

# The Confirmation Process

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# Introduction to the confirmation process

# Intro to the confirmation process

- Plan your PhD with your supervisor
- Contact your advisor
- Conduct a literature review – part of your research plan
- Put together your confirmation report
- Present a talk
- Discuss your confirmation report with a panel

What is the point of the confirmation process?

# What is the point of the confirmation process?

 **Crime Muse** @katejmclachlan · 30 May

I had my **Confirmation** of Candidature **Panel** on Monday & my proposal was deemed too ambitious. 'Won't be too much work' to pare back. Since then I've made muesli bars, apricot bliss balls, chocolate custard & currently planning macadamia white choc cookies. **#phdlife #phdchat**

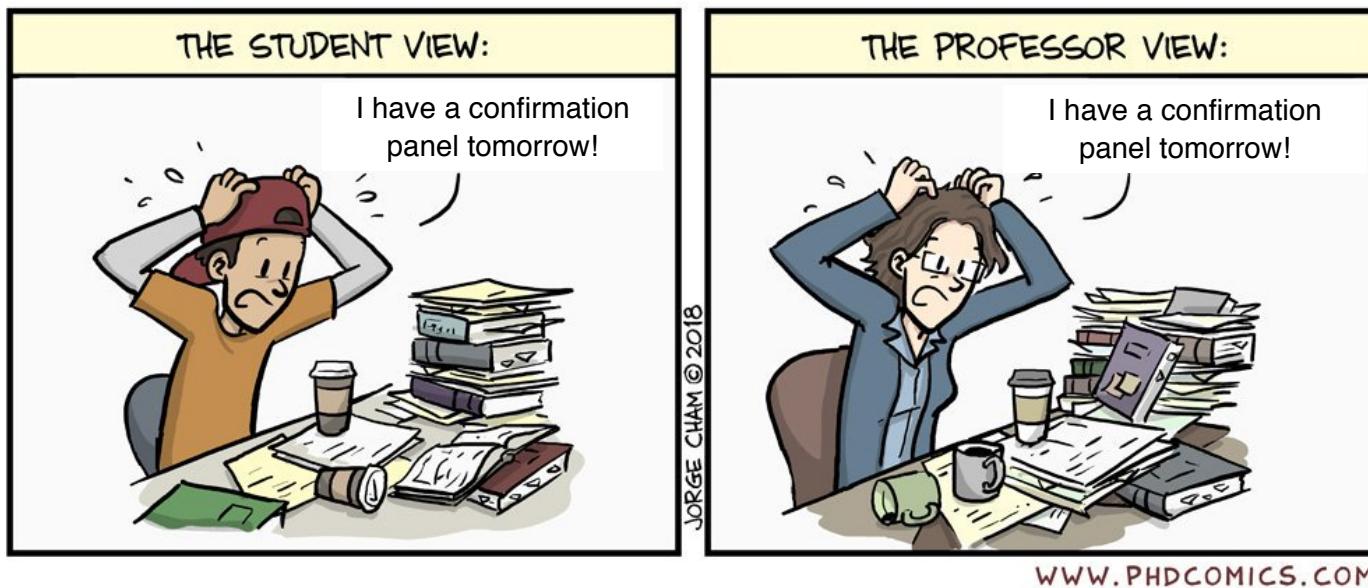


GIF

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# What is the point of the confirmation process?



How to set up your  
confirmation panel?

# The Confirmation Panel

- Contact your advisor and set up a meeting.
- Tell your advisor when you want to have your confirmation panel – usually late spring, in the summer or early autumn of the end of your first year – or about 8 – 10 months into your PhD.
- Discuss who you would like on that panel, which external people you want to have involved in assessing your PhD plans.
- Discuss how your advisor structures confirmation panels – the process is different in different parts of the school and is run differently by different people.
- Share your timing for your confirmation report preparation and discuss.

Give a talk

# The Talk

- Talk to Research Conference (April - May)
  - Sessions by research theme
  - 15 min slot - ~10 min talk and 5 min questions
  - Talk should include (title), aim of PhD, main research question(s), knowledge gap, background, methodology and field/lab/archive/interview plans if known, preliminary results if relevant
  - Other talk options are available if you can't make the conference

# Science Communication 101

- The hook
- Question? - resolution
- Analogies
- Relatable to everyday life
- Social math
- The story arc

What happens at the confirmation panel?

