

Defeating self-sabotage, getting your PhD finished

Extracts from “*Defeating self-sabotage, getting your PhD finished*” by Hugh Kearns & Maria Gardiner, Staff Development and Training Unit, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. www.flinders.edu.au/staffdev/phd.htm

'Want to get your life and PhD in control? Sometimes things just don't work out – your computer crashes and you forgot to back up, your supervisor doesn't understand you, and you have so many demands on your time it's almost a conspiracy to keep you from getting your PhD finished. Maybe it's just bad luck. But if it keeps happening to you, and you are regularly over-committed or always leaving things to the last minute, there's a chance that you are deliberately self-sabotaging. Common self-sabotaging behaviours include:

- **Over-committing:** You take on so many things that your high priority goals (e.g. your PhD) suffer
- **Procrastination:** You put off important or necessary tasks, often until the last minute.
- **Perfectionism:** You want your work to be of the highest and most groundbreaking standard.
- **Busyness:** You look and feel very busy, but in reality only less important things (such as emails and referencing) are actually getting done.
- **Disorganisation:** You don't have a routine or system that makes managing your time and life easier.
- **Do not put in effort:** You don't practice or try very hard.
- **Choose performance debilitating circumstances:** You try to work in a busy or unsuitable location or situation.

If you think you might be self-sabotaging:

Be aware (but not alarmed!)

Sometimes just being aware that you're being perfectionist or over-committing can be enough to stop you doing it. So review your behaviours and try to identify patterns that get in your way.

Take action

If you procrastinate, set yourself deadlines. If you over-commit, try to get rid of some demands on your time.

Challenge your thinking

Our thinking determines our behaviour. If you're finding it hard to change your behaviour, then you need to challenge some of the assumptions and thoughts you may have.

Use the ultimate defeating SELF-SABotage tool:

Set a specific goal

What is the next specific, practical thing that you could be doing to get closer to finishing your PhD?
What would your supervisor suggest? E.g. finish analysing my most recent data, or get started on the first section of chapter 3.

Earmark times to do this

Specify the actual times and dates you can do this in the next week e.g. Mon 9-12, Fri 9-1.

Look back to see what has stopped you in the past

Use the self-sabotage checklist to determine what your typical behaviour patterns are – these are likely to stop you achieving your goal.

Fire away!

Have a go, do your best to achieve the goal you set.

- *If it didn't work...*

So, what happened?

What happened instead of working on your PhD? E.g. I went and helped someone who knocked on my door, or I just thought I'd check one email, but I kept going

Accurate thinking?

What were you thinking at the time? Were these thoughts accurate?

Back to the start again

Now go back and start again with a goal. Getting a PhD requires a lot of persistence!

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