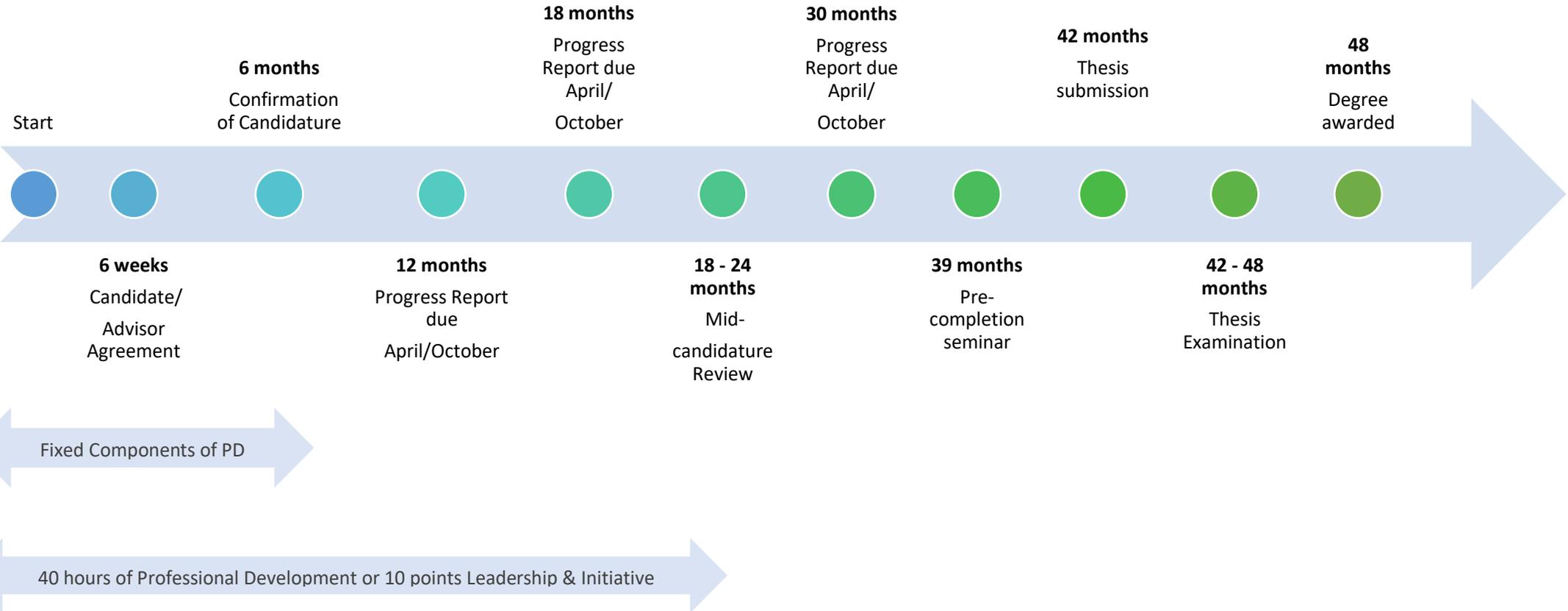- Response to examiner Reports

Progress Reporting

Additionally, there are two progress reporting periods each year: 1 November to 30 April and 1 May to 31 October. If you have not completed a major milestone* during a reporting period, you and your Advisor will be required to submit a Progress Report.

Detailed information on each milestone can be found in the HDR Milestones and Reporting Procedure, and in three sections below that will help you navigate of each stage of your candidature: *Getting Going*, *Getting Through*, and *Getting PhinisheD*.
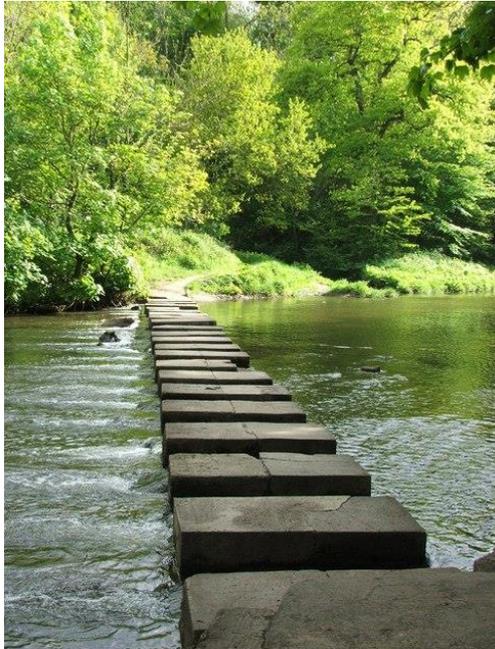
Progress Support. In the event that your experience a setback to your expected progress, additional support is available to you through the HDR Progress Support Strategy. You can find more detailed information here.