## The Confirmation Panel

- 5-9 months into 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Usually takes around 1 to 2 hours, sometimes longer
- Can be a 10 min talk at the beginning
- Usually about 1 hour of questioning from the panel members – supervisors are there but don't contribute to the discussion
- Discussion with the student without the supervisors to discuss student needs
- Short discussion with the supervisors without the student to discuss any issues
- Outcome of the panel presented with everyone present
- Follow up of paperwork with compiled panel feedback from the advisor
- Should be a jolly and engaging chat

# The Confirmation Panel

- Aims:
  - Student is capable
  - Project is working and feasible
  - Supervisory team is adequate
  - Necessary resources
- Format:
  - 15 minutes talk at School Research Conference
  - Report (word limit agreed with Supervisor; max. 10,000 words)
  - Interview (c.45 mins) with Review Panel (Advisor, other staff, +/- supervisor)
  - Written feedback from Advisor
- Outcomes:
  - Pass
  - Pass after submission of ethics form
  - Minor re-write – very normal usually because a section doesn't have enough detail or something is missing
  - Major re-write
  - Rescheduling of a confirmation panel

How to write your  
confirmation report?

# The Confirmation Report

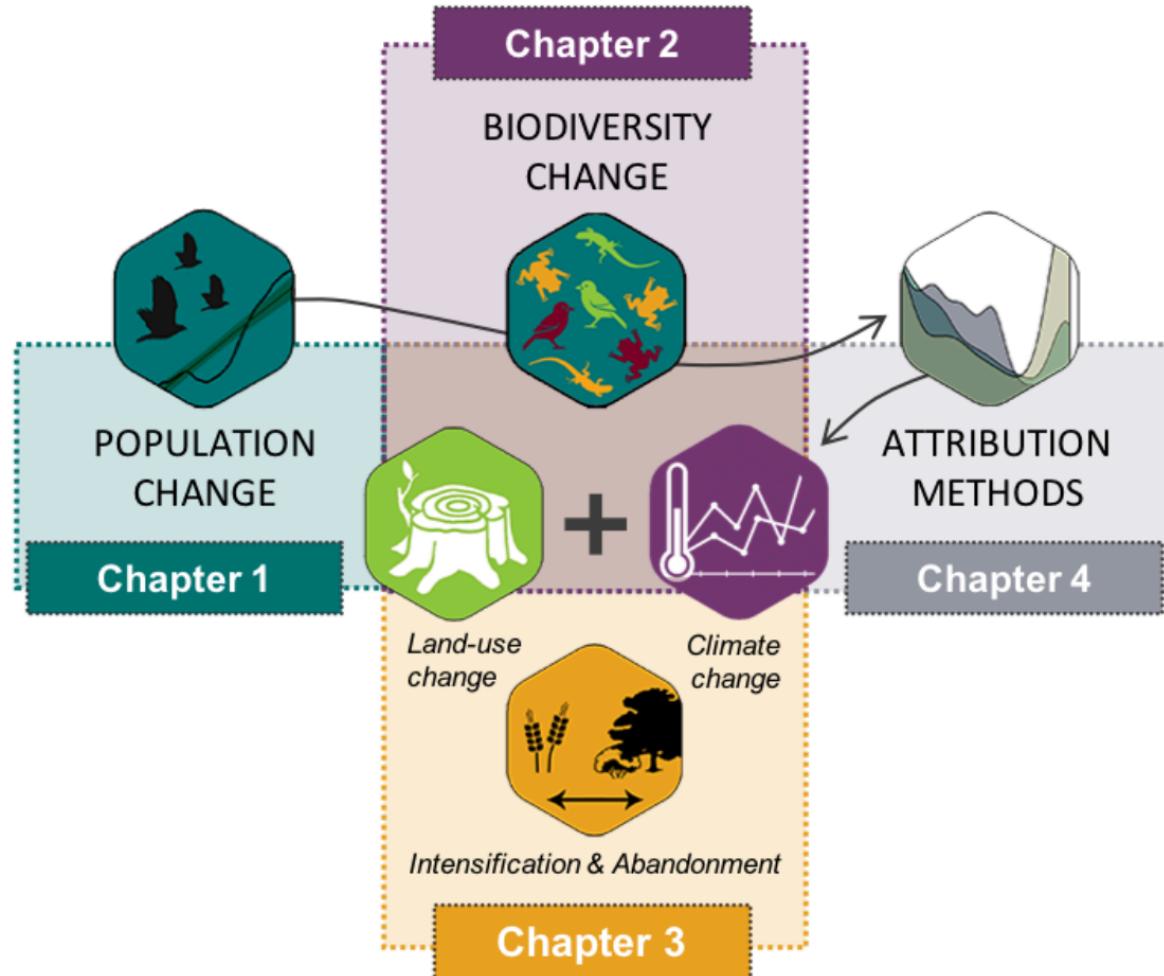
The Confirmation Report generally should contain:

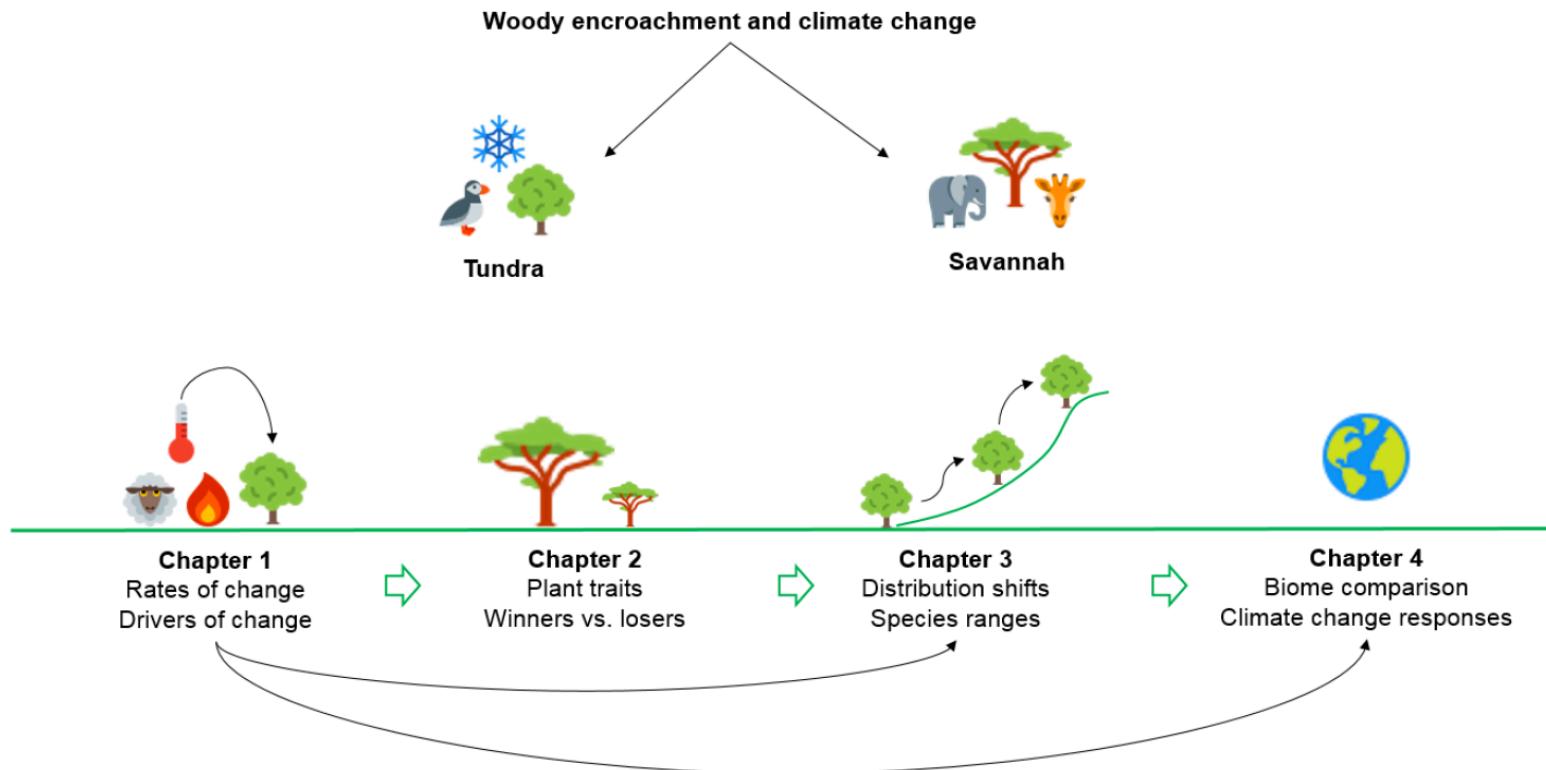
- A statement of the research topic and the research question(s).
- An account of the research context/background/brief review of relevant literatures
- An account of the proposed research design, methods of data collection and analysis
- Any results obtained so far where appropriate
- Preliminary identification of the key thesis chapters and/or publications
- A detailed plan for the next 6 months and an outline plan for the next 18 months (Gantt chart or timeline)
- A data management plan
- An brief overview of the supervisory arrangements
- An assessment of resources needed to complete the project
- The Ethics Determination Form
- Maximum of 10,000 words – generally more concise is better!

