

# Guidelines for PhD Students

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*“...learning is not a process of dishing out information...Education...is learning to think for oneself under the guidance of a teacher...”*

Bertrand Russell, *Wisdom of the West*, p.68

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# Why do a PhD?

Some good reasons are:

- you enjoy solving problems
- you enjoy learning
- you're curious
- you like making sense of the world
- you enjoy creating things
- you like a challenge
- you want to contribute something to the world

# Why do a PhD?

- A bad reason: to prove how clever you are
  - Does that make the work enjoyable?
  - Do you want to spend years doing that?

# Good and bad aspects

- Freedom
  - Very few people have so much time and freedom
  - You may never have it again!
- Frustration
  - A PhD is hard
  - You may not be used to the lack of guidance
  - Things will go wrong
- Uncertainty
- Misguided objectives

# Uncertainty

- Problem: Uncertainty
  - What should I do now?
  - Is my work correct?
  - Are my results good enough?
  - Has this been done before?
- Solution: avoid worrying
  - Make a plan
  - Accept that you did what you thought was right
  - Move on

# Misleading objectives

- Before PhD study, students get marks for everything
- Does a high mark prove you understand?
  - No. You can memorise a formula without understanding it
- Does publishing a paper prove you are doing the right thing?
  - Publishing (in good places) is good
  - But it should not be your only objective

# The thesis

- You get a PhD if your thesis is good enough
  - BUT a PhD is a journey, not a destination
- The PhD results are not so important
  - How many people will read your PhD ever?
  - How relevant will it be in 10 or 20 years?

# The thesis

- What is important?
  - The skills you have learned
  - That you are a mature, independent researcher
- After your PhD you will have another journey
  - How different will the subject be?
  - What skills will you need?

# Overall aims

I suggest they should be:

- to become a competent, independent, mature and well-rounded researcher who is prepared to pursue an academic or scientific career
- to do good research
- to enjoy it
- to help others do the same

# Specific objectives

- Critical thinking skills
- Communication skills
- Planning and management
- Networking skills
- Social/interpersonal skills
- Lifelong learning
- Independence
- Initiative
- An understanding of professional and ethical standards
- Self-knowledge
- Contributing to the academic life of your group

# Guidelines

- Take taught courses
- Give a guest lecture
- Give a seminar on your work
- Set and mark coursework
- Organise something
- Review papers
- Propose and coordinate a group project

# More guidelines

- Propose and co-supervise a student project
- Contribute to your research group
- Take personal development courses
- Attend seminars
- Read 'How to get a PhD'
- Arrange a research visit
- Write a grant proposal

# A review form

- <http://www.cs.bris.ac.uk/Teaching/learning/phd-guidelines-form.doc>
- To help you think about what objectives you can improve
- A matrix: activities (rows) and objectives (columns)
- List your activities
  - writing papers
  - reading
  - attending seminars
  - attending conferences
  - emailing authors...

# A review form

- Which objectives do the activities contribute to?
  - Breadth of knowledge
  - Initiative
  - Networking
  - Communication skills
  - Personal development
  - Feedback on PhD
  - Collaboration
  - Planning

**Thank you**

**Good luck**

**Enjoy your PhD**