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# Becoming a PhD

A Quick Guide to Starting Well and Finishing Strong



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## For Doctoral Students

at the

Graduate School of  
International Development

NAGOYA UNIVERSITY

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## Introduction

Beginning the doctoral program comes with great anticipation: the prospect of earning the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree – the highest academic accomplishment and symbol of intellectual maturity. The excitement could be more when the opportunity is courtesy of a fully funded fellowship and at a university in a different country. The PhD student looks forward not only to starting the course but also to learning new cultures, seeing fascinating landmarks, making new friends, and creating mutually beneficial networks. However, most PhD students will realize that the excitement is short-lived. The reason is simple: earning the PhD qualification is a solemn and arduous undertaking, one that requires utmost devotion and minimum distractions.

The extent of devotion underscores the value of a PhD (the holder of the qualification), whether in academia or industry. In academia, the PhD is deemed knowledgeable enough in a specific discipline to instruct others and produce new PhDs. In industry, holders of the degree drive innovation and change. Importantly, a PhD, by training, is critical, analytical, and never accepts things on face value. Therefore, to produce PhDs worthy of the honor, universities demand thoroughness from the student and supervising professors. Unlike the Master’s degree earned mostly by course work and research, the PhD honor is usually earned by research only (with a series of oral presentations on the research). The research-based organization of the doctoral program aims to groom the student into a competent, independent researcher. Worthy of note, the PhD research is expected to be innovative, making a dent on the literature in the discipline. For this reason, inadequacies overlooked at the Master’s level are not tolerated in the PhD program.

***“...earning a PhD is a solemn and arduous undertaking, one that requires utmost devotion and minimum distractions.”***

The GSID Student Handbook is an invaluable guide to your PhD journey. It contains the administrative requirements that, when not complied with, can delay your graduation by a semester or more. However, your accomplishment and

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satisfaction as a PhD will not rest on having complied with the minimum requirements set in the GSID Manual but on having pursued a serious scholarship with the mentorship of your advisors, the contribution of your peers, and the validation by scholars in your field even outside GSID.

This guide contains bits and pieces of wisdom and practical tips from the lived experiences of those who walked the same path. There is no doubt that each path to PhD is unique. We have different capacities and the personal challenges we face vary. These notwithstanding, we believe that there are more similarities than differences, as we play by the same administrative rules and move in a similar academic environment. There is the common saying that one only knows when to begin the PhD program but not when it will be completed. It is an acknowledgment that many factors come to play in determining the success or failure of an attempt to become a PhD. Ultimately, however, the hope is that by sharing what we have done and reflecting on what we should have done, you can tread this path more successfully than we did.

# Overview

GSID’s PhD Program is marked by milestones to help you pace yourself. Each stage before the submission of the final dissertation culminates in a presentation corresponding to the goals of each stage. Attaining the goals, however, entails several preparatory steps. It may be overwhelming, but a good overview will prevent you from underestimating the enormity of the workload. Ideally, D1 is accomplished in your first year, D2 in your second year, and D3, Oral Defense, and Final Dissertation on your third year. Consult your main advisor in a good advance for the exact dates for each one.

As you move on each major stage, the list gets shorter leading to the final dissertation. This does not mean, however, that it gets easier. Writing always takes more time than you think it would take, your motivation may dwindle, and your advisors’ expectations get higher as they begin to grasp the entirety of your research findings and their implications. This guide is an attempt to assist you through it.



**Goal:** Finalize your dissertation proposal

- PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES**
- Select your sub-advisors
  - Prepare for supervision.
  - Prepare your research proposal.
    - Conduct an extensive literature review.
    - Set research questions
    - Decide on the methodology.
    - Start initial communication with relevant people for fieldwork or data gathering.
  - Look for international journals on your field of study.
  - Seek membership to an academic organization and attend a conference.



**Goal:** Present initial findings from fieldwork and desk

- PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES**
- Prepare your research instruments.
  - Obtain the necessary permissions for fieldwork.
  - Conduct fieldwork.
  - Organize your data.
  - Report your initial findings to your main advisor.
  - Revisit the literature in light of your initial findings.
  - Write an article and submit to a journal.
  - Try to present your initial findings in a conference.
  - Write the first 3 chapters of your dissertation.