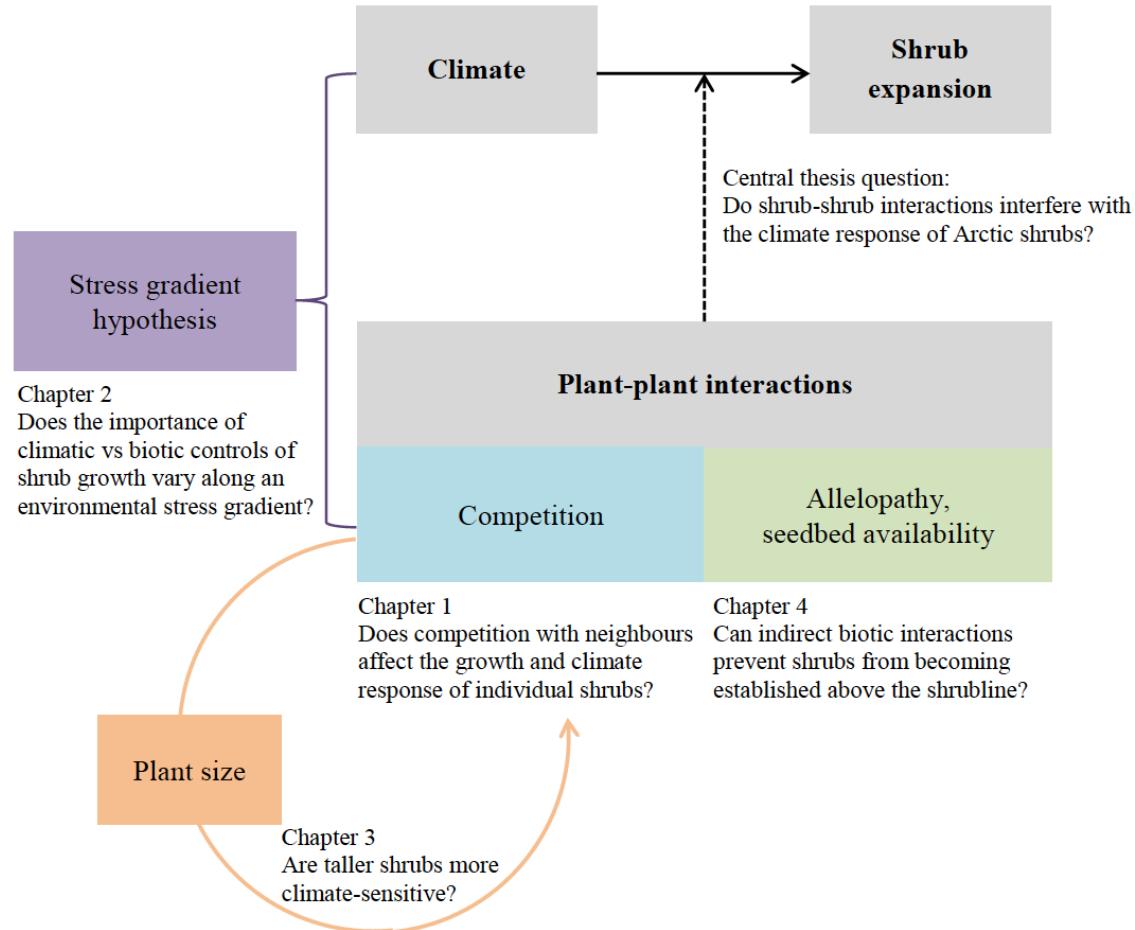
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Research aims .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Literature review.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Evidence for population change .....	7
Evidence for biodiversity change.....	8
Biodiversity change across metrics.....	8
Biodiversity change across scales .....	8
Drivers of biodiversity change.....	9
Evidence for biodiversity change due to land-use intensification and land abandonment .....	9
Methods for attribution analyses in ecology.....	10
<b>Databases.....</b>	<b>11</b>

