How to get the most out of your research degree

Obtaining a Masters or PhD: Following a recipe for success

Ultimately, to get the maximum out of your course, it is paramount that you know exactly what the point of it is. While we all have our personal goals in the forefront of our minds, such as increasing our employability or landing that long-sought after promotion, what does it really mean to successfully obtain a Masters or PhD degree? If the words ‘specialised knowledge’ and ‘skills’ come to mind, you are right. At its core, however, its meaning goes much deeper. To be awarded this research degree means you have proven you have the critical thinking skills required to independently conduct novel research. That is, you trust your judgement enough to put yourself in the front seat, and your own work out there for critical review by academics.

You demonstrate this aptitude through your thesis. Not only do your peers, supervisors, and future employers expect this; it is actually a formal regulatory requirement in the national policy for qualifications in Australian education (Australian Qualifications Framework, website https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-second-edition-january-2013) for awarding you the degree.

So how can you prove and showcase independent research skills in your thesis? Believe it or not, there is a recipe! The recipe applies to every task you undertake through your research journey, no matter how big or small it is; such as formulating research questions, organising your thesis structure, selecting methods, and writing well-structured sentences and paragraphs.

Based on feedback, evaluate your successes and identify areas for future improvement. Through repetition of this process, your independent research skills will continue to strengthen until you become an expert! Ultimately, by preparing meticulously for every meeting in this way, regardless of whom it is with, you will impress them with your organised, considerate, thorough, clear minded and independent strengths. Your ‘preparedness’ will open doors where and when you least expect it!

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