**Goal:** Present a proof of publication acceptance, submit the first full draft of your dissertation

- PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES**
- Write the first full draft of your dissertation.
  - Present your findings
  - Present in a conference if you want to validate your findings.



**Goal:** Present a refined version of your dissertation and defend it in front of your advisors

- PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES**
- Revise your draft dissertation according to D3 comments.
  - Present in seminars in preparation for the oral defense



**Goal:** Submit your final dissertation

- PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES**
- Revise your draft dissertation according to oral defense comments.
  - Comply with the administrative requirements for submission.

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## ***Starting Well: The D1 Period***

A D1 presentation is the culmination of your first year in the PhD Program. It summarizes all your progress in your first year and prepares you to embark on fieldwork. If you come with a scholarship that allows you to spend an extra year or semester as a research student, you have an edge in starting well. If you don't have that extra time, however, the best time to start is always today.

### **1. Select your Sub-Advisors**

As a doctoral student, you are in the final phase of academic adolescence. Helping you transition to academic adulthood are your main and sub-advisors who, as earlier mentioned, constitute your dissertation committee. To move to each major stage in your doctoral program, you must earn the approval of all three advisors.

Before beginning the doctoral program, a student will have been accepted at least provisionally by a professor willing to serve as the main advisor. Students are often unsure if it is they, the main advisor or the graduate school that will select the sub-advisors.

It is the student's responsibility to find the right picks for sub-advisors. However, this must be done carefully and tactfully. It is strongly advised that you consult your main advisor about completing your dissertation committee. Your main advisor will want to ensure that the sub-advisors are colleagues with sufficient expertise in your field, can supervise your kind of research, are accessible, and reliable. Your advisors have their own strengths and weaknesses. They may also come from different research traditions. Complemented with your own strengths and weaknesses, this synergy is invaluable to your research. Be strategic about selecting your advisors in this regard.

Once you have decided, your main advisor will ask you to make a formal request to the target sub-advisors. If one or both of them decline your request, inform

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your main advisor and continue the search together. Below are the roles of advisors in your becoming a PhD.

### **1.1 Main Advisor**

The main advisor has the overall responsibility to ensure that you learn, abide by the university and graduate school's regulations, conduct your research ethically, and complete the doctoral program on time. Other responsibilities include:

- To discuss and review your work to ensure it is relevant to accomplishing your research goals.
- To put you back on track if you veer off the research goals.
- To ensure that you are aware of the general literature and are up to date with the latest perspectives.
- To discuss significant findings of your research and opportunities for publishing.
- To ensure that you have opportunities to present your work internally (and if possible, externally).
- To conduct the mandatory evaluation of your performance.
- To contact sub-advisors if anything threatens your research and early graduation.
- To make all communication between you and your sub-advisors smooth along the way.
- To ensure that you submit all required documents before and after presentations.

### **1.2 Sub-advisors**

Sub-advisors also ensure that you receive guidance to complete your research and graduate on time. They ensure that you observe the regulations and meet ethical demands in research. Other responsibilities include:

- To ensure that you are aware of the general literature and are up to date with the latest perspectives.
- To ensure that you submit all required documents before and after presentations.
- To make themselves available for your presentations.
- To provide useful criticisms of your presentations, articles, books, and dissertation in good time.
- To stay informed about your progress and render advice.

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Your advisors are available for consultation as the need arises. However, you should give them sufficient prior notice. Also, be discretionary about what kind of discussion to take to your sub-advisors. As mentioned earlier, issues regarding significant changes with your research or threats to your graduating on time should be transmitted to sub-advisors by your main advisor.

## **2. Prepare for Supervision**

You will have been accepted into GSID after an assessment of your capacity to conduct doctoral research and whether your research proposal falls within the remit of GSID. Acceptance into the program, however, does not indicate total endorsement of your competence or the strength of your proposal. You should create room for improvement. You should also expect minor to significant (including overall) change to your proposal as you begin the course.

Bear in mind that the initial proposal might have been written without the input of your advisors who are to guide you through the research—this may vary according to your prior status. Their input will be necessary and invaluable. Therefore, by accepting to be supervised, you should be willing to be supervised.