<b>Chapter 1. Do species attributes and/or global change drivers explain vertebrate population change? .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 2. How is land-use change influencing biodiversity change?.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 3. How are land-use intensification and land abandonment influencing biodiversity change? .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Chapter 4. How can we statistically attribute biodiversity change to global change drivers? .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Project resources.....	30
Data management.....	31
Activities .....	33
Supervisory arrangements.....	36
Training .....	37
Timelines .....	39
References .....	41
Appendices.....	48

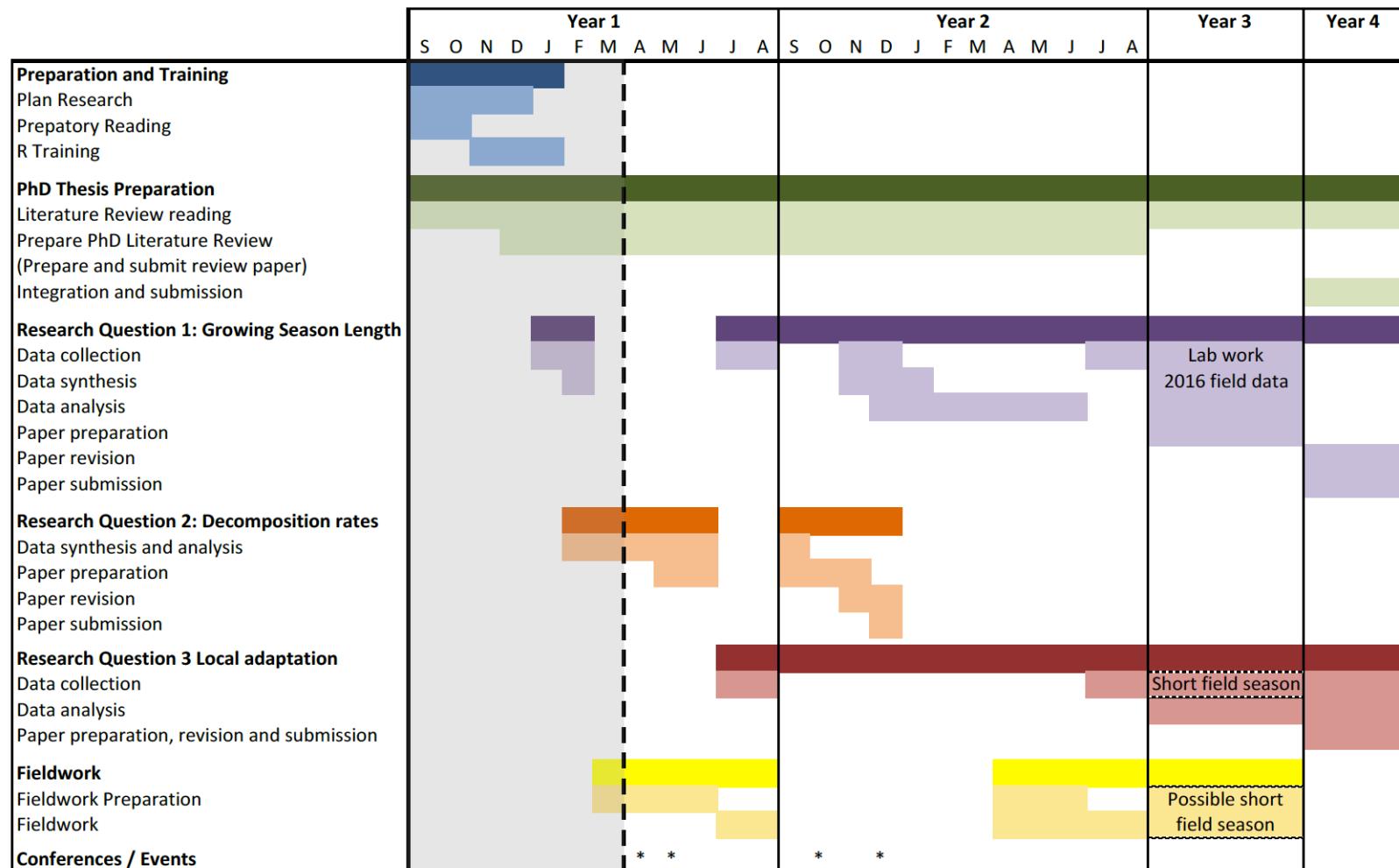
Make a conceptual diagram of  
your PhD and brand your  
research themes

