

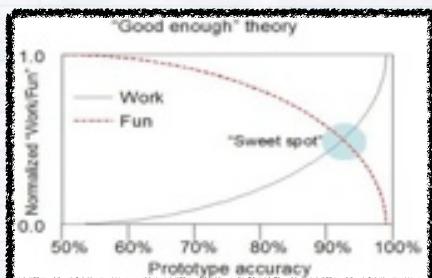


Fifteen things I wish I'd known before I started my DPhil

...advice for new female DPhil students

1. “Good enough” is genuinely OK.

Ladies like to be perfectionists, but during your DPhil it is just too exhausting and doesn't get you much further ahead in the long run!



Recovering perfectionists

3. Screwing up occasionally is OK / practically expected / makes your supervisor feel useful. You are still learning!

4. Being ambitious is nothing to be ashamed of.

Statistics show that women in particular don't apply for things because they doubt they meet the criteria, but there is nothing wrong with reaching for the top. If you never apply for things like awards, travel grants or post-doc positions, you will never realise your potential.

"Whilst I was worrying "Am I good enough to do a post-doc?" all the guys in my office were asking themselves "Where will I get a post-doc?"! I had no idea that I was holding myself back by not being confident enough."

Final Year DPhil Student (who has found herself a post-doc!)



5. It's OK to admit that you don't know stuff!

You are still learning!

If your supervisor asks if you have heard of a paper/person, it's OK to say "no!". (NB: it's obvious when you don't know and try to wing it). Many women feel awkward about their own ignorance, but we're too hard on ourselves - it's OK (and normal) to not know stuff! If you admit what you don't know it makes learning much easier and faster as your supervisor can talk to you at a level you understand. Never be afraid of asking "dumb" (not!) questions!

2. Most women do not think they are “good enough”!

It's easy to think you are not good enough, but remember - YOU are the Chosen One! Your supervisor believes you are the right person for the job, so take confidence.

THE CHOSEN ONE

Anakin Skywalker, the Chosen one. The prophecy of the Chosen One was an ancient Jedi legend that foretold the coming of a being who would restore balance to the Force. Remember, you too are the Chosen One: selected and honed by a Jedi philosopher/your supervisor, you can and will protect and progress a scientific realm.



6. Never struggle on your own.

For advice about both professional and personal issues- try your supervisor, friends or chat to senior female academics (who are excellent sources of advice).

Remember, asking for help is not a sign of weakness. There are lots of welfare services accessible through your college. Often all we need to hear is another person (who's opinion we respect) telling us that we are doing OK.



Something wrong?

7. Procrastination is very easy to do!

Everyone does it.

8. Self sabotage is easy to do. Women do it most often.

But sometimes in Science, self-sabotage can be a good thing as it's important to learn how to be self-critical

9. It's hard for people outside of academia to understand the academic lifestyle.

Don't listen to people who try to make you feel bad for not getting a "proper job" or working office hours.

10. Everything takes considerably longer than you think. Everyone thinks they are running behind schedule.

There is never enough time to do everything you want,



13. Enjoy your DPhil! Enjoy Oxford!

Your DPhil is likely to be the most free-reign you'll get on a research project until you have your own funding and/or are your own boss. Oxford University is a world renowned excellent institution, and the city itself is stunning: make the most of it.

But taking breaks is important. Not taking them is counterproductive, even if you think you are running behind schedule. If you are "not in the mood" to work, leave the office and take a "proper" break. You'll return feeling refreshed and ready to work - better than wasting an afternoon at your desk on Facebook!



11. Talk to as many people as you can.

Not everyone thinks the way your supervisor does, and it's really helpful to hear different points of view. Don't be afraid to ask to chat to other academics and senior researchers: you'll be surprised how often they say yes and the worst thing that can happen is if they say no! Talking informally about your work improves your communication skills and may lead to science gold (i.e. improvements in your project, collaborations, and post-DPhil employment).

12. Sometimes the most productive way to work is to not be at work!

Figure out what works for you. If you are not a morning person, accept it, and work in the evenings! If you write best in your pyjamas at home - write there! Some supervisors say they like to see their students in the department every day, but most accept that it's fine for people to do what works for them.

Flexibility is one of the perks of academic life



Tea is your friend.

15. You have time to put together a thesis, even if it doesn't feel like it!



14. THE 3C'S - CHOCOLATE, CAKE AND CAFFEINE ARE LIFEGIVING.

Self-administer frequently and feel no guilt....dispell any potential guilt by sharing the 3 C's with others.