Doctor of Philosophy Timeline

Start

6 months
Confirmation of Candidature

18 months
Progress Report due April/ October

30 months
Progress Report due April/ October

42 months
Thesis submission

48 months
Degree awarded

6 weeks
Candidate/ Advisor Agreement

12 months
Progress Report due April/October

18 - 24 months
Mid-candidature Review

39 months
Pre-completion seminar

42 - 48 months
Thesis Examination

Fixed Components of PD

40 hours of Professional Development or 10 points Leadership & Initiative

Getting Going:
Preparing for HDR Confirmation of Candidature

These tips are for candidates and their advisors to consider as you prepare for the confirmation of your candidature (after reaching the six-month full-time candidature equivalent point).

This is a crucial stage of candidature - the time when your provisional enrolment is confirmed. This guide is intended to provide advice on how to prepare and plan for this phase. Our aim is to help answer the questions:

… do I have a clear direction for my research and my thesis?
… is my project of sufficient scope and standard for the degree?
… am I resourced and ready to begin the next phase of my candidature?"

What is Confirmation of Candidature?

Preparing for Confirmation of Candidature provides you with a scaffolded approach to starting your research studies. It forms the basis of your first discussions and work with your advisory team and ensures that the scope and focus of your study will meet the requirements of your degree. The Candidature Committee reviews your work to assess whether:

- your proposed research is feasible and achievable in the time available and if the outcomes of that work are likely to meet the award requirements

- your presentation of the work to date demonstrates appropriate progress in developing the research skills and capacities that are needed to conduct the research at the appropriate level.

Experts beyond your advisory team provide formative feedback to support you and your research. This type of review is part of the life of the researcher and your capacity to engage with and respond to feedback is designed to contribute to your research training experience.

Components of the milestone

There are two major components to the completion of Confirmation of Candidature, RD7001 (Research Proposal) and RD7002 (Literature Review). Together these separate components form the basis for assessing your eligibility for confirmation of candidature. The work in each is complementary and together represent the outcomes that are reasonable to expect from a candidate after 6 months of full-time study or 12 months of part-time study in a Higher Degree by Research.

Your Confirmation Seminar is a 30 minute (plus questions) public presentation where you present this work to your Candidature Committee, your colleagues, fellow candidates and friends. You should contact the Academic Services Officer in your College for help in arranging your seminar.

You can find all the procedure, forms and template here.

Timeline

As soon as possible after course enrolment	▪ Set a timeline for preparation of the literature review and professional development ▪ Set the seminar date and appointment of Expert Reviewer, download and review the COC Proposal Template. ▪ Review the GRS emails and website to ensure you complete the required compulsory training components
6 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Advisory team submits research proposal to the Expert Reviewer using the COC Proposal Template
4-6 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Submit literature review to Advisory Panel for comment
4 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Make amendments to research proposal in accordance with Expert Reviewer's report
2-4 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Complete the Professional Development Audit and Plan in Appendix 1 of the COC Proposal Template in discussion with your Advisory Panel
2 weeks prior to seminar	▪ Advisors complete RD7001/RM7001 Advisory Panel Report on COC Assessment Form
1 week prior to seminar	▪ Finalise the literature review and submit it with COC-Proposal Template, COC Assessment Form and revised Candidate Advisor Agreement to the Candidature Committee

Notes on using the template

The COC-Proposal Template provides a guide and format for the preparation of the Research Proposal and associated documents including the Professional Development Audit and Plan, Response to Expert Review and Budget as required. The Research Proposal that will be sent to the expert reviewer does not require inclusion of any appendices. The Final version of the Template to be submitted with COC-Assessment Form

one week prior to the Seminar must include all required appendices. The Literature review does not form part of the template but must be attached to the COC-Assessment Form.