A crucial thing to note is that, as a rule, professors in GSID do not micromanage students' research. They only render their expertise acquired through years of experience. It is for this reason that they are called 'advisors'. You therefore have to pace yourself. You can do this better if you know yourself.

### **2.1 Know Yourself**

Knowing yourself is knowing your motivations, habits, strengths, and weaknesses. At the peak of stress and pressure, it is not unusual for PhD students to question why they are pursuing the degree in the first place. While it is true that you need a compelling reason to embark on this journey, the reasons you started may be different from the reasons why you continue. A PhD is not a sprint. It is a



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marathon.

One thing that you should know most about is your attitude to writing. The final output, after all, is a written work. This should be emphasized enough: Writing takes more time than you think it would. You need to plan for this on better days to cope with the bad days. If you are the type of person who has the habit of planning ahead, good for you. However, if you are a procrastinator, be mindful of deadlines. To a procrastinator, a deadline works wonders. It forces your mind to focus and to decide on the issues in your research that you have been mulling over. The following are the ways that worked for other procrastinators that you may want to try:

- Volunteer for an early schedule of seminar presentations. There is no such thing as ready. Aim for high quality given your best effort and limitations. Even those who submit their final dissertation feel like there are more left undone. This is the nature of the research process.
- Do not wait for your main advisor to give you deadlines. Promise him/her a date of submission and keep it. Your main advisor may sometimes be hesitant to pressure you. If you let him/her know the assistance that you need, s/he may be willing to hold you accountable to the deadlines that you committed.
- Set a daily writing goal. Writing 500 words a day due at a constant time every day can give you a sense of accomplishment and encourage you to go on. In difficult times, you may ask a fellow PhD student to hold each other accountable to this goal.
- Arrange for a consultation schedule with your main advisor or sub-advisors. Knowing that you have to discuss your progress can push you to organize your thoughts. Your advisors can also help you process your ideas.

## **2.2 Know your Advisors**

In the process of consulting with their advisors, some PhD students get confused at the feedback they receive. The longer this drags on, the more delays are incurred. Although they may ask for further explanation, there are various reasons why students hesitate. One way around this is to know your advisors. It is not

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required but you will benefit greatly in this regard if you read the papers published by your advisors. The more you read their papers, the easier it will be for you to understand their comments and suggestions on your own research work. As much as you can, attend their seminar classes, the doctoral presentations of fellow students, and observe their line of questioning and how they comment. Each advisor comes from a different field which may have different research traditions. Understanding this in your pre-D1 period can help you along the way.

Your seniors (senpai) are a good source of information about your advisors' working style. How fast each advisor can read your work and give you feedback varies. Some require a month while others can give feedback in one to two weeks. This is not within your control and this is something you should adjust to. Better yet, ask your advisor how early you should submit each output before a major presentation to give him/her adequate time in preparing for substantive feedback.

Another crucial and often generalizable advice is a good anticipation. Professors have as busy schedules as others, and most doctoral activities have a lapse of months to take the next step. These conditions naturally cause miscommunication, potentially a surprise in both parts if regular (let's say, weekly) contact is missing. If your advisors don't foretell a deadline or envisioned schedule, you need to be who keeps them updated of upcoming events. This will also encourage your advisors to reserve time and give a fast response.

### **3. Improve your Research Proposal**

Your research proposal is the main requirement for D1 presentation. They may have passed through an entrance exam. However, they did so with the premise that they will certainly be revised. Consider them as that. Attachment to your ideas this early can prevent you from improving it and might make supervision difficult.

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### **3.1 Conduct an Extensive Literature Review**

The first step to revising is by conducting a more thorough literature review. Literature review is composed of three parts: exploration, reading, and outputting. A thorough exploration should precede your reading as the first reading can influence your mind in a non-systematic way. Nagoya University Library supplies rich resource, including institutional license to useful databases and e-journals. It is also recommendable to make an output in your favorite style each time after reading a document. Have a talk with your advisors and students also helps to clarify your understanding. Since your reading will extend several years and mountainous volume, leave always your footprints along the way will support your work process in later periods.

