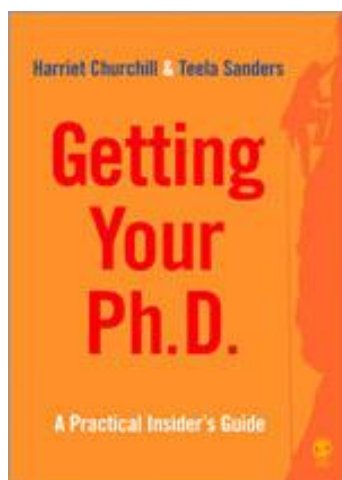


Book Review



Getting Your PhD: A Practical Insider's Guide

by Harriet Churchill and Teela Sanders

London: Sage Publications Limited (2007).

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Review by **Tetsuko Watanabe**

Getting Your PhD is a reader friendly handbook, especially useful for those who are going to embark on their PhD programmes and for students who are at the initial phases of their PhD journeys. This one of the 'survival skills for scholars' series shows the reality of PhD life, offering the strategies for common problems that students often face in the course of their PhDs.

Getting Your PhD has eighteen chapters organised into four parts. As Churchill and Sanders say, this book seeks to provide 'strategies for thinking through common problems experienced by social science and humanities research students' (Churchill and Sanders, 2007, p 7), and voices from twenty-seven contributors such as lecturers, supervisors, PhD graduates and students are inserted as real-life shared experiences throughout the book. This is the strength of this book and also makes readers feel they are receiving warm advice whilst listening to their stories over tea or coffee.

Part 1 provides guidance on the issues that PhD students usually have at an early stage or with which they struggle: Choosing a topic and formulating research questions (Chapters 1 and 2). In Part 2, the difficulties in the writing process such as managing writer's block and missing the deadline are addressed (Chapters 6 and 9). Then, Part 3 offers personal well-being strategies when PhD students need to balance research and life along with guidance on miscellaneous personal concerns related to doing a PhD: returning to study, doing a part-time PhD, combining a job and a PhD, and managing high and low emotions during a PhD (Chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14). Towards the end of this book, Part 4 covers rights as a PhD student and support that PhD students can seek from their institutes, including enabling access for the handicapped, combining raising children and doing a PhD (Chapters 16 and 17). In addition to these featured chapters, the essential aspects of a PhD such as managing the ethics, preparing for the viva and the relationship with supervisor(s) are dealt in other chapters.

What is unique about *Getting Your PhD* is the final chapter entitled, 'coping with stress with Eve Parsons, practising university counsellor', in which she provides practical advice on managing stresses and anxieties that are often raised during a PhD, isolation or procrastination, for instance. As readers go through this chapter, they would feel as if they were undertaking counselling about their PhDs. Although *Getting Your PhD* takes a number of serious aspects of issues and problems related to a PhD, the authors succeed to provide guidance on 'safeguards and flexibility that you can call on in times of need' (*ibid*, p 213).

Also, *Getting Your PhD* adopts accessible layouts such as short paragraphs, boxes for a range of advice and anecdotes, and summary sections for each chapter called, 'key points to remember', further, there are suggested readings and websites at the end of each chapter. This enables readers to use this book as a reference for a particular problem in depth, a resource book for further information about the issues raised, or a handy repository of the concise and valuable information about doing a PhD by reading through just the summary sections.

What is omitted in *Getting Your PhD* is, as the authors mention, guidance on 'methodological and design issues' and 'seeking doctoral funding' (*ibid*, p 8), and obviously, one book is not enough to cover all of the issues and problems that may be raised during a PhD. *How to Get a PhD* by Phillips and Pugh also addresses the common issues and problems that PhD students at institutes in the UK may face in particular, and provides detailed advice including cultural differences for overseas students. *The Research Student's Guide to Success* by Cryer deals with quite a similar range of topics to *Getting Your PhD* in more detail, and *Your Dissertation in Education* by Walliman and Buckler focuses on the educational domain including the topics on methodological and design issues as well. Likewise *Getting Your PhD*, the last two books also adopt reader friendly layouts. By reading through the literature, students can be equipped themselves with senses to realise pitfalls during their PhD and strategies as to how to overcome them when they actually come across them in the course of their PhD.

Nevertheless, *Getting Your PhD* alone is a highly recommended handbook, which is packed with a range of practical advice with experts' experiences of how to manage the reality of ups and downs during a PhD journey, for those who want to have a clearer idea about what they are going through on the same path.

References

- Cryer, P. (2006) *The Research Student's Guide to Success*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Phillips, E. and Pugh D. (2005) *How to Get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Walliman, N. and Buckler, S. (2008) *Your Dissertation in Education*. London: Sage Publications Limited.