



## For Postgraduate Research Students

A PhD is one of the most challenging academic qualifications a person can obtain, however it can open the door to a variety of opportunities especially if you have invested time and energy into planning and managing your career.

### Start planning your career now

As a researcher, you would spend time planning your research project so that you have access to the necessary information and resources to complete your project in a timely manner. You would also ensure that you are presenting your work and findings at the appropriate forums.

The same concept of planning applies to your academic and / or research career. By investing time in planning where you would like to see your career going, you will ensure that you are ready to take advantage of any opportunity that arises.

Planning your career will also help you develop a better understanding of yourself, your skills and your 'true' career goals. The time spent exploring your career horizon will also assist you with acquiring a greater understanding of the world of work, including the wider economic, political, social and technological climate and how this may or may not impact on future academic career opportunities and decisions.

It is also important to note that career planning is not a one-off activity. For genuine career success you will continuously review and assess your career pathway to ensure you are fulfilling your career, personal and life goals through continuous learning and professional and personal development.

### Find a good mentor

Navigating the world of academia can be challenging, therefore it is wise to find a good mentor who you can turn to and bounce ideas off. A mentor is someone you can look to for guidance and direction.

Your selected mentor should be someone you trust and respect. The conversations you may have with your mentor will vary from your research area, career development and career management to maintaining

motivation when the going gets tough, balancing research and teaching loads as well as personal life issues. Given the range of issues you may share with your mentor it is important that you know that your mentor can be trusted with such personal information.

### Networking your way into a job

When buying real estate the chant you hear is 'Location! Location! Location!' When it comes to planning and managing your career, the chant should be 'Network! Network! Network!'

Networking is essential if you have decided to embark on a PhD. Completing a PhD can be an isolating experience especially if your project does not require you to work within a team environment or interact regularly with fellow students, staff members and industry bodies. On some occasions, a PhD can result in a person losing contact with friends and colleagues as they are often required to make many sacrifices to ensure they complete their thesis on time.

However, networking can prevent this from occurring. Networking is a way of building connections and relationships with colleagues and companies which may result in future opportunities and insights. Some of these could lead to strategic collegial alignments, long lasting friendships and possible employment outcomes.

If networking is undertaken with a 'what can I get from you' attitude it will often fail. Networking is not about taking but about sharing, engaging with others, building relationships and making connections.

That said, it is important to be honest when networking and not to pretend to be someone you are not. Additionally, when you have made a connection with someone, you need to manage and nurture the relationship and maintain the connection over time.

Networking comes naturally to some and is a learnt skill for others. Find a method of networking that is congruent with your style e.g. even the shy and introverted can be great networkers when they focus on one-to-one or small group relationships.

The best places to network are not only at conferences and professional development courses but also within your department and the university postgraduate student group. Some of your best friendships and networks will be established during your candidature.

## Contributing to Publications

Publications are essential if you wish to pursue a career in research and academia. Having publications will make you more competitive in the academic job market as they are often a key requirement of the selection criteria for job applications and promotions. They are a way of clarifying your research ideas, validating your research, and receiving constructive and critical feedback. At the same time, publications will assist with building your reputation within the research community and help with obtaining research grants.

It is great if you are able to publish early in your research career, however it is important to focus on quality papers and not just the quantity of papers. Therefore, when it comes to deciding where you should publish, talk with your supervisor, colleagues and fellow students to get ideas with regard to which journals are most suitable to your research. The same applies when you are displaying your work at conferences, galleries and / or exhibitions. You want to ensure you are getting your research into reputable journals, conferences and events. This will also help ensure your research is being presented to potential employers.

## Focus on employability skills

With a PhD, not only will you gain additional knowledge regarding a specific area of research, you will also develop many transferrable skills which you will find useful in all areas of work and life. The Graduate Careers Australia Postgraduate brochure touches on the types of transferrable skills you will develop via postgraduate studies.