When doing the literature review, a practical approach is to read at least one article per day. You may choose to start with a broad knowledge of your topic and narrow down to details or start with the details and widen your scope as you go along. Whatever the approach, do not lose sight of the goals: To critically review what has been done and see what more needs to be done. A critical review means that you need to interact with the material and not just highlight what seem to support your ideas. This is daunting. As a beginner, you may be bothered by your inexperience and question your right to question the work of researchers ahead of you. It happens to the best of us, and it takes time to be comfortable. Some practical tips to get started:

- For each article you read, write the research questions, the methodology used, the most interesting idea, and the ideas that you do not understand.
- For a synthesis of the articles that you read in a week, summarize ideas that appear repeatedly in different articles, as well as the unique ideas.

Remember that you need to contribute to the literature. You will not be able to pinpoint your contribution if you do not take literature review seriously and systematically.

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The literature review can be exhausting and confusing. You will be able to accumulate hundreds of scholarly materials in the course of your PhD. To prepare ahead, learn to use a literature referencing database. There are a lot of free downloadable options. Examples include Mendeley and Zotero. Their integration with Microsoft Word will save you time in referencing.

### **3.2 Set your Research Questions**

Your research questions will be the starting point of your research. Your initial research questions can be refined as you appreciate your contribution to the literature. The research questions should be informed by the gaps in the literature or a possible reconceptualization of the research problem you are working on. Like the rest of your paper, this can still change after your data gathering. However, setting one now sets the scope of your research, which helps you decide on your methodology, and prepares you for fieldwork.

### **3.3 Decide on the Methodology**

Unlike a master's thesis, a dissertation's methodology draws more scrutiny. Pay attention to the methodology used by the authors of the research papers that you read. Over time, you will get an idea of the variety of approaches applicable to your research topic, as well as possible methodological insights from different fields examining a similar phenomenon. If there are opportunities for workshops or trainings on research methodology, grab them. It is better to have more options in case you change your mind about your research questions.

### **3.4. Start Initial Contact with Informants for Fieldwork**

With your research questions and tentative methodology, you can already start contacting possible sources of information for fieldwork. This will help you further refine the scope of your research as you begin to see what is possible. Your proposal will also be judged through the feasibility of answering your research questions given the methodology and fieldwork that you have in mind. You can

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never be too early to start this process.

#### **4. Prepare for D1 Presentation**

The presentations are not mere rituals. Some students had to redo a presentation that was under par, thereby setting them back by months. You should prepare to avoid a repeat. If you were enrolled in April, know that an academic session for you ends in March of the next year. For an October enrollee, it ends in September. It is advised to fulfill the requirements to complete D1 no later than ten months into the first academic session. Some former students accomplished this task in the first six months.

To pass D1, your advisors expect you to:

- Illustrate the novelty of your research (the new contribution to the body of knowledge in the field).
- Show the theoretical (and if applicable, policy) significance of your research.
- Articulate the research objectives, questions, and the reliability of the method of data collection.
- Demonstrate the feasibility of the data collection plan.
- Show clearly, your plan for completing the doctoral course.

Consult your main advisor and the student handbook for documents to submit before and after D1. After completing the D1 presentation, you have to draft a Q&A sheet in the format designated by the graduate school (main advisor will inform the detail) and obtain approval of all advisors. Once approved, you should send it to main advisor notifying the final date of approval so that she/he can post it in a digital archive, to which all professors of the GSID have access. This should be completed within a week afterward. The same applies to D2 and D3 presentations.

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## 5. Plan for a Publication

Failing to publish early is one factor for PhD programs stretching beyond the standard duration. Remember that without a peer-reviewed academic publication (an article or a book) on your research, or proof that one of both has been accepted for publication, you cannot proceed to hold D3 presentation. Note also, that publishing is a long and challenging process. According to former students, the average time spent waiting for and responding to reviewers' queries was six months. For some, it lasted a year. This early, you should be observing where scholars in your field are publishing. Check their websites and note the following for reference:

- **Scope.** No matter how excellent your paper is, if it is out of scope, the possibility of rejection is high.
- **Duration of the review process.** Most journals indicate how long their review process take. Information on this can help you decide which journal to submit to and pace yourself accordingly. If the duration is not indicated on the website, contact the editor of the journal, and ask for information.
- **Nature of the journal.** Who are its readers and who are publishing there? As GSID requires publication to an international journal, you should ensure this too. There are predatory journals that ask for payment when you submit for review. The only payment acceptable is when you opt to publish open access.

