

Getting the thesis PHinished – tips for HDR Candidates, Advisors and ADREs

Susan Gasson, Hilary Whitehouse, Christine Bruce.

Background

These tips are for Candidates and their advisors to consider after reaching the 3 year full-time candidature equivalent point without having a thesis ready for examination. We are helping you answer the question “how is your thesis going and what strategies may help to get your thesis submitted?” These are suggested strategies you should adapt and adjust to meet the needs of individual candidature circumstances. The final few months of candidature can be challenging. This guide is intended to provide advice on how to prepare and plan for this phase.

Writing health check

Work together to build a timeline that accounts for the work to be completed and the requirements of the thesis. Brown (1994) suggests one strategy you may find useful to plan next steps.

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

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?

Create a master file that contains all the component parts. In each component 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? If so prepare a timeline to conduct outstanding work.

What remains to be written? Incorporate this writing into the timeline if it is needed for the thesis.

Commit to a realistic submission timeline with check in and feedback meetings. As each piece is submitted the candidate can progress to the next phase of work to progress. Advisors can divide up the review work to optimise application of the expertise, ensuring quality feedback.

Once 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.

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

Examiner Expectations – Is your thesis good enough?

Review the [HDR Thesis examination form](#) together and consider if your thesis addresses all the criteria.

Examiners, usually in 6 weeks, will review your work and recommend an outcome. The process might include looking at the table of contents and bibliography to see consistent use of disciplinary practices in your work. Thesis reading may focus on sections aligned with their expertise. The result will be written feedback and recommendations. They are looking for evidence to recommend that the thesis be passed, if they find counter evidence it may take them longer for them to respond. The university will consider examiner recommendations then advise you on next steps.

Reclaiming your life – what happens beyond examination

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.

Use social and other media to share key outcomes with key stakeholders.

Breaking the barriers

Barriers	Strategies
I am not ready to complete	Trust your advisory team to give you guidance. Seek reassurance from counsellors and trusted peer. Find friends with experience to give feedback and support you.
I need help with writing the thesis	Academic and Thesis Writing Workshops Thesis Preparation Resources Library Guides and Events
Barrier: The formatting of the thesis is not working	Thesis Preparation Resources Capstone Editing Elite Editing Referencing
I know what I think but I can't write it clearly enough	Academic and Thesis Writing Workshops Thesis Preparation Resources
My thesis needs polishing the grammar and spelling are troubling me	Capstone Editing Elite Editing
Are you concerned with version control of your writing or access to your data set	Using Microsoft for Thesis Production

Need help with references and citations	Do a quick iThenticate report to check you haven't accidentally plagiarized
I am doing a lot of house cleaning, gardening and ironing	Find someone to be accountable to. Ask if you can daily report back to your roommate, partner, best friend, child or parents, colleagues or peers on what you did yesterday. Share success, and report on incremental progress or setbacks.
I don't feel committed to completing	Think about revisiting your candidate and advisor agreement and note commitment to mini milestones to support your steps to submission.

Don't chew up your candidature time (EFTSLs)

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.

Hot Tips

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.

Find a critical friend who can informally read your work progressively and reassure you and speak to you as you progress.

Quick links

[JCU Thesis Collection](#)

[Counselling services](#)

Brown, R (1994) The 'Big Picture' about Managing Writing. Quality of postgraduate Education Zuber-Skerritt & Ryan, Y. 90-109. Available: <https://rl.talis.com/3/jcu/lists/6430AE81-016E-86F5-D9C0-A4BEDBCC8012.html?lang=en-AU&login=1>

[LearnJCU](#) Resources in Higher Degree by Research Students community and Higher Degree by Research Advisors.

[Defeating Self-Sabotage: Getting your PhD finished](#)

[GRS Thesis Preparation, Submission & Examination documents](#)

[Academic and Thesis Writing Workshops](#)

[Thesis Preparation Resources](#)

[Library Guides and Events](#)

[Capstone Editing](#)

[Elite Editing](#)

[Referencing](#)

[Using Microsoft for Thesis Production](#)