

10 Tips for PhD Research

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Tip Number 9 – Work Towards a Career Outside the PhD

The global number of doctoral graduates each year is an order of magnitude greater than the number of tenured academic positions in research universities. For this reason, only a small minority of PhD graduates will ever work in academia in the long term. This means that, while conducting their PhD research, candidates need to also work on their future careers. Once the PhD is completed it is probably already too late to start contemplating what to do next – or hoping wishfully for a postdoctoral position that may never eventuate.

One of the core activities that needs to be undertaken throughout the PhD program is therefore preparation for life outside the PhD and, potentially, outside the university/research sector. This preparation may take many months.

The field-specific expertise developed during the course of a PhD program is generally too narrow to be used as a basis for a career outside research. However, the PhD does facilitate the development of many other skills which are generically applicable to the professional workforce. These include:

- Tenacity and an ability to tackle long-term problems
- Analytical ability
- Writing ability
- Public presentation ability
- Independence and independent thinking
- An ability to conduct rigorous, systematic investigations.

A student needs to devote considerable time to determining how these skills can be mapped into a future career. It may also be necessary for a student to undertake additional studies concurrently with their PhD – including business administration or entrepreneurial studies.

Additionally, using the research itself, it may be possible for students to set their sights outside the traditional career and look towards creating their own start-up company

All these things take considerable time and effort – and planning for the post-PhD career needs to start early in the program.