If you are confident that the literature review you prepared for D1 presentation is outstanding, you should consider publishing the key findings before fieldwork. But remember that you must confer with your main advisor about publishing your article.

## 6. Attend Outside Forums, Join an Academic Organization

Consult your advisor on academic organization/s that you may seek membership

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with. Most academic organizations do not allow non-members to present. You may pay an amount for membership, but that is usually discounted for students. Try to attend a conference even if you cannot present yet. This is a good learning opportunity to observe how presentations are done, who are working on the same topic as yours, and how the feedback process usually goes.

Thanks to the expansion of webinar platforms, online session series, which don't require a membership, are gaining popularity. Explore your field and attend those platforms to seek for perspectives from wider public on your work, and networking. Due to the economic advantage of online platforms, big conferences are not necessarily the best location to get most valuable opinions.

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## ***Staying on Track: The D2 Period***

At this stage, you have received your advisors' approval to go ahead with your fieldwork. Based on the initial contacts made for fieldwork, you need to organize for an actual one. The following are the activities you can expect in preparation for your D2 presentation. These are not necessarily sequential. Some activities may need to overlap depending on the progress of your preparations. Keep in mind that a badly planned fieldwork will not only cost you time and financial resources. It may also substantially delay your work.

### **1. Finalize your Research Instruments**

Whether it is a survey form or interview questions, ensure that your instruments can answer your research questions. It would also be best if you can do a field test. Try these instruments with respondents who have a similar profile as your actual research respondents and check whether your questions are understood in the way that you intended. Consult your advisor before you use or send them out.

### **2. Obtain the Necessary Permissions for Fieldwork**

Aside from permission from your advisor and respondents, it is important to check if there are protocols observed in the locality of your choice. In some localities, going directly to your respondents without a courtesy call to local authorities is a breach of protocol. Respecting these is important not only for data gathering but also for your safety. If anticipated, consider a recommendation letter from your main advisor in a good advance to make a smooth landing in the field.

In GSID, there is no ethics committee that checks the conduct of ethical fieldwork. Nonetheless, you are expected to know ethical guidelines. If you are not familiar with ethical concerns governing your methodology or subject of study, read up on them. There are articles online discussing these.



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Going abroad for fieldwork also requires permission with the GSID administration. Check the Student Handbook or inquire with the GSID office regarding online forms that need to be filled out. Your scholarship may also have regulations on the maximum length of time you can spend outside Japan. Neglecting these may cost you a month's worth of scholarship. It is also advisable to get a travel insurance, especially when you will be in an unfamiliar country or region. There are also countries where you would need vaccinations against local diseases. Check travel advisories.

### **3. Conduct Thorough fieldwork**

Unless you have funding for fieldwork, you will have to provide financial resources to collect data. Depending on your research design or future adjustments to your research questions, you may need to do another fieldwork or would need additional data from the same group of respondents. If you promised them anonymity, respect that. If you promised to update them on the findings of your research, get their contact details. Maintain a good relationship and ensure that there is a way to contact them again.

### **4. Organize your Data**

Ideally, you already planned for data analysis in the course of developing your research methodology. If you neglected to do this, you may be overwhelmed by a mountain of data that you do not know how to begin organizing. This happens especially in a case study research where multiple sources of data are considered.

For interviews, note that you would need a transcription. This takes up so much of a researcher's time. If you can find a transcriptionist that you can trust to keep the anonymity of the data, consider having them transcribed. This will give you more time to think and analyze. Documents that are digitized including interview transcripts and field notes can be qualitatively analyzed using commercially available analysis software like NVivo or Atlas.ti to name a few. They may cost

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you in license fees. However, you can take advantage of student discounts.

### **5. Report your Initial Findings to your Advisor**

Consult your main advisor on your initial findings. It is best done early so that decisions can be made if there is a need for additional data or your research questions need to be redirected.

### **6. Revisit the Literature in Light of your Initial Findings**

At this point when you already have initial findings, revisit the literature. Reading the literature before data gathering and after initial analysis provide different insights. Note the portion of your findings that the literature has and has not predicted. These can help you appreciate better your possible contribution to the literature.

