

THINGS NOT TO DO DURING PHD

WRITTEN BY

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LEARNING WITH CHANDAN

PERSONAL, ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL LEVEL
MISTAKES A RESEARCHER SHOULD NOT DO
DURING PHD

Things not do during Ph.D.

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About Learning with Chandan

Learning with Chandan is an interactive YouTube Channel which regularly shares many useful videos about research writing help. This channel started with a mission to provide quality content about research writing and shares many useful tips like “How to write Literature Review”, “How to write a Research paper”, “How to select a Journal”, etc.

About SS Edutech

"SS EDUTECH" is an online education platform founded by Mr. Arshpreet Singh to teach, learn, inspire and grow. The basic aim is to boost new teachers and provide students a meaningful platform to get knowledge about educational as well as entrepreneurship opportunities around the world. It also provides accounting and taxation services to help people in GST returns, Income Tax returns, Digital Signature Certificate (DSC), EPF and other accounting financial matters.

Introduction

Every human makes mistakes, as it is said “To err is human”. But it’s actually great to be aware of the possible mistake that could be made. Being aware can save you from making that mistake if not it can help you reduce its major effects on your life. So, in both cases, it’s a win-win situation for you. The mistakes that a researcher can commit during his/her are discussed in this book. These mistakes are very common, but can affect a researcher in multiple ways. While doing PhD, the life of researcher gets divided in three aspects i.e. personal life, academic life and financial life. The beauty of Ph.D. is that, it teaches you to balance all of them simultaneously.

- Personal Level mistakes.
- Academic Level mistakes.
- Financial Level mistakes.

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Chapter 1

Personal Level Mistakes

1.1 Doubting yourself

Doubting yourself is the biggest mistake a researcher makes during his/her Ph.D. You are capable of carrying out this research task. Trust yourself. May the force be with you.

1.2 Comparing your Ph.D. timeline with others

Every researcher has his/her timeline. It's totally fine if you are working slower than others. Ph.D. is a journey, not a sprint race, which you need to win amongst others and reach earliest. It's okay to take your time, and finish things little slow. Ph.D. is a journey filled with knowledge and endless experience along with learning, you have done fantastic till now, and you will excel in future too.

1.3 Measuring success by the number of journals or h-index

Your success is measured by how better you did than yesterday, not by how someone performed in his past 3 years. It's okay to take 3 years for one journal paper, as long as you learn. Focus on learning than output. Always

remember, "Its okay to take time to finish." And you are growing as long as you are developing skills.

1.4 Keeping Silent

This is the worst mistake that researchers do. They don't talk about the things that they are going through. Talk about your insecurities, talk about your fears, talk about things that make you feel insecure, just talk. It's okay to be imperfect, it's okay to be scared and it's okay to fail. But what's not okay, is to keep silent. You can talk to your friends or any stranger. A stranger is a stranger anyway, the worst that a stranger can think is what foolish this guy is. But the point is, does that matter what that stranger thinks, NO. But does that help, of course YES. Every human-being needs to vent those things out which subtly trouble him/her. If you are of extremely introvert nature, you can try writing your worries on a diary or something and burn it. I am not sure if that would work or not, but you can try and share the results with me too.

Chapter 2

Academic Level Mistakes

2.1 Trying to learn things not relevant to the thesis work.

Ph.D. is a course where you are exposed to a lot of things, some might be useful for your Ph.D. work, while some may seem useful, but are actually not. There might be online courses, hands-on workshops or expert lectures. So instead of just enrolling for every course that you see rhyming with your Ph.D. work, you need to analyze that if doing this course can actually be useful for your work. The perfect way to do this is to analyze the outcomes of the course. Have a look at the contents of the course, and see if they align with your work. Ask this question to yourself, does the things taught in the course relate to your research work. If you feel that even one single point that will be taught in that particular course can be useful for your Ph.D. work, then you must enroll in that course.

2.2 Trying to publish a lot of Research papers during Ph.D.

While doing Ph.D. we may get a lot of opportunities to publish papers, either in the form of conferences papers or journal papers. The vague idea that publishing a lot of papers helps in completing Ph.D. might lure researchers to send research manuscripts to the conferences. Merely increas-

ing the number of publications will not help you to get Ph.D. Just fulfill the criteria for getting Ph.D. i.e. 2/3 papers in SCI Indexed journals or according to your university criteria. And give your best shot in that. Fulfilling these criteria will be a Hercules task for you, and you won't be left with any time for publishing papers in a conference, unless your guide/supervisor asks you to do so, in which case, you are left with no choice.

2.3 Taking too long to submit the first manuscript

Researchers often struggle to perfect their manuscript. However, in this process they end up taking a lot of time. Ideally, the first draft of a research paper is ready within 2-3 months, after which 1 more month is consumed for corrections as instructed by guide/supervisor. But the reality is something else, most of the researchers take at least 4 months to prepare the first draft, since they want to perfect their first draft, this delays the submission of their manuscript. It's okay to get rejected; it's okay to face corrections.

