

10 things I wish I knew before starting my DPhil

- 1) Doing a DPhil is about becoming an independent researcher. At the start, you should ask your supervisors for as much feedback as possible. By the end, you should be able to know whether your work is good enough, and if not, how to fix it.
- 2) Early on, read the theses of students who have already been awarded the DPhil. Doing this will give you a much better idea what the final product should look like, and what you need to do to get there. Students who have finished their degree are always happy to help out with this!
- 3) Become aware of the deadlines and requirements for transfer of status, confirmation of status, and thesis submission.
- 4) Practice your 'elevator pitch' often: describe your thesis in under 60 seconds to someone who you've never met before. College parties are great for this- you're going to get asked about your DPhil constantly, and it's much easier to talk about it if you have the pitch down already.
- 5) Even better than college parties for practicing your elevator pitch are conferences. Go to as many as your funding allows, and take the time to seek out people to talk about your work and get feedback. Senior academics are often very happy to put aside time to meet during a conference if you contact them in advance.
- 6) The unexpected will happen. Data will not arrive in time, or not at all. Recruitment will take longer than you thought. One of your collaborators will stop returning your emails for months at a time. Everyone else has had this happen in their DPhil, and they got through it as well. Ask your supervisors for advice about how to deal with these situations, and if possible, think up a backup plan in the event data you were counting on doesn't become available.
- 7) Take opportunities to engage in work outside your DPhil. At times this might seem like you're doing work for free- but many people who have been awarded degrees in this department say some of the most valuable stuff they got out of their time here was by working on projects unrelated to their thesis. Ask your supervisors, or email someone in the department who has similar research interests.
- 8) Write early, and write often. It's much easier to have it written as a rough draft- and to have to revise it later- than it is to write from scratch.
- 9) Send a detailed agenda a few days in advance of what you want to talk about during supervision meetings, and take detailed minutes during meetings with supervisors.
- 10) Oxford is the centre of the academic universe, and there are myriad talks in related (and, of course, completely unrelated) disciplines every day. Take the opportunity to hear something you've never heard before- some of the best ideas come from learning outside your immediate area of interest.