Tips for Success

- If you are late with your Confirmation of Candidature, you are also likely to be overdue with finalising your thesis. If you start well, you are likely to finish well.
- Familiarise yourself with the requirements of the Research Proposal and Literature Review subjects.
- Familiarise yourself with the requirements for this milestone and the templates and assessment forms that are used so you understand how you will be assessed (HDR Milestone and Reporting Procedure)
- Participate in the Graduate Research School's Professional Development Program being mindful that you complete the compulsory components.
- Start preparing your proposal, substantive written work and seminar well in advance. Written work is likely to require multiple drafts before it reaches the standard expected of an HDR candidate.
- Allow plenty of time (about six weeks) for external review of your written work prior to the seminar.
- Improve your proposal by incorporating comments from your Advisory Panel and the expert reviewer.
- Ask other members of your research group to critique your work as they will give valuable feedback.
- Practise your seminar several times, including at least once in the place in which you'll be presenting it publicly – be that face-to-face or by live-feed. Many candidates now present via Zoom, so discuss the arrangements with your advisory panel and make your preparations accordingly.
- Time your seminar and keep within the recommended timeframe of 25-35 minutes.
- If you will be using a PowerPoint presentation, check that your slides are legible from the rear of the seminar room or on a computer screen.
- Take opportunities to build your networks and engage with your peers – support is critical to success.

Review and refresh your Candidate and Advisor Agreement

As you move through this milestone and on to the next stage of your candidature you should meet with your advisory team to revisit your Candidate and Advisor Agreement.

Prompts to frame your thinking and conversations with your advisors as you move ahead include:

- Craft: Can you outline your planned research?
- Pivot: Being ready, able and willing to modify elements of your research is a normal part of life as a researcher. Consider whether you need to modify any part of the plans for your research as you move into the next phase.
- Plan: Think about your candidature lifecycle and look to the requirements of your next milestones (mid-candidature). Plan your time and resources to make sure you are on track. There is a useful timeline in the HDR Candidate Handbook that you can use to help plan.

Notes for the Advisory Panel

Please be aware that in working with your Candidate toward Confirmation of Candidature it is your role to help them ensure they frame their topic to ensure that its scope and focus is achievable within the time and resources available.

To assist you in this work there are a series of compulsory components that all candidates must undertake intended to ensure they are aware of degree requirements, they have access to services to support their skills development and that they are aware of their responsibilities in working with you.

Working from day one we envisage the planning for the first milestone, Confirmation of Candidature will begin and that the Research Proposal and Literature Review will inform your work together.

Please work with the candidate and College Academic Services Officer (ASO) to plan a realistic date for the Seminar - accounting for student progress and availability of panel members. The key materials to be aware of can all be viewed here including subject outlines, the template and the form. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your College ASO or the Graduate Research School. These questions may include the candidate needing leave or an extension.

In order to prepare the research proposal, we ask that you identify an appropriate external reviewer and ensure they are able to review the work within two weeks. The reviewer must have no conflicts and be appropriately qualified and trained to be able to assess the work independently, accounting for the requirements of the Confirmation of Candidature. The elements of this work are spelt out in the COC-Proposal Template. Only the template and none of the appendices are to be sent to the External reviewer using the email proforma provided.

Your work with the candidate will culminate at least one week prior to the seminar with your approval by signature of COC-Assessment Form.

Getting Through:
Tips for candidates approaching the Mid-Candidature Milestone
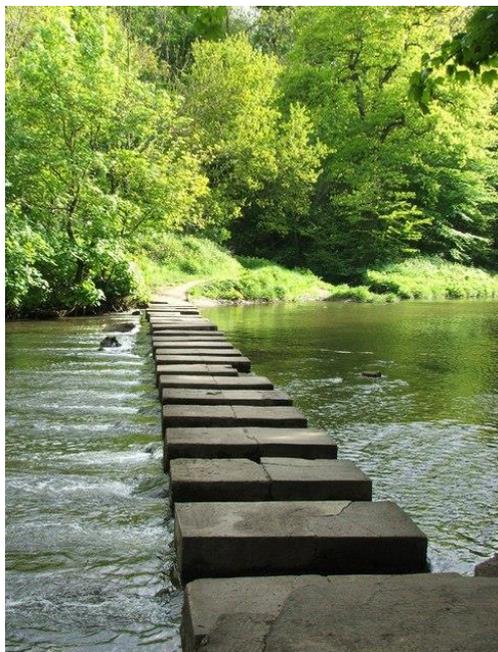
These tips are for candidates and their advisors to consider as you approach your mid-candidature milestone (at the two-year full-time candidature equivalent point).

