

File 20110815.1549: Just got off the phone with Dr Ashbourn. She clarified a few things. Taking a leaf from her example in the past, I put few details in my email and spoke with her on the phone about things I really wanted to say.

She was unencouraging about the prospect of extensions (although appeals was left open and unstated); she told me to write an email right now to the assessors ‘further to my communication earlier today’ explaining that I will give them the chapters—and she made it clear, just a couple of polished chapters—by Monday, 29th August. I should apologise for the delay, explain that it resulted from a flood, but that I would have told them earlier but didn’t want to bring personal circumstances into it, and explain that cleaning up from the flood ate two weeks, and I need two weeks more to finish the written work.

Dr Ashbourn chastised me for setting a date (15th August) that the assessors did not demand. That was a tactical error.

Nobody cares, she said, what I do not tell them about. Exploit the informational disconnect of the assessors. Assume they have not read all my status reports; assume they have not talked with Dr Martin. Much more important than the viva is what I put before them to assess. They assess the written work. (Or data, or whatever.)

Set a soft date of ten days from now to finish. Then spend four days polishing it after that. In the email I send, I must include all the following components:

- An apology
- Copy to Dr Martin, Julie Sheppard, and Dr Ashbourn
- ‘Further to my message earlier today’
- Background of the two-week flood, concerned about family, etc.
- However, I am confident I can submit by Monday, 29th August [hard date]
- Can you please confirm that this is acceptable. If I do not hear from you, I will assume it is OK.

No one will ever know about the data you collected but didn’t get a chance to include, or the arguments you wanted to make but didn’t get to; all they can assess is the written work you give them.

I made one misstep by inadvertently insulting Dr Ashbourn with a ‘joke’ saying ‘quit talking to me and get off the phone; I need to work’. She said that American humour came across as harsh. I apologised and got back on the right foot by telling her about M’s blindness. She was very interested to hear all about that. But if I ever should suggest that I am wasting her time by telling her about my family, she bristles at that and says I am wasting her time if I ever try to tell her I’m afraid of wasting her time. Don’t ever presume to tell Dr Ashbourn you’re wasting her time—it wastes her time.

Finish early, then polish. Deliver on time. Talk to Dr Ashbourn again before the viva. It is true this is my last chance to confirm, but don’t stress and worry, just work. She is waiting for me at the finish line with a DPhil gown. I will do this. I can do this. I shall.

Sending email now.

References