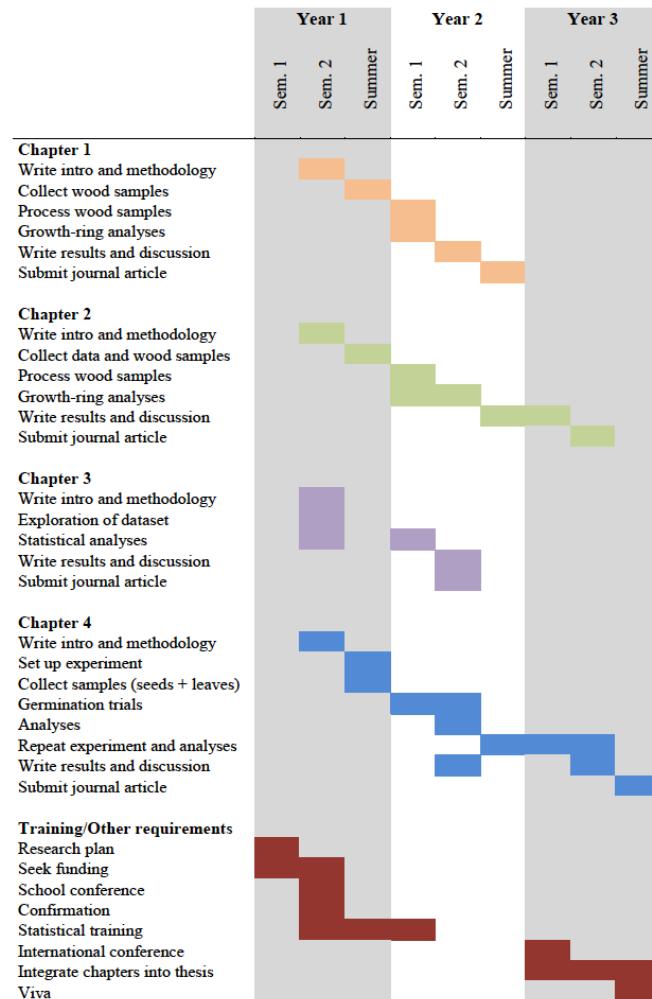






Include a detailed timeline  
and/or Gantt chart







Make sure you have developed  
your scientific pitch

**The hook** *Here is what is known about your general field – the big picture of your research:*

**The knowledge gap** *Here is what is not known about your general field – the gap you will fill:*

**The PhD motivation** *Here is how you are going to fill this knowledge gap – your methods plans:*

**The take-home message** *Here is why this research matters to the bigger picture of the field:*

## **Chapter 1**

*Specific 'what we know' hook:*

*Specific knowledge gap:*

*Research question:*

*Hypothesis:*

$H_1$ :

$H_0$ :

etc.