This milestone is pivotal – it marks the time when you are moving into the second half of your candidature.

This tip sheet is designed to provide you with an overview of the milestone. You can find the relevant procedure, forms and template here.

What is the Mid-Candidature Review?

This milestone is designed to test the following questions:

- do you have a clear direction for your research and your thesis?
- is your project of sufficient scope and standard for the degree?
- are you resourced and ready to begin the next phase of your candidature?

What is required?

At this milestone, your Candidature Committee will:

- review current drafts of materials that you have prepared for inclusion in your thesis, including a substantive piece of written work identified for detailed consideration (e.g., thesis chapter or journal article)

- evaluate a seminar or poster on an aspect of your research findings. If you have submitted a paper to a peer-reviewed publication or made a comparable presentation at a conference external to JCU since your Confirmation of Candidature, you are exempt from this particular requirement

By this stage, you must also have completed certain Professional Development requirements.

If a seminar is required, it will be a public presentation where you present this work to your Candidature Committee, your colleagues, fellow candidates and friends. You should contact the Academic Services Officer in your College for help in making arrangements.

Review your Candidate and Advisor Agreement

As you move through this milestone and on to the second half of your candidature you should meet with your advisory team to revisit your Candidate and Advisor Agreement.

Prompts to frame your thinking and conversations with your advisors as you move ahead include:

- Craft:	Do you have a clear path for the remainder of your research.

	Do you have a detailed thesis plan?

- Pivot:	Consider whether you need to modify any part of the plans for your research as you move into the next phase. Being ready, able and willing to modify elements of your research is a normal part of life as a researcher.

- Plan:	Think about your candidature lifecycle and look to the requirements of your next milestones (pre-completion). Plan your time and resources to make sure you are on track. Questions to frame your thinking as you move ahead include:

	o	Which member(s) of my advisory team will I be working with most closely in this next phase?

	o	How will those working arrangements be structured?

	o	Will I be aiming to publish? If so, how will publications and authorship issues be handled?

Tips for Success

- Take the opportunity to publish your work and present papers at conferences. If you do this successfully you will find it much easier to fulfil the requirements of your Mid-Candidature Review.

- Peruse the assessment forms so you understand how you will be assessed (HDR Milestone and Reporting Procedure)

- Ask other members of your research group to critique your work as they will give valuable feedback.

- If you are required to give a seminar, rehearse it several times, including at least once in the same room in which you'll be presenting it publicly, or on Zoom if that is the format you will use.

- Time your seminar and keep within the recommended timeframe of 25-35 minutes.

- If you will be using a PowerPoint presentation, check that your slides are legible from the rear of the seminar room or on a computer screen.

- Participate in the Graduate Research School's Professional Development Program.

- Take opportunities to build your networks and engage with your peers – support is critical to success.

Getting PhinisheD:
Planning and Navigating the Completion Phase
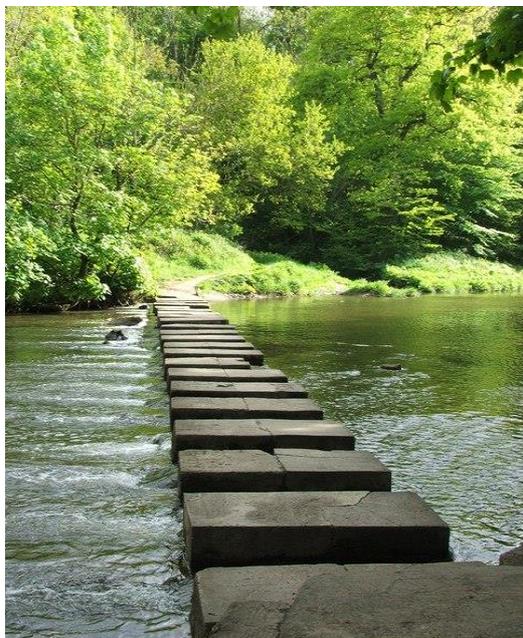
These tips are for you to consider as you approach the final stages of candidature. You will be working toward three milestones:

Pre-Completion Milestone

Submission for Examination

Responding to Examiner Reports

The final stage of candidature can be challenging. This guide is intended to provide advice on how to prepare, plan and navigate the three milestones that comprise this final phase.

An Indicative Timeline for the Completion Phase

Task	Approx. timeline
Review and revise advisor agreement. Create a completions timeline	After you complete your mid-candidature milestone
Pre-completion milestone	3 years and 3 months (or part-time equivalent)
Send thesis for professional editing (if needed)	As soon as possible after the pre-completion seminar
Nomination of examiners	As soon as possible after the pre-completion seminar
Thesis submission for examination	3 years and 6 months (or part-time equivalent)
Response to examiners' reports	To be completed before 4 years enrolment (8 years part-time)

Review your Candidate and Advisor Agreement

What?   At this stage of your candidature, you should work with your panel to ensure you have shared understandings of key expectations of this critical completion phase. These understandings should be reflected in a revised version of your Candidate Advisor Agreement.

When?   A good time to review your agreement and start planning for the final stage of your candidature is immediately after you have achieved your mid-candidature milestone.

How?   Here are some key elements of the completion phase together with questions that you might use to inform thinking, planning, and preparation. The questions are offered as guides, and you are free to modify or add to them as needed:

Craft:	Can you outline your planned thesis structure?
Pivot:	Do you need to modify your plans for the thesis to bring it to completion on time? Does this mean shifting the structure, or changing the scope of the work?
Plan:	What is your planned pre-completion date, and what needs to happen to complete that milestone on time? What is your planned thesis submission date for examination and what needs to happen to meet that forecast deadline?
Negotiate:	How do your plans fit in with others' timetables and commitments? How can you modify timelines and processes together to suit?
Communicate:	Discuss needs early and revisit plans with your advisors, peers or critical friends as needed
Reach out:	Do you need help to articulate your needs with your advisors, especially around feedback timeframes and other important matters? Do you need help interpreting advisor feedback?
Create support:	What support do you need from advisors, peers, or other critical friends?

Creating a Timeline for Completion

Work with your advisory team to build a timeline that accounts for the work to be completed and the requirements of the thesis. Use any timeline format that works best for you and your advisors. An example template using MSWord is included at the end of this document, or you can use a Gantt Chart format available free of charge from http://www.ganttproject.biz

Consider whether you need to modify any part of the plans for your research as you move into the next phase. Remember, being ready, able and willing to modify elements of your research is a normal part of life as a researcher.

Create a master file that contains all the component parts of your thesis. In each part include all the written work you have done for that part to date. Review the master file with your advisor and identify what research remains to be done. Consider if this work is essential to the thesis.

Discuss and agree the role of each member of the advisory team. Advisors can divide up the review work to optimise application of their expertise, ensuring quality feedback. Agree timelines for returning written work, making sure any leave or teaching or service commitments your advisors have is accounted for. Be clear that you want to ensure you have set aside sufficient time for reviews to occur.

Ensure your timeline is realistic, allowing sufficient time to conduct all outstanding work, including work yet to be written.

Preparing your Thesis for Examination

- Find a thesis in your discipline that you can use as a reference. One that is easy to read and has a structure that aligns with what you have planned for your thesis. Check the JCU Thesis Collection.

- What are the component parts of your thesis (e.g., chapters, papers, exegesis and creative work)?

- The introduction and conclusion are usually the last sections finalised. The intervening chapters highlight the significant contribution which you speak of in the introduction and conclusion.

- Detail the title of each chapter and write a short abstract to describe the argument the section makes and how it contributes to the whole. Are the abstracts an introduction to the chapters?

- Once all sections are complete, review the work as a whole. Ensure you can see the coherence between the chapters and consistency of the argument presented throughout the thesis.

