

Evaluation of Defeating Self-Sabotage: getting your thesis finished

Masterclass

Newcastle University July 2007

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

- Weekday timetable 3hrs/day. Weekends off. Reward system. Plan in writing with supervisors.
- Seek as much help as possible. Re-draft with a focused (agreed upon with supervisor) voice/thesis. Adopt a timeline.
- Make a plan for the next six months (one chapter per month), including regular hours for real writing. Uncommit myself from some distracting projects. Don't check emails/internet until after the writing block is over. Make 'end of day' plans.
- Not open email to ensure the time I have set aside will be productive. End each weekly report I give my supervisor with a question
- Stick to my submission plans and submit whatever I have written without thinking it's low quality
- No more overcommitting. Set clear cut times for writing and time to PhD. Rewards and giving yourself breaks is important.
- Find new primary supervisor. 6 days 11-1pm, 2-4pm writing; 5-7pm other PhD.
- Follow timetable of when working and when I'm not
- Write during undisturbed time for 2h/day
- Prioritise the writing-up, breaking it down into smaller, more manageable pieces.
- Force myself to write to overcome my writer's block. Plan specific work times and stick to them. Eg. 8-11am each day for writing.
- Greater structure (daily). More writing.

2. What specifically have you learned from this program?

- Looking at evidence – of how I am going; of the reality of getting a PhD; real hours and fantasy hours
- Seeking external assistance both enforces a personal honesty and offsets guilt and saves time
- It doesn't need to be perfect; it just needs to get finished. Those negative thoughts are fake – get over it! You're not the only one doing this stuff to yourself.
- Admitted to the avoidance tactics I have used
- PhD is not the end of life. Fit it within your normal routine and don't get guilty. Be flexible to change your plans
- All thoughts and feelings are common among PhD students, you're not isolated. Techniques to getting the PhD finished – structure, avoiding avoidance. What other things people find useful
- Finish the guilt by going back to doing stop reflection; writing is affective (cemented); ideas to keep in the anxiety zone when starting to write
- Not alone, not desperate. Honey and munfet personality types. How to recognise avoidance tactics.
- Plenty, but most importantly that my writing problem is fixable, and that I am quite 'normal' (in terms of PhD students). Also, that there is freedom in structure.
- I have a better understanding about what's 'normal' when undertaking a PhD – this includes understanding the requirements/demands as well as the emotional component.
- How to evaluate and recognise avoidance strategies. Ways of improving my 'mental health' during this process, eg overcoming guilt
- The ways in which I self-sabotage (avoidance); the ways in which I can be more effective with my time (end of day task list) and small uninterrupted blocks of writing time.

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

- That I am going better than I may have previously thought (princess and pea mentality). It is easy to burn out.

- That I have been avoiding – assiduously, cunningly – the task at hand by romantically assuming the role of philosopher monk.
- I'm a reflector and this is not going to get the work done. I should take advantage of my very active supervisor – this is exactly the kind of push I need. I need structure – I don't need the guilt
- This program gave me ??? of the approach I have taken and thus helped with my guilt or questioning of the approach, i.e. very structured work times but much shorter than full time work.
- Keep to what you set out to do for that particular time
- I'm an over-committer; I'm not as strong as I think, I need rules to follow (structure); I need breaks
- Moments of truth
- That I need much more structure to perform really well, be it externally imposed or self-imposed
- I work really hard at avoiding writing. The way to fix this is the 'feet nailed to the floor' method of exposure. Failing to stick to goals is a chance to learn and improve things: a) determine what got in the way b) work out how to minimise this
- I over-commit and have a lot of difficulty saying no. This is a problem I have to address to make faster progress towards completion.
- I have become aware of how little time I spend actually doing my PhD. Have also gained insight into my relationship with my supervisor.
- That I use certain tasks as forms of avoidance. That now I have removed many of my overcommitting that I need greater structure (daily) with accountability

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

Yes – 12

No – 0

- Definitely!
- Yes – if only to escape the monastic vision; the self as isolated is deeply problematic

- Absolutely!
- Yes, but I think an hour a day over several weeks would be much more beneficial
- Yes. If it could be made one of the induction courses early at the start of the PhD.
- Yes, earlier than later
- Definitely! It should be mandatory after 12 months (and possibly every year after)
- Yes, yes, yes!
- Yes. A good investment of time
- Definitely, and sooner into the PhD than later. Say at the end of the first year.
- Yes, it should be compulsory at the 6-12 month (full-time) time

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

Yes – 12

No – 0

- Definitely
- Yes – I have witnessed my own insights becoming formally articulated. This has been enormously affirming
- It already has helped a great deal and I'm sure it will be a major element in my PhD finalisation plan
- Yes, or at least finishing it quicker
- Yes. It has reaffirmed that I am on track and that's what I needed instead of worrying
- Definitely – bring the end line on
- I think it has meant I will definitely submit despite a nightmare run
- Yes – before yesterday I couldn't see how I could actually write my thesis – now I have a useful strategy
- Yes. I have a more objective perspective of how I am going and what needs to be done. Thank you.
- Yes, as long as I follow up with the techniques