### **7. Write your Journal Article for Submission**

After initial analysis and revisiting the literature, start writing your journal article. If you have done your initial search, you know by now where to publish. Your main advisor is the best initial reviewer for your journal article. Your advisor has published papers before and have even served as peer reviewers for other journals. When you plan for timeline, make sure to include the time it takes for your advisor to review and for you to revise. Your advisor may also help you in responding to reviewers' comments.

### **8. Try to Present in a Conference**

You may do this at any time during your PhD. However, presenting before your D2 presentation may help you in your dissertation in progress. Some conferences also offer publication in their journal. If this is single authored and peer reviewed, this may qualify for the required publication by GSID.

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## 9. Prepare for your D2 Presentation

At D2 presentation, you share the initial findings of the fieldwork with your advisors. In the case you don't employ field data collection, some substantive analytical orientation is expected by this step. They expect you to:

- Show that you addressed the major concerns they raised during your D1 presentation.
- Show that the empirical data is relevant to the research objectives and questions.
- Show whether the data validates or invalidates pre-data collection assumptions.
- Identify possible data gaps and plans to fill the gaps.
- Indicate if you will refocus aspects of your research.

At this stage, expect your advisors to be more critical of your work. The reason is that you have never-before-seen data. They will probe to see whether the data is sufficient and adequately answer the research questions. They may demand more data should they identify any additional data need. Consult your main advisor and the student handbook for required documents before and after D2.

It would help to practice presenting in your seminar classes before your D2 presentation. This is to prevent any major misunderstanding between you and your advisors regarding the current progress of your research and what they can expect during your D2 presentation. Some problems may also be avoided if you foresee them early, gauging from the feedback of your classmates in the seminar.

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## ***Finish Strong: On the Road to D3***

If everything is going smoothly, you are by now awaiting the result of your journal publication. The agony of waiting can be allayed by writing the remaining chapters of your dissertation.

### **1. Write your First Full Draft**

By now most students are already exhausted. When overwhelmed, take some days or a week off and then return. Be mindful that excessively long breaks can make it hard to get back in the frame. Some students also find that presenting in a conference at this stage increases their motivation. Hearing feedback from other scholars – which for sure will not be all negative – gives a boost in confidence.

There will be days when you will wait for motivation before you write. It will not come before you write. Rather, it will come when you start writing. Sharing your ideas whether orally or in writing to your fellow PhD students may also give you unexpected insights. Remember that though it is only you who can write your dissertation, you do not have a monopoly of good ideas. They can come from anyone you share it with, even from those who are outside your field.

Motivations aside, the following will help you in completing your first full draft:

- Revisit your literature review in light of your findings.
- Refine your research questions.
- Write a tentative conclusion.

### **2. Prepare for D3 Presentation**

Until any future changes, to graduate in March, you must pass D3 by the end of October or the end of April if you plan to graduate in September of the third academic session. Before D3 presentation, ensure to organize your research into a tentative dissertation. At the presentation, your advisors expect to be convinced

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that:

- You have addressed the major concerns they raised during your D2 presentation.
- You have considerably or satisfactorily answered the research questions with available data.
- Your argument is coherent, and you can organize your dissertation into logically connected chapters.
- You have demonstrated the relevance of your research to the discipline.

Expect more critical interrogation from your advisors. They are likely to request that you strengthen aspects of the research. If all three agree that despite any need for strengthening your argument you passed D3, you will proceed to develop the dissertation, and your status changes to 'PhD candidate' (to be precise, there is no official definition for this concept in GSID as a comprehensive exam is not introduced). Consult your main advisor and the student handbook for documents to submit before and after D3.

A good way to prepare is to present in all your seminar classes. This is also an efficient way to update and receive feedback from your main advisor and sub-advisors, as well as gather insights based on the feedback from your audience. Every presentation can help you improve and sharpen your arguments. If there is an opportunity to present in a conference, you may do that too.

## ***Oral Defense: Earn the Honor***

Do not approach the Oral Defense with complacency. By this time the doctorate is within grasp, but you must strive to put a firm hold around it. To qualify for Oral Defense, you must submit your dissertation by the designated day in December if you aim to graduate in March, or in June if you intend to graduate in September, depending on the period of your admission. At this examination, you will defend your research before your advisors who expect you to:

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- Show how you addressed all the concerns they raised during your D3 presentation.
  - Show how the research questions have been answered.
  - Show that you have organized your argument coherently, and your dissertation logically.
  - You have clearly articulated the implications of your research for the discipline (and maybe policy).
  - Point out opportunities for future research in furtherance of your line of study.

