Implementation of a PHD research design

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A research project evolves

- 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
• 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
• 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
• 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)
• **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**