- Use writing support services or peer groups or journal reviewers to assist in the refinement of drafts. You should also have talked through use of jargon, abstract words and grammar. Writing support services can help with links between paragraphs, headings and links between sentences.

- The style guide for your discipline will assist you format tables and graphs consistently, and then ensure they are aligned with text that explains and elaborates on information provided.

- Work with your liaison librarian to review in text referencing and reference lists again to ensure consistency in formatting. They can also assist with any copyright issues related to figures or information used. Use iThenticate to find any potential referencing that may need to be added.

- By creating two secondary documents one including just the table of contents, and the second just the first sentence of each paragraph you can easily review logical flow of information between paragraphs and sections.

- Ensure you have the Research Question/s or hypothesis or problem for your study referenced and addressed throughout the thesis to ensure overall coherence and focus.

- Is the writing clear, is the argument logical, have you made a statement that makes it clear why an examiner should care about reading your work? Ensure that you know what they will learn or gain for taking time out to read your chapter/publication/thesis?

- Discuss strategies for managing conflicting comments from your advisors. For example, either they agree before you see the comments, or you see differing comments and make recommendations back to the panel, etc.

- Have your completed data available to the examiner to support and validate your findings if required.

Your Pre-Completion Milestone

Your Pre-Completion Milestone is due three months before your expected submission date (thesis submission should be planned for 3 years and 6 months after commencement).

The key purposes of this milestone are to:
- provide you with helpful feedback during the final three months before you submit your thesis for examination
- ensure that the thesis (or creative work) and data is of a standard that is ready for examination
- provide you with the opportunity to synthesise, present and defend the results of your research.

Consult the [Pre-Completion Milestone](#) procedure (Section 4) for details of how to arrange the seminar and what you are required to prepare. You should also familiarise yourself with the **evaluation form** for the milestone.

Data, Ethics and Intellectual Property Matters

The final months are also when you need to ensure you have addressed all ethics clearance and IP agreement and data management requirements. Go back to the documents, check what you said you were going to do and ensure it aligns with information in the thesis.

Ensure you have securely saved, in appropriate formats and on appropriate sites, any information that must be stored or may need to be referenced or reported on into the future. Refer to the [Research Data and Information Management Website](#) to ensure completion of data management requirements and remember JCU requires a copy of your research data for compliance and integrity purposes.

Refer to [JCU Connect](#) or researchdata@jcu.edu.au if you have any questions or concerns.

Plan for the Examination Process

When reading through each chapter of the thesis, identify potential examiners or scholars that you think would be interested to read it.

Think about examiner expectations. The role of the examiners is to review your work and provide written feedback and a recommendation for the outcome. Remember - examiners are looking for evidence to recommend that the thesis be passed!

Thesis examination techniques vary but may include reviewing the table of contents and reference list for consistent use of disciplinary practices in your work or focussing on sections that are aligned with an individual examiner's expertise and who possibly may wish to review the data. When you are preparing for submission, try to read the work from the perspective of potential examiners.

Waiting for Examiners' Reports: Think about life beyond the doctorate

- Find time to prepare a publication plan to ensure you disseminate your findings and research beyond the thesis.
- Consider the industry or community partners who have supported your work. Make plans to share outcomes or report back as you come to the end of the thesis journey.
- Have a career plan that considers the role of your thesis and doctoral experience when taking next steps. This may help you frame the thesis and publication plan.
- After thesis submission, it is time reconnect with people. Celebrate submission with family and friends.
- Ensure your publications are online linked to your ORCID and relevant disciplinary systems.
- Ensure Data Publication is completed, and appropriate access conditions and licence is assigned for potential sharing and re-use for future research project, this also guarantees correct attribution, citation and visibility.
- Use social and other media to share key outcomes with key stakeholders.

Respond to Examiners' Reports

Eventually your examiner reports will come in! When they do, you will most likely be required to make some revisions to your thesis. At this point, you should work with your advisors to discuss the required revisions and plan a strategy and timeline for addressing them. Treat this process in the same way that you did when you were working toward submission: have a plan, meet regularly, and schedule times for feedback.