[www.graduatecareers.com.au/content/view/full/3118](http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/content/view/full/3118)

The types of skills you will develop include independent thinking, project management and leadership. To learn more about the types of transferrable skills you will develop from completing a PhD visit:

[www.careers.usyd.edu.au/students/jobsearch/employability.shtml](http://www.careers.usyd.edu.au/students/jobsearch/employability.shtml)

Also consider looking at the Transferrable Skills Portfolio developed by Flinders University Faculty of Social Sciences. The site contains excellent information about transferrable skills, why they are

important and the employers' perspective.

<http://socsci.flinders.edu.au/skills/>

## Writing your resume

The most requested document when applying for a job is a resume. If you don't have one, start developing one NOW. Don't underestimate the time it will take to develop a professional resume.

When developing a resume you need to clearly identify your skill set and knowledge base and you will need a sound understanding of your personal goals and career values. You need to research the organisation or learning institution and learn about their application procedures and work values. Then match your skills and knowledge to the role and organisational values. Most importantly, you need to ensure that your resume meets the needs of your intended audience and it is likely you will need to revise your resume for each job application.

An academic resume is slightly different to the type of resume you would use when applying for a job in a different industry. Obviously your academic qualifications are essential. Your work history within academia as well as any research experience needs to be highlighted in the resume, especially any achievements and outstanding results that may have come from your research.

Publications, presentations at conferences, awards and successful grant applications are also an essential item on an academic resume. These areas demonstrate that you have the capacity to produce successful research. Furthermore, awards and successful research grant applications validate the importance of your work within the research community.

*The most important information to include in your resume includes:*

- Professional qualifications and universities attended
- Research fields
- Teaching experience and list of courses taught
- Academic awards and grants
- Professional development and evidence of additional talents as appropriate for the job
- Details of service or administrative experience
- Professional memberships and offices held
- List of publications
- List of conference papers
- List of book reviews
- Referees

## Addressing the selection criteria

The majority of academic jobs will ask you to address selection criteria, a list of requirements considered essential or desirable in the position. When addressing each criterion, where possible provide practical evidence of how and where you have demonstrated or developed the desired skill or experience. It is not enough to say that you believe you have the skills to meet the selection criteria. Keep your answers specific to each selection criterion. Giving long-winded written answers can turn the reader off your application so keep your responses concise, relevant and factual.

Visit the Careers Centre's website for general advice on job applications, writing resumes, cover letters and addressing selection criteria.

## Impressing the interviewers

Panel interviews are generally the most common form of interview for an academic position. The number of panel members can range from two to ten or more and will often consist of staff members from across a number of areas of the university, and not necessarily just from your specific discipline.

Often there will also be informal meetings with departmental staff members either before or after the panel interview. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the department and possible future colleagues. However, keep in mind that every person you meet is potentially interviewing you and that their interaction with you may be considered by the main interview panel.

Obviously you will need to revisit your application and the job description so you fully understand the role and how your skills and knowledge align with the position.

*Examples of possible questions for an academic interview include:*

- Describe your research – have strong articulate answers (short version for non-expert panellists and longer version for experts in your field).
- What were the key achievements from your research?
- How would you contribute to current research projects within the Department?
- What experience have you had teaching and supervising students?
- Explain your teaching style to us.
- Give us an example of a time when you have had to manage a challenging student. Outline the issue and how you managed the situation and the outcome you achieved.

- What are your plans for future publications for your research?
- The university is interested in making greater connections with the local community. Is there any scope in your planned research to contribute to this university objective and, if so, how?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- How do you intend to fund your research?
- Tell us of a time when you have been a member of a successful research partnership involving other disciplines or partners external to a university and what your role was and the outcome of the research.

It is also a common requirement to give a presentation or short lecture outlining your research. The audience may include students, academics within your discipline or faculty and / or other academics and staff members across the university as well as community or business representatives.

It is essential that you are well prepared. Speak to your supervisors and other academics about presentations they have had to give at interviews.