*Methods (bullet points):*

- 
- 
- 

*Anticipated results (what you anticipate finding out your hypothesis and null and/or alternative hypotheses spelled out in words):*

If we find this ... this will mean ...

If we find that ... that will mean...

Check your writing before  
sharing the report

# Your Confirmation Report Check

- Do you include all of the required sections and content?
  - Do you include a short literature review highlighting the research gap you will fill?
  - Do you outline your hypotheses/research questions?
  - Do you provide a clear timeline?
  - Is there content on at least three different PhD chapters?
  - Etc.
- Do you have clear topic and concluding sentences?
- Is the writing well structured and does it have good flow?
- Is your literature review well referenced (are you using referencing software)?
- Do you include preliminary data analyses if relevant?
- Is this document a good summary of your PhD plans to discuss in your panel?
- Have your supervisors already provided you feedback before you share with your other panel members?

## Common issues

- Too detailed without enough of the big picture
- Knowledge gap is not identified
- No research questions or hypotheses
- Not enough chapter specific methodological details
- No thoughts provided on the anticipated results
- No indication of why the research matters
- Too much jargon/buzzwords – should be written for a general scientific audience
- A specific section is missing such as the Data management plan
- Not professionally formatted or well proof read
- Talk was not practiced or lacks good science communication
- Too long without distilling the key messages – talk or report

## In the panel

- Come prepared, but be as relaxed as you can be.
- Do not get defensive, the panel may try to push you to the limits of your knowledge or to defend your work, so they may be looking for you to be clear or to say that you don't know something.
- When you are asked a question that you don't know the answer to – just say that you don't know. You can also start with: "That is a great question, I don't currently know the answer, but one way I could find out would be ..."
- Own your PhD topic and talk with confidence, but be respectful of other opinions in the room.
- Answer questions with short and direct answers and finish with I can provide more information or discuss x or y further.
- If you don't understand a question, or you need time to think, ask for the question to be repeated or repeat the question back in your own words to see if that is indeed what they are asking.
- Bring water or tea and paper and a pen and a marked up copy of your confirmation report!

# The Ethics Determination Form

Don't forget the ethics determination form:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/geosciences/intranet/working-in-school/other-important-information/ethicsinresearch>

The screenshot shows the 'SCHOOL OF GEOSCIENCES' website. The main navigation bar includes links for 'School of GeoSciences home', 'For Staff & Students', 'Working in the School', 'Other Useful Information', 'Research Ethics and Integrity' (which is the current page), and 'Contact us'. Below the navigation, the title 'Research Ethics and Integrity' is displayed. A sub-section titled 'Purpose of Ethical Standards' explains the importance of ethical standards in research. Another section, 'School Procedures', describes the Ethics Assessment Form and Guidance Notes. On the left, a sidebar menu under 'Research Ethics and Integrity' lists various resources such as 'Our Forms and Resources', 'Sample Project Information Sheets and Consent Forms', 'Guiding Principles', 'Procedures', 'Ethics Committee', 'Research Misconduct Procedure', 'School Policy', 'Authorship', 'Bullying and Harrasment', and 'Good Research Meetings'.

What are the specific guidelines?

# Confirmation Process

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/geosciences/intranet/student-support/postgraduate-research-support/pgr-handbookstudents/7-training-progress-review-and-monitoring>

## 7.4 Confirmation Report: Months 6-9 for Full Time Student, Months 12-18 for Part Time Student

### 7.4.1 Aims of PhD Confirmation

Although there is no formal change of degree status during Year 1, it is essential to review and 'examine' progress of students normally within the first 6–9 months for Full-Time students (12-18 months for Part-Time students). The purpose of Confirmation is to check that: (a) the student is capable; (b) the project is working and feasible; (c) the supervisory team is adequate; (d) the necessary resources are available.