Your advisors will listen keenly and raise carefully crafted questions in anticipation of equally carefully framed responses. They will assess the depth of your knowledge in the discipline. Based on your overall performance, they will determine if you have attained the degree of expertise sufficient to be awarded the PhD honor and inducted into their intellectual circle. In simple terms, they must be convinced that you are ripe to be called a colleague. If you pass the Oral Defense, you are a PhD awaiting degree conferment. Ensure to consult your main advisor and the administrative office regarding documents to submit before and after the Oral Defense.

## ***Final Dissertation***

After the oral defense, you need to address the comments and concerns raised in your oral defense through your final dissertation. Do not be disheartened. Receiving points for improvement even at this stage is quite normal. At the end of it all, you will be glad that you did.

Aside from the ideas in your dissertation, this is when formatting and administrative matters will take up much of your time. GSID has detailed instructions on the formatting, the attachments that will come with your final dissertation, and the due dates. You will be informed of these in advance. Be extra careful in these requirements. They may be small, but they can trip you up and

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cause considerable stress to you and your main advisor if you are not careful.

After you submit your dissertation on the due date, the GSID committee will review it and send you further corrections if needed. After addressing them, the GSID faculty will deliberate and put them to a vote. A one-third majority will lead you to finally be confirmed graduating. Should your future employer need a document confirming that you will earn your degree in March, this is the time when GSID can release it.

There will be another submission of the final dissertation. This will be the last. From here on, you can just wait for the graduation ceremony and probably sleep longer if you prefer.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### **1. What happens if I cannot find suitable sub-advisors in GSID?**

Depending on your area of interest and the nature of your research, you may not find all two sub-advisors in GSID. In such a situation, you can have ones from another graduate school within Nagoya University, although this usually takes a costlier process as non-GSID affiliates are not always committed to the issues in GSID. Again, let your main advisor support you with finding the right external pick. You should check with your main advisor if the regulations also allow students to approach a professor from another university where all internal options have failed.

### **2. What do I do if an advisor does not support my ideas?**

An advisor might fiercely oppose your ideas, such as how you intend to proceed with your research, what and where you want to publish, an aspect of, or the overall claim of your research, etc. It could be your main advisor or a sub-advisor who disagrees. Usually, they will provide a reason for disagreeing and offer alternative ideas. It is advised that you consider their point of view on its merits. They might differ from a position of experience or in keeping with their obligation

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to ensure you adhere to the rules governing the doctoral program. They are expected to defend your work before faculty, so would want things done accordingly to minimize opposition from faculty.

Except at the final voting in a Faculty meeting—which will take place after Oral Defense when a two-against-one vote in your favor is sufficient to earn the degree, you need the approval of all three advisors to pass D1-D3 presentations as well as Oral Defense. It is for this reason that a doctoral student will find negotiation skills inevitable in reaching a mutually satisfying compromise with all three advisors. Where no reason is given for rejecting your ideas, and no alternatives are suggested, endeavor to approach the advisor for an explanation to ensure it is not a case of miscommunication.

Seminar presentations allow you to share your ideas with your peers to get their feedback. It is also helpful to run your ideas by your senior colleagues and ask for frank criticisms. Their feedback could help you realize what you are doing wrong so you can make an informed decision.

### **3. What should I do when I no longer have smooth working relations with an advisor?**

A worst-case scenario is when there is a complete breakdown of understanding between a doctoral student and an advisor. Several factors could lead to such a situation: the student or advisor is uncompromising; the advisor feels that their suggestions are not taken seriously by the student; the research has become unrecognizable to the one the advisor had agreed to co-supervise; the student demonstrates lack of devotion, etc. It could also be for no expressed reason. When this happens, the advisor might ask to be removed from the dissertation committee. Again, negotiation is advised. But if all fails, the student must seek a replacement. If it is the main advisor who opts out, that may be extremely consequential for the student's progress, unless a sub-advisor already familiar with the research agrees to step up to the main advisor role.