*In planning for the presentation:*

- Ensure you understand what you are required to present on and stay on task
- Research who will be in the audience and prepare appropriately
- Practice your timing
- Speak clearly and to the entire audience
- Use current forms of technology and visual aids where appropriate
- Consider having handouts ready
- Invite the audience to ask questions
- Thank the audience at the end

It is important to note that finding the right person for the position is no longer just about getting the brightest person with the best research output. It is also about finding the best 'fit', someone who will work well in a team and positively contribute to the goals of the department and faculty and ultimately be able to contribute to the reputation of the school and the greater university community.

Keep focused at the interview, greet each interviewer with warmth and dress professionally. If relevant, take a portfolio of your work and show examples where appropriate. Talk about the 'added value' you can bring with you to the department. Don't forget to smile and be enthusiastic.

Visit the Careers Centre's website for general advice on interview skills and preparation so you are fully prepared for your interview.

## Life, love and laughter after submission of your dissertation

Many PhD candidates mention that they felt as though they had to put their life on hold to complete their dissertation. There is a perception that PhD students have to give up all social contacts, other employment and basically any activity that is not related to their research and dissertation if they are to be a true research student and complete within the designated period.

Others have talked about getting to the half-way point of their dissertation and feeling like 'the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off'. Many begin to wonder whether they made the right decision in taking on such a large commitment. The important thing to remember is that these are all normal thoughts and feelings.

There is no way to ignore the fact that a PhD is an extraordinary task to complete. However, with the appropriate planning and support structures, the PhD candidature experience can be very rewarding career-wise, intellectually, socially and personally.

It is important to stay focused on your research and it is equally important to think about the future and visualise what that might look like. Stay connected with your support networks, be vigilant about developing new networks, plan a rewards system for each milestone and create your own life, love and laughter after your dissertation.

## Get help with your career plan

Start planning your academic and research career well before you submit your dissertation. Within 12 to 18 months of commencing your PhD, start building your career plan. Take an active role and sit with your supervisor to plan which conferences to attend. Also plan to present and participate in poster sessions at conferences. You need to be aware of the most current research and developments within your industry if you expect to pursue a career in research and academia, therefore join appropriate professional associations and list server groups.

The Careers Centre provides a specific service for Postgraduate Research students. This includes resume support, academic information sessions, faculty-based workshops and individual career management sessions.

[www.careers.usyd.edu.au/career\\_advice/career\\_options/phd\\_candidates.shtml](http://www.careers.usyd.edu.au/career_advice/career_options/phd_candidates.shtml)

## Career management and job application resources

- UK website specifically for PhD and researchers [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)
- USA Information on the skills developed during postgraduate study [www.chronicle.com](http://www.chronicle.com)
- Identifying your skills [www.strath.ac.uk/careers/pgr/postgraduateresearchersidentifyingyourskills/](http://www.strath.ac.uk/careers/pgr/postgraduateresearchersidentifyingyourskills/)
- Getting an Academic Job, by Michael Ernst <http://pag.csail.mit.edu/~mernst/advice/academic-job.html>
- Preparing for an Academic Job Interview by Mary Corbin Sies, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland <http://faculty.virginia.edu/schoolhouse/ProfessionalizationPage/JobAdviceandQuestions.html>
- What to Ask During an Academic Job Interview, by Tara Kuther <http://gradschool.about.com/cs/academicsearch/a/facint.htm>
- Academic Job Interview Advice, by Mary Corbin Sies <http://otal.umd.edu/~sies/jobadvice.html>

## Job boards

- Australian jobs and details on scholarships, awards and grants [www.researchjobs.net.au/](http://www.researchjobs.net.au/)
- UK based [www.phdjobs.com/](http://www.phdjobs.com/) [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)
- USA based [www.career.edu/](http://www.career.edu/) <http://chronicle.com/jobs>
- USA and Canada [www.univjobs.com](http://www.univjobs.com)
- Science [www.newscientist.com/home.ns](http://www.newscientist.com/home.ns)
- International academic job hunting site [www.academic360.com](http://www.academic360.com)
- Science, Maths & Engineering career resources [www.phds.org](http://www.phds.org)