



# Implementation of a PHD research design

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- Expect big difference between original research project and ultimate result
  - As you progress, your insight deepens
  - Original proposal was most likely framed too broadly
    - Logical, because to get the proposal accepted, you want to demonstrate that you have most angles covered
  - Certain questions become much more specific
  - Original assumptions may prove not to have been correct
- However, do not lose track of your core research question(s)
- Formulate (multiple) precise hypotheses & sketch out a research design to 'prove' them
  - Flexible enough to allow you to play around
  - But sufficiently rigid that within certain boundaries, you retain your general course

# A research project evolves

- Linear progression vs. multi-threaded research
- Case study development
  - To prove whatever you have set out to prove (= linear progression)?
  - Or use it as a tool to refine your theoretical / conceptual part?
    - Consider maintaining several smaller, but separate case studies to test subparts of your concept → will make for lively reading!
    - Develop one major case study (also in parallel) to find out & later demonstrate how all parts of your research work together
- If you enter a known area of controversy on a particular issue, do not merely acknowledge the controversy, but set out to demonstrate why your approach is the correct one
  - Otherwise risk of dismissal of your work
  - A true academic will always acknowledge the merit of the argument, even if he / she disagrees with the viewpoint
    - Engage a (potential) member of your jury / faculty with a contrary view in advance on the matter, as this will help you to refine your argument!

# Structuring progress

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- If you have the slightest uncertainty about something you have written, then be certain something is amiss
  - If you leave the issue, be certain it will not disappear and one of your examiners / reviewers will pick up on it
  - Investigate very critically why you have your doubts
  - If doubts persist, consider removing the part or trying to arrive at your objective via an alternative route
- If you have a problem framing something, why not involve your partner?
  - He / she may not understand what you are researching, but try to explain to him /her what you are trying to do.
  - Have him / her ask you questions every time they do not get it
  - If you succeed explaining your problem in plain language, you will most likely have found the solution to it

# Be your own worst critic

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- **Broaden your reading and research activities into related fields, perhaps even exact sciences**
  - In 'off' moments, broaden general knowledge
  - Your specific research question may have already been framed in another discipline
  - Stimulates multi-threaded research
    - Interactive refinement of arguments in different parts of research
    - Very useful in the interplay theory – case study
- **If offered to participate in a (somewhat related) project, consider accepting it, even if time is tight**
  - *My problem*: why did only certain countries in the Middle East go for chemical weapons?
  - Answer found via SIPRI project (1993) and Kuwait conference (1994)

# Creating serendipity

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- **Self-reliance is key**
  - If you start blaming others for your own difficulties, you are close to the end of the road!
  - Analyse any problem you encounter, investigate your own role in them, and find solutions that affect you!
- **Manage your nerves**
  - Especially in the final months you may vacillate between euphoria and depression
    - Can happen several times in a single day
    - Use the euphoria to punch out text, BUT revise what you have written very critically at a later stage
    - Use the ‘trough’ moments to go for a walk, listen to loud music (*Deep Purple & Jacqueline Du Pré worked for me!*) and take a deep breath, but do not despair. You know it will pass!
    - Use other ‘off’ moments (and there may be plenty) to reread what you have written or broaden your reading.
      - Inspiration is most often self-induced.
- **Always bear in mind that not the cleverest mind necessarily succeeds, but the most willed & resilient person always does**

# Final thoughts

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