### **4. What if an advisor is no longer able to supervise my research?**



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This might occur due to unforeseen circumstances such as when an advisor retires from service, is down to a debilitating mental or physical condition, takes up a job elsewhere, etc. It will no doubt, have a huge impact on the student and the likelihood of completing the program on schedule. The peculiarity of the situation will determine the course of action to follow. If it is a sub-advisor, the main advisor should ordinarily initiate the protocol for getting a replacement. If it is the main advisor, the student should contact the students' counselor in GSID for what to do.

### **5. How should I deal with journal article decision delays?**

Your D3 presentation is upcoming, yet the decision on your journal article is still hanging. You responded to the reviewers' comments on time and expecting an acceptance. However, the reply is taking so long. If the period of review promised by the journal editor has passed, you can politely write a follow up email. Some PhD students were sent an email of acceptance – pending actual publication - after explaining that they would need one as a requirement for graduation. Sending a follow up email when the set duration of review has not yet passed, however, may just be replied with an advice to wait.

### **6. What should I do if I get delayed in any of the critical requirements – D presentations or publication – and I am sure that I can no longer graduate on time?**

As soon as you foresee that you will no longer graduate on time, the first thing to do is inform your main advisor. S/he will be able to check if your understanding of the requirements is correct, or if there is still a way to prevent it from happening. In case your advisor agrees that there is no possibility to graduate on time given your situation, you have two options:

- **File a leave of absence (LOA).** The GSID Office will be able to give accurate advice on when to do this and what the procedures are. The advantage of this option is that you do not have to pay for tuition fee. If you are an international student on a student visa, being on LOA means your visa will expire soon and you have to leave Japan unless you change to another visa. Another disadvantage of this option is that while you are away, you are no longer the priority of your advisor. If you opt for LOA, make sure you inform your advisor

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on when you plan to come back. NEVER go on LOA without informing your main advisor. It goes without saying that this is disrespectful, but there were students in the past who filed for LOA without informing their main advisor. Be also aware that scholarships may disable to acquire LOA during the expected regular period of enrollment.

- **Remain enrolled until you finish.** In this option, there will be no visa consequences. You simply need to apply for extension. As you remain a student, just continue working towards completion. The disadvantage of this option, however, is you need to pay for tuition fee. Once you go past your third year, you lose some privileges. If you are on scholarship, you now need to pay for tuition fee on your own. You may be allowed to apply for a discount, but the chance of getting it is slim. Though not always available, there are scholarships that you may be able to apply for. Make sure to consult the International Student Advisor of GSID for scholarship options. You may also inquire with your advisors for available positions as research assistant or teaching assistant. While working part-time outside the university allows you to earn more, being within the university minimizes the distraction. You still need to continue writing, after all.

While not finishing on time is stressful, this is not the end of the world. There are ways to maximize your prolonged stay in GSID. When you finish writing your dissertation and you are just waiting for the comments from your advisors, you may write an additional journal article, apply for an internship, fellowship, or a job. Or better yet, be happy at the thought that you have more time to reconsider your plans in life. Each setback presents an opportunity.

## **7. When should I begin making post-PhD career moves?**

If you are not holding on to a job, or you hope to make a switch to another job after your PhD program, it is best to begin job-hunting before the completion of the program. The ideal time to start sending out job applications is the beginning of the third year of the doctoral course. But four to six months before graduation might still put you ahead of others in your position. Thankfully, employers targeting PhDs

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welcome applicants about to obtain the degree by the start date of the job. The recruitment process for postdoctoral researchers and tenured employees usually lasts months or even a year, thus allowing prospective PhDs to be considered. However, beginning a year to graduation will depend on whether you are certain to complete the course on schedule. Due to uncertainty, often over delays with having a publication to proceed to hold D3 presentation, some doctoral students were compelled to wait until after graduation.

For students who may be unable to secure a career position before graduation, the post-PhD phase could cause apprehension. If you will opt for an academic career, use the post-PhD period to increase your publications or apply as lecturer to universities in order to gain teaching experience. Applying for fellowships and maintaining membership to academic organizations may also help you find opportunities.

If your target employment is with international organizations, try to get internships while you are in your PhD. This counts as a work experience. You may also apply for consultancy contracts post-PhD to improve your chances. GSID offers various career seminars and training for employment with international organizations. These will help you strategize on your post-PhD career.

With your training and qualification as a PhD, you can also go into independent practice.