

Book Reviews

The unwritten rules of PhD research (2nd edition)

Marion Petre and Gordon Rugg
Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2010
ISBN 0-335237-02-9

This book is a useful companion to more formal guides to the academic process of postgraduate research and aims to answer the refrain 'why didn't someone tell me that earlier?' The authors claim that their advice includes all the things that nobody ever tells you, and promise to fill in the gaps you will find in other guidebooks by introducing you to what they call the 'tacit knowledge' of the research community: the things that experienced researchers know, but don't bother to tell you because they seem so basic as to not be worth mentioning (eg the importance of the 'cup of coffee' or building networks of the right people to give you support and advice).

Becoming an independent researcher is likened to becoming a master cabinet-maker, and a collection of 'basic craft skills' are covered together with the ground rules of the academic world. This book covers the range of topics you would expect to find, from working with your supervisor to facing the viva. This edition includes new material on critical thinking, research skills, becoming an independent researcher and different models of doctoral study including professional doctorates. The 'big picture' of the academic system is demystified through tackling issues such as how to build networks of support across the research community down to short practical pointers on research design, critical reading and writing. The authors work through the PhD process in a structure that is designed around themes rather than in strict chronological order. In this way the book not only serves as a guide to doing doctoral research, but also offers a way of approaching research and shows how to integrate

it into other aspects of your working and home life.

There is much in the chapter on 'Sabotage and salvation' that will resonate with the lives of busy people trying to juggle competing priorities and perhaps losing themselves somewhere along the way (are you engaging in instrumental behaviour such as steadily working through the references in six key texts, or expressive behaviour such as carrying round a clutch of articles that you never read?). Some of the pitfalls of becoming an independent researcher will be instantly recognisable, with sound advice on developing constructive habits such as 'putting your research out there' by articulating your ideas with others in your community and engaging with criticism. Older is not necessarily wiser and presumably you're thinking about this book because you need some advice on moving forward with your own research. The chapters on establishing good critical reading and writing habits right from the start of your study give valuable practical tips (eg how to maintain an annotated bibliography which works for you) and suggestions for managing your time for maximum productivity.

The text is very accessible, written in a light-hearted style that is highly readable, although this may come across as somewhat patronising if you are not the probable target audience of fresh young graduates with less work or life experience. For example, networking at conferences and preparing presentations are probably the areas of doctoral study that teachers actually feel fairly confident about, but a read of these sections will remind you of what you know and, more importantly, show you that you may actually be more in control than you realised. The authors capture the key points of most chapters in summary tables which are a useful aide-memoire.

I would recommend this book particularly to those who are at the beginning of doctoral study, to help establish good habits from the start, but the practical advice and reassuring tone make it a useful read for research students at any stage.

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The learning mentor manual

Stephanie George
London: Sage, 2010
ISBN 978-1-412-94773-2

Although this book initially appears to be aimed exclusively at learning mentors, it is a great resource for all in education and is specifically aimed at school leaders and class teachers as well as learning mentors. It was written to encourage schools to take a more formal approach to mentoring and will suit those aspiring to take an active role in this process. Well laid out, the book's logical and clear structure is definitely one of its strengths. Each chapter follows the same format, beginning by outlining the intentions and context of the material to follow possible activities, and ending with a synopsis of key points, further reading and a list of downloadable materials.

This book offers a wide range of topics that will guide any professional involved in a mentoring programme. Firstly the scene is set for mentors and the book then goes on to discuss the skills needed to be a successful mentor. Separate chapters are devoted to how to work with external agencies and sustaining successful mentoring provision.

The resources that this publication provides are undoubtedly its key feature. There are numerous photocopiable or downloadable resources and, alongside these, lots of 'thinking prompts' to encourage reflective practice. These 'thinking prompts' and resources can be used by mentors as a tool for training other professionals or with pupils as part of a mentoring programme. Materials include those for tracking purposes, action plans and examples of letters to send home to parents. The case studies that this book provides will also be invaluable when considering the 'what ifs' that one may encounter when just starting out as a learning mentor, offering guidance on how to deal with a range of situations.

The learning mentor manual is exactly that, an accessible, invaluable text for all those involved in this very important process.

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Achieving QTS: meeting the professional standards framework. Secondary education reflective reader

Martin Fautley and Jonathan Savage
Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd, 2010
ISBN 1-844454-73-0

This book is aimed predominantly at beginning teachers, but will also be very useful to practising teachers wishing to re-explore useful pedagogy and advice for reflective guidance and success in their classroom. Martin Fautley is a Professor of Education at Birmingham City University, and Jonathan Savage is a Reader in Education at the Institute of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University. Both have authored numerous publications designed to assist teachers with the diverse theoretical and practical approaches they can adopt to improve learning within their classroom.

There is a logical flow to the content of this book. The chapters are structured around three key themes: starting teaching, developing a teacher identity and considering subject and pedagogy; developing the teaching; and future teaching practice. Each theme spans three separate chapters, allowing for a full and comprehensive development of the topics considered.

Within each chapter, many challenges for the novice teacher in developing their practice are clearly presented. There is also considerable allowance for the more experienced teacher to either revisit theory and pedagogy, and place concepts they use in the classroom with the theorists who develop and write about them; or re-galvanise their teaching and learning approach with theories and pedagogy that can be applied (with relative ease) in their lessons. A wide range of academic extracts from many different educational writers and theorists is used, allowing for a balanced approach to reading and the development of reflective understanding. These readings are clearly and