2.4 Only reading, not writing side by side

If you think that just reading a research paper will get your work done, then you are wrong. You must plan to write at least 30 minutes every day. Doing this small yet difficult task everyday will get you prepared for the final battle of these writing at the end of your Ph.D., where you might be forced to write the whole day.

Here are some writing ideas that can help you in developing the habit of writing every day. You can write small excerpts everyday such as,

- Short summary of research paper that you read.
- Writing the experimental procedure on the setup which you are currently working on.
- Extracts of the meeting you just had with the supervisor.

- Important understandings of the results you got as a part of your research work.

If nothing amongst these is available, then you can just write whatever is on your mind. It might be any poem, short story, or just the recipe of the last dish you cooked.

Writing a short summary of research work done every day, will not only help you to develop your habit of writing, but will also improve your paraphrasing skills, since you are trying to write the work in your own words, instead of merely copy-pasting from any trusted source.

This simple task can help you in three ways. First, by writing about your research work every day, you are simultaneously writing your next research manuscript. Your next manuscript will be nothing but an organized collection of these everyday writings. Second, writing everyday this will help you in remembering the small details of your experimental setup and results. This can be very useful while discussing your research work with your guide/supervisor since everything will be fresh in your mind. Third, when you are writing your research work, many other aspects of your research work, which until unexplored might come up, leading to better experimental procedures, and ultimately better results.

2.5 Starting Ph.D. without Research plan/Blueprint

This is one of the worst mistakes a researcher can commit during his/her research life. Ph.D. is a time when we are fairly new to the research world. At this time, it's great to have multiple ideas in your mind about possible research topic. But merely having a research topic is not enough. A researcher should have a research plan, either proper or vague, ready before starting Ph.D. Having a clear research plan will help the researcher in three aspects. First, it will give a clear idea about what could be the possible steps/phases in which research should be carried out. Second, it will give a general idea about the tools which could be used. This alone helps to forecast many other things like the amount of budget required, or even selecting research lab to work on. When a researcher has a clear idea about

what tools/instruments would be required for his research plan, he/she will apply for that lab where those facilities are available instead of applying where he/she could get a chance. Third, it allows the researcher to forecast the time in which the research work would be carried out. So even before starting Ph.D., the researcher has clear idea about the number of tasks and expected time to complete those tasks.

2.6 Collecting papers from every source

Not every research manuscript found on the internet related to your research field will contain information related to your research topic. When we are selecting a research topic, we narrow down a broad research area in such a way that we can find some novel work to do. Similarly each research paper related to your research area maynot be useful for your research topic.

A researcher before deciding wether to use a particular research paper for his/her research manuscript, should do some analysis on that research paper. A very simple way to do this, is to analyze the abstract of the research paper, as after reading abstract, the researcher will have an idea about what is being discussed in the paper and the major findings of the research paper.

So, merely collecting every research paper found over internet might not be useful for that person.

2.7 Selecting research topic based on someone's advice

Never let somebody else to decide what you will be doing as a part of your PhD work. There are two factors that decide PhD work. First, the feasibility, the factor that decides, wether a researcher has the tools and facilities to carry out a research work. Second, the interest. Wether a researcher is genuinely interested in doing that research work or it's just an external motivation forcing that researcher to do this research. If it is the result of external motivation, then it won't be lasting that long and eventually the researcher will find some other topic interesting and might

consider changing the topic. So it's always advisable to choose topic by looking at your own interest and feasibility, rather than having someone else to choose it for you. Research is a long process, and usually takes 3-5 years. During this long tenure, a researcher will acquire a lot of motivation, and a major part of this motivation should come from inside of the researcher (internal motivation). This internal motivation factor might be missing if you are working on a topic on the basis of someone advice. So it's important that you choose research topic on the basis of your own interest, rather than someone's advice.

2.8 Depending upon Advisor to tell you, to what to read

In the initial stages of Research/ Ph.D. , we often tell our advisor/supervisor to provide us some reference papers to start out literature review. For initial stages, this is fine but it should not continue beyond that. A researcher should be able to decide on his/her own whether to read a research paper or not. A guide/supervisor will be able to guide you only till Ph.D., after that a person has to decide on its own. There are some very practical methods to do that, like reading abstract and conclusion of your research paper as it gives an idea about what the author is trying to discuss as a part of his/her research paper.

2.9 Neglecting Teaching Assistance ship (TA) Duty

TA duty is the best possible chance to practice and sharpen your public interaction and presentation skills. While being on TA duty, researchers get a chance to interact with bachelor's/masters student. This is a great way to practice for academia's. As academics, is what most of the Ph.D. holders join once their Ph.D. commences, while some try for post-doc to continue working in research lab. TA duty can help a researcher to develop new ideas as young minds are full of ideas, which possibly can lead to new project ideas.

Chapter 3

Academic Level Mistakes

3.1 No clear idea of Ph.D. Scholarship

Money is what we live for. Remember! , “Do not do PhD without fellowship”. Of-course, your advisor/guide will promise you to get your fellowship arranged from other source. But don’t rely on that. Arrange for the fellowship by yourself before joining PhD or at least have a very clear idea about it. If you think, you will figure that out once you have joined the PhD, and then there are chances that you may not get enough time to do that because of work pressure. The best solution for this is to rely on institutional funding instead of external funding. In the case of institutional funding, the scholar has direct access to the finance department of the institution through which the scholar can easily solve if any major/minor issues affecting the dispatch of fellowship. While in the case of external funding, the offices handling the financial issues might be located far away, so in the case of any issue delaying the funding, it takes a lot of time, to actually visit that office and get the problems solved, hence causing a delay in the funding.

3.2 Not filling Income Tax Return (ITR)

Tax related procedures are something that a research scholar is afraid when he/she doesn’t have enough knowledge about it. One of the primary reasons behind this being we, as research scholars have never been given this

tax knowledge. Since our school we have been taught majorly about our subjects with very little to none knowledge given about these factors. So, it's not your fault if you don't have knowledge about these terms and procedures. But it's important for a researcher to know about these things and have basic financial knowledge. The very first step of getting financially enlightened is to file the Income Tax Return (ITR). A research scholar might not be aware but there are many benefits of filing an ITR, primarily being getting an easy loan in the future apart from the tax benefits. According to Income Tax rules, Research fellowships, grants received from universities may all be exempt when their nature is to support further education. So, 'Scholarship granted to meet the cost of education' is exempt from Income Tax under the section 10(16). Other important benefits of filing an ITR are:

- **Easy Loan Approval:** As discussed earlier, filing the ITR will help research scholars, while applying for any kind of loans such as vehicle loan (2-wheeler or 4-wheeler), House Loan etc., since all major banks can ask for a copy of tax returns, as a proof of income.
- **Claim Tax Refund:** If you have a refund due from the Income Tax Department, you will have to file an Income Tax Return to claim the refund.
- **Income Address Proof:** Income Tax Return can be used as a proof of your Income and Address.
- **Quick Visa Processing:** Research scholars might need to visit other countries for various research related purposes. In this case, while applying for Visa, most Embassies Consulates require you to furnish copies of your tax returns for the past couple of years at the time of the visa application.
- **Avoiding Penalty:** Since research stipend is exempted from Income Tax, so there is nothing to worry about penalty. But once after completing the Ph.D., when a scholar joins some laboratory or institute, then the researcher will need to file the ITR. In this case it's always advisable to have prior knowledge about filing ITR. If you are required to file your Tax returns but didn't, then the tax officer deserves the right to impose a penalty of up to Rs.5000.

3.3 Not budgeting Ph.D. Fellowship

By the time, a scholar starts his/her Ph.D., he/she has already reached a landmark age of 25-30 years. This is an important time for every person, as at this time, the person may think of his/her other responsibilities towards family. No doubt a scholar might be getting a decent fellowship amount every month. But it's always a great idea to wisely budget your money. Budgeting your PhD research fellowship will not only help you to manage your money, but also can save you for the rainy day. It's always advisable to make an emergency fund and buy health and life insurance for yourself and your family. Most of the research scholars also plan to start a family, which again puts a burden on their fellowship. So it's always advisable for a research scholar to budget their fellowship from the very first year. Once a scholar has budgeted his/her PhD fellowship, he/she gets a vague idea about how much money he/she is left with after all the expenses. This extra money can be wisely invested in some schemes which not only will help the researcher to save tax, but also save for the rainy day. There are many options a researcher gets once he/she has budgeted his/her fellowship. Some of the being investing in a tax saving scheme, creating a pension fund, buying a medical insurance or investing in property/land/ Some great tax saving options that are available in Indian Markets are:

- Buy Term Insurance cover with a Sum Assured equal to 15 to 20 times of your annual income
- Public Provident Fund (Provide EEE benefits)
- Allocate at least 20 percent of your annual income to Market-linked Investment Options which offer EEE benefits.

For example:

- Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs) or Wealth Plans from Max Life
- Equity Linked Savings Schemes (ELSS)

Having a pension fund is a great way to ensure that you keep on getting money even after when you retire from your job. One practical method

by which a researcher can invest at least 10 percent of annual income in a pension fund, like

- National Pension Scheme (you can save Rs. 50,000 more).
- Pension Funds from Max Life Insurance.

Having a medical insurance is important as it can help in your times of medical emergency. Some great ways to have a medical insurance along with saving tax, includes

- Buying a Mediclaim health insurance cover for self.
- Buying a Mediclaim health insurance cover for parents.
- Covering yourself against critical illnesses like cancer (final stage only), renal failure etc.
- Getting cancer (all stages) cover for self

Conclusion

Knowledge about possible mistakes is the first step in preventing them to happen. Ph.D. is a journey that transforms a person completely from mental level to intellectual level. The points discussed in this book, might be helpful for research scholars, both who are about to start their Ph.D. journey or are currently in their Ph.D. journey.

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