

Reflections

Three Days in the Life of a Full-Time Working, Studying Mum (or How To Avoid Your PhD)

Karen Brown

In preparation for putting pen to paper (or fingers to typewriter), there have been three guiding principles that I have considered since starting my PhD. Firstly, you are more likely to achieve your goals if you sit down and write for one hour each day, five days consecutively, than if you attempt to sit down and write for five hours the same day. Secondly, your PhD studies will have ebbs and flows so don't expect to achieve at a high rate all the time, and don't get depressed when you don't. And thirdly, keeping a diary of your student activities will help you become a better researcher.

A year later, I can fully endorse the first two principles, but I cannot agree with the third. Having had a chance to reflect upon some of my diary entries for November, I am inclined to disagree. In fact, what all this journaling has really shown me is that I have some extremely well-developed PhD avoidance strategies. So, for those of you who are feeling somewhat lost and lonely, daunted by the ever-ticking PhD clock and suffering from inertia –you are not alone!

Tuesday 22rd November: Travel to London Met to meet Supervisor

9.30: Just dropped children off at school and child-minder and have just managed to catch the 9.27 train to Euston. Hmm lots of seats, that's good. It means I can spend the fifty-minute journey reading the library book I have to return today. There may be some useful quotes in it or links to further research...

On second thought, I think I'll finish my coffee and chocolate bar first.... Oh, look!

Someone left a copy of *The Sun* on the next seat. I'll just see if there's any interesting news, or any news at all. It won't take five minutes...

Are we there already? Oh well, it was a boring book anyway. I don't know why I borrowed it in the first place.

11.00: I'm just about to meet my supervisor. I really should look up that reference I was given last time, but first I'll just answer a few emails. Crikey, I forgot to book my elder son into afterschool club. Must do that now... Oh no, why have I got thirty emails in my inbox? All spam vouchers at that. I will have to read each one carefully to see if I can save any money... No, as I thought – all a waste of time...speaking of which...time to go!

13.00: Very useful meeting. Yes it was, I can't remember what we discussed but it felt like a very useful meeting... Hmm, must email that person whose address I was just given... right after I have coffee with my friend who I have arranged to meet.

14.30: Doesn't time fly when you're having fun? I have achieved next to nothing and now I must catch the train home. Oh well, at least I can work on the train.

15.15: No I can't, hubby called and that's the end of any study time. Train's too packed anyway...

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Friday 25th November: Study Day

I have been asked to cover an extra shift at work. Haven't got the time, but I need the money before Christmas. I will have to accept. There goes my six hours of solitary confinement with my research question. Pity, I was just about to enjoy it for once.

Monday 28th: A Day in the Office

9.00: Not a chance for the PhD today, just too much paperwork to throw out. It has mounted on my desk like some sculptural attempt to replicate Mount Everest. It will take a week to reach the Summit. Still, I'd better head for Base Camp or I will be caught in an avalanche.

14.50: The maintenance man is very unhappy with me. He just dislocated his shoulder emptying my waste bin. I don't know why he is complaining – he has nothing on the slipped disk and twisted ankle I acquired in an attempt to conquer the giant paper mound...damn! Did I throw out all my notes from the meeting with my supervisor last week? I bet I have... No, it's alright. They are still in the car, trampled on daily by my

children when I pick them up from school... Speaking of which...

15.15: Of all the stupid things to do. I've gone and volunteered to be a parent governor at my son's school. I really must be desperate not to do any research. Well, that's not quite true, I will have to research how to be a parent governor now, a jolly site more interesting than my research question. I'll get back to my PhD in a few weeks. No I can't, it's nearly Christmas!

You know If I hadn't spent so much time with this diary, I could have written at least a page of my PhD by now...Happy New PhD Year!

Biography

Karen Brown is a Vice-Chancellor's Scholar and second-year PhD student in the Faculty of Law, Governance and International Relations at London Metropolitan University. Her main research interest is in the field of medical law and ethics. She is currently investigating the efficacy and equality of English legal provisions for individuals with an intersex condition, particularly in the context of the healthcare system.