

Evaluation of MasterClass Program

On 3-4 April 07, Hugh Kearns from Flinders University, ran a MasterClass program at La Trobe University. The program, Getting Your Thesis Finished: Defeating Self-sabotage, ran from 9:00am to 12:30pm over two days. Fifteen PhD students at various stages of candidature attended. At the end of the program the participants completed an evaluation form. The following pages summarise the participant's responses.

Total of 12 evaluations returned

1. What specific steps will you now take towards completing you PhD as a result of this program?

Reduce my work to small tasks that can be done in blocks of time
Wait before quitting: trying to control the anxiety and hopefully starting to write

Set tasks
Set timetables – use deadlines to motivate
Get supervisor on side with this
Change focus from building to closing the deal

Organise time slots throughout my week to do specific tasks
Write a 'to do' list and prioritise each thing on it
Eliminate distractions – make 'must dos' necessary only at specific times

Implement new strategies to complete chapter writing – accept I can't think my way out of writing problems and nail my feet to the floor

Write detailed schedule/plan on what to do
Schedule a specific time to work on my PhD everyday (start right now and start with a small step)

I need to make a 'to do' list so all my tasks remain salient to me
I will block out specific time for writing
Involve my supervisor more in the process of writing

Set specific times in diary for specific tasks, eg. Writing time for chapters
Make a plan on things still to do and prioritise
Make regular meetings – booked – with supervisors and agree commitments for time lines for work

Create timetable – detailed
Pester supervisor – deadline and feedback contracts

Make backup plans – then can move on after hold-ups
Nail feet to floor – persist
Submit work as incomplete drafts

Start writing, even if it's not great writing, I just need to write

I will make a strict timetable outlining when RA work vs PhD work vs side projects are allowed

Setting myself a weekly timetable
Setting realistic goals of what I can complete (ie, not putting too much pressure on myself by saying I'll do things that I realistically cannot complete)

Letting colleagues know of my availability for work related matters and what my study days are

Visualising nailing my feet to the floor

Not rewarding myself until after I have completed the set task

2. What specifically have you learned from this program?

How to try to cope with my writer's block and how to structure my work to procrastinate less

Stop pretending distractions and side tasks are essential

Realised that 'opportunities' are distractions too and that PhD will be finished quicker if I reduce distractions

When doubting about my work look to external evidence of its quality

That waiting for 'motivation/inspiration' is a myth and that action needs to come first. Also that when I encounter a speed hump or am at the bottom of the rollercoaster, I need to push myself out/over, not just blame it on being 'the wrong time'. To seek help when I am stuck – I can't solve everything.

I still have difficulties with perfectionism which I had thought had been dealt with earlier.

Basically I do have a good situation and strategies in place and supervisory relationship. Reassurance from the group experience

Figure out what is my problem

Get professional advice on how to work to solve my problem

Get motivation to move on

Get to know more about the difficulty and reality of PhD study!

How to block time, PhD in top 3 priorities

Nailing feet to the floor

Anxiety about sitting in front of computer

Time management

That I overcommit – stop now and finish the PhD is the most important thing for the CV/future employment
I can set up a program with submission as the goal within my time frame

Writer's block – just start writing! Doesn't have to be 100%
PhD doesn't have to be perfect – pass or fail
Only 1 in 600 PhDs fail
Can get help from editor. That I'm not alone

That I can say no to side projects – it is more important to finish the PhD; all the other opportunities will present themselves again
Be more realistic about what I need/want to do. Have a plan
That I need to know what stops me from completing the above and need to take action to stop that from happening!

Behaviours which sabotage the time I spend on my PhD and reasons why I have some of those behaviours
That I will please other people at the expense of working on my PhD

3. What personal insights or awareness have you gained over the last 2 days?

That most of my self-sabotage is due to procrastination and anxiety to write
Also, that there is a need to discuss with my supervisor: her role; what are the standards and how to complete the PhD sooner than later (pass the PhD and move on)

I am not as efficient with my time as I thought I was
I use too many rewards (for too little progress)

That I am a perfectionist (old insight) but that this inhibits my productiveness
That I overcommit because I think that's what I should do, rather than what I need to do

Deeper understanding of my work practices and habits and need to change writing habits which are not working and some strategies to do this

This program is really helpful and practical as it really related to everyone's specific 'problem' and work to how to solve it and move on.
I wish to have the chance to undertake this program 1 year before!

I have learnt about the things that I am doing subconsciously that are preventing me from moving forward with my thesis

What sort of person I am – over-committer, too willing to put my hand up to help/do something, like most other PhD students

I'm not the only one feeling this way
I'm not stupid – it's just a hard task
I'm a perfectionist
4 years isn't so bad

Just how much I procrastinate and make excuses
It has given me awareness of the cycle I'm in and the cycle I need to escape

I am a terrible over-committer and very good at justifying other things taking priority over my PhD. I am going to conceptualise it as a task that cannot be squished – it will be like tutorials – to be done at specific times

I have to stop expecting that I can do everything
I have to learn to say 'no' to my supervisor; be more honest about what I can do with her
I need to work with my husband to organise our lives to that I can complete my PhD in a timely fashion!!

That I'm not the only PhD student feeling the way I do and that is only a PhD – it's something I do and not who I am

4. Would you recommend this course to other PhD students?

Yes. Particularly for candidate after the first year. Don't wait to be in the later years. So you can use the different tools to develop good work habits.

Yes. I think all PhD students should do it and then the completion rate would be higher.

Yes

Yes, helpful to hear group experience and learn about new ways of thinking about the PhD process

Definitely yes!!

Yes I would

Yes, absolutely, however earlier on in the PhD

Yes, there doesn't seem to be much support for PhD students. A regular support/discussion group would be great.

YES – especially to show others we're not impostors or stupid (as we allow ourselves to think)

Absolutely – probably earlier, say 1/2 way through, as opposed to some people who are much closer to the end

Yes... I think it is worthwhile for those well into their PhD but has the potential to be beneficial for those just starting

5. Do you think attending this course will help you finish your thesis?

Yes

Yes and I think it will make the rest of the process more efficient and less painful

Yes – I just need to remember these skills to implement at various stages until the end

Yes, I sincerely hope so

Definitely yes!! It helps a lot

Yes I do – awareness about these barriers is the 1st step towards getting past them!

Yes, it has motivated me and enabled me to set tangible steps towards this goal

Yes, hopefully much sooner

Yes, it has given me strategies to cope with getting through the low points

Yes. I think it has helped nip my over-commitment problem in the bud. Thanks Hugh!

God – I hope so!