

10 PhD tips

1 - The PhD trajectory is an individual learning path

There is no predetermined path that you can take. You will need to define your own goals & priorities for your individual training programme and your PhD thesis; and combine this with the project requirements in consultation with your supervisors.

Since it is your own PhD path, it is often not very useful to compare yourself to other PhD candidates; at most, you can use their experiences and suggestions to craft your own ideal PhD trajectory.

2 - Inform yourself

Inform yourself about your rights & duties as a PhD candidate, and make sure that you know where you can find the information if you should need the exact details later on (e.g. PhD regulations, employment regulations, holiday rights, training budget, Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, authorship guidelines, (confidential) support services).

3 - Discuss mutual expectations

Make sure to regularly discuss the mutual expectations for the goals for your training, the content for your PhD thesis and your 4-year project planning with your supervisors. Write down the important agreements, so you can refer to them later on. This also includes for instance [ideas on authorship](#) ranking for a (shared) project/publication. The yearly performance (R&O/P&D) meetings would for instance be a good time to discuss and write down these mutual expectations.

4 - Train yourself

It is ok if you do not immediately feel that you are able to do all the things that an independent scientist should be able to do, after all, a PhD project is a training programme. So regularly reflect on your performance and your goals, and determine in which areas you need further training or opportunities for getting more experience.

5 - Manage your supervisors

Give your supervisors feedback on what you would need to perform at your best and how you would like to be supervised. To be able to do this you need to invest time and energy in good, effective & honest communication with your supervisors, which also means creating sufficient (in)formal contact moments together. The yearly performance (R&O/P&D/ Let's talk) meeting is a good time to give your supervisor(s) feedback. [Here](#) is a link to the guide for supervisors, which provides an overview of the minimum requirements of supervision.

6 - Have your own outsider view

Someone with a fresh, outside perspective to your PhD process can help you to reflect on your personal development, things you are good at, your well-being, and the progress of your project. So discuss how you are doing with colleagues, friends and family; this also helps to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

7 a. Be solution orientated and pro-active

Take responsibility and make sure that important things happen/are discussed. Do not expect that things will arrange themselves automatically or in your best interest.

b. Ask for help

Ask for help if you need it, because you do not need to solve every puzzle or problem on your own. Consult your supervisors, your colleagues, experts on the subject, your mentor, counsellors etc. When ever you are stuck, answer the question who can help, and then go ahead and ask them for advice.

c. Involve others Collaboration and/or informing people of what you do also means you are already building a network of people that can help you when you need it. It also helps you stay curious and informed on what other people are doing, and what is happening in the fields of science you are less likely to encounter otherwise. And it increases the chance of being asked to help others.

8 - Start writing early on

Make sure to start writing up your work early on, so you can get comfortable with the process of writing, determine where you might need some extra training, and can start to formulate story lines and think about the outline of your chapters/thesis. Do not leave it all to the last (4th!) year.

9 – Impact and ambitions

Make sure you start thinking early about your own ambitions regarding what kind of impact you want to have with your research; if you have not done so already. Include this in your discussions with your supervisors regarding training, networking and what kind of research you would like to do. Ideally, it affects all these three aspects (i.e. what you learn, where you want to be networking wise, and the content of the chapters of your thesis). You have the A2 project to act as a catalyser. We advise you to include this thinking and acting on a pathway to impact as soon as possible. Regarding the A2: finalise the final reflection at least 6 months before wanting to hand in the reading version; this so you focus on finalising the thesis, and focus even more on step 10 below:

10 - The next step?

During your PhD time also use your training programme and your network to think about and prepare yourself for the next step in your career.

Bonus - Your own PhD tip! 😊

Write down your own PhD tip for your (future) self and share it with your fellow PhD candidates: