

Tips & tricks when considering to do a PhD



Deciding to apply

- Only apply if you really want to do PhD research. Don't apply just to prove yourself.
- Be sure to find a topic that will keep you enthusiastic for four years.
- Be aware of the trends in your discipline and take a stand: join in, or criticize?
- Read (abstracts of) successful applications to learn 'funding lingo'.
- Think like a committee member: why is your proposal a sound investment?

During study

- Apply for teaching, research or student assistantships.
- Get in touch with the people whose work you find interesting.
- Try to get into a selection committee for a (assistant/associate) professor.
- Write a book review (publish something).
- Write a research proposal. And write another one. Practice makes perfect.
- Determine which topics you find interesting, and find out if there is a broader theme which covers all these topics. During applications it is useful to show you had a clear focus, even within your studies. It is also possible to focus on a variety of themes, and make that the 'selling point' in your application.
- Make your ambitions clear to lecturers who can possibly help you along the way. Tell them you are interested in doing a PhD and ask them politely to keep you informed if they see anything that might suit you.
- If you have an opportunity to go abroad for a few months to work on a thesis / paper / research proposal, do it! It's great for your network, cv and academic development.

Writing a research proposal

- Defend your research proposal in front of a mock committee (also helpful for practicing an interview!).
- Do not include all your ideas about a certain project. You can save them for the interview.
- Kill your darlings.
- Let others read your research proposal, preferably from various disciplines.
- Show how the project integrates different perspectives and opens up new areas of research.
- Show that you can be critical, constructive and creative.
- Each proposal might have different requirements. Some need to be more elaborate than others. Find out what is necessary for each application you do and stick to the requirements.
- Show affinity with the topic if you apply for a position within a research project. Demonstrate you have put some serious thought into it. Indicate which literature you would use, which approach you would take, and – if possible – which parallels you see with your own previous research.
- Formulate a clear, focused and relevant research question.
- Make clear how your proposed research method would lead to a valid answer to the research question.
- Very important: avoid any spelling errors in your cv/letter/proposal!