Students in the ESRC 1+3 model (Masters + 3 year PhD) will have two progression points: (1) their satisfactory completion of the Masters will confirm progress to PhD; (2) during Year 1 of the (+3) PhD they will undergo Confirmation in line with School policy and as specified below.

Confirmation involves three components: the Confirmation Presentation, the written Confirmation Report, and the Confirmation Panel.

PGR offers workshops for Year 1 PhD students to provide guidance and advice in preparing for Confirmation. These are usually run in conjunction with the Institute for Academic Development (IAD).

### 7.4.2 Confirmation Presentation (Student responsibility)

- A short (normally 10-15 minutes) illustrated presentation outlining the research proposed, followed by 5 minutes of questions.
- Normally delivered at the Annual PGR Conference in spring.
- Attended by the student's supervisor/s, Advisor and preferably all academic members on the student's Confirmation Panel.
- The Seminar content should include: the research question/s, the rationale for the research, relevant theoretical and methodological issues, technical and procedural aspects of data collection and analysis. If appropriate it may report on initial findings.

# Confirmation Process

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/geosciences/intranet/student-support/postgraduate-research-support/pgr-handbookstudents/7-training-progress-review-and-monitoring>

## 7.4.3 Confirmation Report (Student responsibility)

- A written report circulated to the Confirmation Panel members 10 working days in advance of the scheduled Confirmation Panel meeting and also attached by the student to the student online first year review.
- Students can receive feedback from the supervisor/s on a draft version of the Confirmation Report if appropriate time is allowed.
- The Confirmation Report is a fully-illustrated and referenced written report. Students should consult with supervisor on the length of this report (maximum length 10,000 words) which should contain:
  1. A statement of the research topic and the research question, if appropriate;
  2. An account of the research context, including background to the topic, a rationale for its relevance to contemporary scholarship, and a brief review of relevant literatures;
  3. An account of the proposed research design, methods of data collection and analysis (including a statement on ethics) and, where appropriate, any results obtained from the PhD research so far (results are not expected for all students);
  4. Preliminary identification of the key thesis chapters and/or publications arising from the research (as appropriate);
  5. A detailed plan for the next 6 months;
  6. An outline plan for the next 18 months;
  7. A data management plan
  8. A brief overview of the supervisory arrangements
  9. An assessment of resources needed to complete the project;
  10. The Ethics Determination Form.

# Confirmation Process

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## 7.4.5 Confirmation Table

<b>Month in Year 1 (assuming September start)</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Months 1-2 (October-November)	Find advisor and inform PGR support  Student meets Advisor  Meet with Advisor	Supervisor   Student
Month 4 (January)	Attend PGR training workshop 'Preparing for Confirmation'	Student
Month 6 (March)	Nominate Panel members.	Advisor in consultation with supervisor/s and student
Months 6-7 (March-April)	Arrange Confirmation Panel meeting	Advisor
Months 7-8 (April-May)	Submission of Confirmation Report to Confirmation Panel members (including supervisor/s) 10 working days before Confirmation Panel and attachment to the student online first year review	Student
Months 7-9 (April-June)	Confirmation Panel meeting	Members of the Confirmation Panel
Months 7-9 (April-June)	Completion of the Confirmation Report Form- <a href="http://www.ed.ac.uk/geosciences/intranet/student-support/postgraduate-research-support/forms">http://www.ed.ac.uk/geosciences/intranet/student-support/postgraduate-research-support/forms</a> and submission of this to <a href="mailto:pgrsupport.geos@ed.ac.uk">pgrsupport.geos@ed.ac.uk</a>	Advisor
Months 7-9 (April-June)	Director of PGR to review panel's recommendation and form is returned to Advisor.	PGR Support
Months 7-9 (April-June)	Advisor to return approved confirmation panel report to student and supervisor so it can be attached to student's first annual review.	Advisor/ Student/ Supervisor

## Remember

- The confirmation panel process should not be scary
- The process is there to help you with your research progress
- You might find your panel meeting fun!
- Your confirmation panel report should be a cheat sheet and map for your entire PhD
- This is a chance for you to really define your research and set the stage for the next three years

## Remember

- Finishing the confirmation process is also a great reason to head to the pub to celebrate!