Build Your Support to Conquer your Barriers

You are likely to find yourself needing all kinds of support as you navigate your way through this final phase of your candidature. Here are some common barriers, some links and suggested ways to deal with them:

Barriers	Resources and Strategies
I am not ready to complete	Trust your advisory team to give you guidance. Seek reassurance from counsellors and trusted peers. Find friends with experience to give feedback and support you.
I need help with writing	Academic and Thesis Writing Workshops Thesis Preparation Resources Library Guides and Events
I need help with formatting	Thesis Preparation Resources Capstone Editing Elite Editing
I need help with references and citations	Referencing Do a quick iThenticate report to check you haven't accidentally plagiarized
I need help with editing	Capstone Editing Elite Editing
I need help with version control or access to my data	Using Microsoft for Thesis Production
I need help with my data	Research Data & Information Management Website
I'm procrastinating	Find someone to be accountable to - your roommate, partner, best friend, child, parents, neighbour or colleague. Ask if you can report back to them on what you did yesterday. Share success, and report on incremental progress or setbacks.
I don't feel committed to completing	Revisit your candidate and advisor agreement and note commitment to mini milestones to support your steps to submission*.

* If you do have priorities that mean you can't pay full attention to your thesis, consider taking a leave of absence until those priorities are addressed. Government support of your tuition fees is limited. You need to manage your enrolled time to avoid extra personal costs that will arise as you progress candidature. If you have received a scholarship with living allowance, it is not likely this will be available after you reach the 3.5 year full-time equivalent point. If you are an international student there will also be challenges to obtain visa and tuition fee sponsorship extensions.

Helpful links

Support Services and Training Resources:
- [Academic Writing and Editing workshops](#)
- [Copyright Guide for Research Students](#) (PDF)
- [Counselling Services](#)
- [Defeating Self Sabotage](#)
- [LearnJCU Resources in HDR Students community and Higher Degree by Research Advisors](#)
- [Library guides and events](#)including [JCU Library LibGuides - Referencing](#) (HTML) and [Discipline specific Liaison Librarians](#)
- [Using Microsoft for thesis production](#)
- [Research Data & Information Website](#)

Guides and helpful links
- Editing of Thesis
  - [Guidelines for editing research theses](#)'
  - [iThenticate User Guide](#)
  - [Capstone Editing](#)
  - [Elite Editing](#)
- Examiner comments advice
  - [Framework for Response to Examiners Comments](#)
- Milestones and forms
  - [PhD Milestone Information](#)
  - [HDR Thesis Submission and Examination Procedure](#)
  - [Pre-Completion Seminar Guidelines](#)
- Thesis related
  - [HDR Thesis Preparation Guidelines](#)
  - [Criteria that Distinguish Between High Quality and Marginal Quality Theses](#)
  - [JCU Thesis Collection](#)
  - [Thesis preparation resources](#)
- * Brown, R. (1994). 'The 'Big Picture' About Managing Writing', in Zuber-Skerrit, O., Ryan, Y. (eds) Quality in Postgraduate Education, chapter 8, pp. 90–109. London, UK: Kogan Page. [Google Scholar](#)

Forms
- [SUB-FORM-01 HDR Thesis Submission and Release Form](#)
- [Pre-Completion Evaluation Form](#)

Doctoral Thesis Completion Plan – Example (adapt to your needs)

Candidate Name: _____

Student Number: _____

College/Centre: _____

Principal Supervisor: _____

Thesis Title: _____

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Thesis Completion Tasks / Timeline proposed in order to complete the thesis.

Chapters	Title and Description	Current Status & What Needs Doing (Start with an estimated percentage of current completion)	Date for completion	Date Advisors' review due back
Chapter 1				
Chapter 2				
Chapter 3				
Chapter 4				
Chapter 5				
Chapter 6				

Pre-Completion Milestone Plan:

Date milestone is due to be achieved (3 months prior to submission date)	Task	Timeframe	Done ✓
	e.g., Contact College ASO		
	e.g., Finish revisions to Chapter 4		

Resources required to complete the thesis:

Description of Resources Required	Estimated Total Amount ($)	Notes

Advisory Meeting Planner:

Date of meeting	Who will meet	Purpose	Done ✓

Notes

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