

# **Crossing the Finishing Line : How to successfully complete your doctorate**

Professor Barbara Jack and  
Professor Annie Topping

# Workshop Aim

The aim of this workshop is to explore the particular challenges the End Game presents and discuss practical solutions for overcoming them.

# Workshop Objectives

- Have examined the writing up process and identified strategies to aid successful completion
- To understand the purpose of viva voce and examine the purpose, roles and possible outcomes



Edge Hill University  
FACULTY OF HEALTH

**EPRC**

# Writing your thesis

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[www.edgehill.ac.uk/eprc](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/eprc)

# How to start?

- Initially seems like a massive task and may even be confusing as to where to start



*Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'*



*'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.*

*'I don't much care where--' said Alice.*

*'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.*

*'--so long as I get somewhere,' Alice added as an explanation.*

*'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'*

*Before beginning a Hunt, it is wise to ask someone (who knows what they are doing) what you are looking for before you begin looking for it*

**Pooh's Little Instruction Book,**  
*inspired by A. A. Milne*

# Getting Started

- No longer fashionable to talk of 'writing up' but of the writing process
- Writing is learned by writing, reading and perceiving oneself as a writer

# The Environment

- For all the mystery that surround it, feng shui evolved from the simple observation that people are affected, for good or ill, by surroundings: the layout and orientation of workplaces and homes

# Your environment

What environment works best for you?

# Getting started

- Effective writing is based on three areas
- Structure
- Process
- Outcome

# Structure

- Important to discuss with your supervisor the structure
- Check institutional requirements – essential
- Look at recent thesis in the library for ideas on layout etc
- Develop a structure – this will be very broad at first

# Process

- This should be planned as a military operation
- References – if you have Endnote/reference manager/ref works learn to use it
- Files – DO NOT JUST SAVE IT ON A PC OR FLASH DRIVE
- Set up folders on your University email account to email it to yourself
- Set up other account to do the same ie hotmail etc

# Process continued

- Important to plan the timetable of work
- Especially important for short time spans
- Build in time for proof reading ( find a friend to proof read it for you)
- Binding etc
- Crises that may occur

# Basic Timetable

| Week | W/c      | Any events | Plan of what to do |
|------|----------|------------|--------------------|
| 1    | 23 Jan   | Eg holiday |                    |
| 2    | 30 Jan   |            |                    |
| 3    | 6 Feb    |            |                    |
| 4    | 13 Feb   |            |                    |
| 5    | 20 Feb   |            |                    |
| 6    | 27 Feb   |            |                    |
| 7    | 6 March  |            |                    |
| 8    | 13 March |            |                    |
| 9    | 21 March |            |                    |

# Process is a balancing act



# Barriers along the way

- Displacement activity
- Computer failure
- Research issues – ie sample recruitment – seek help
- Issues that affect you – ie personal problems – keep supervisor informed

# Strategies to help

- Writing a thesis is equated with the loneliness of the long distance runner

# Loneliness of the long distance researcher





# Strategies to help you are not alone!

- Peer support
- Post grad society?
- Form your own group
- Web chat room

# Writers Block/ the fear creeping in factor

- If you get blocked, draw a graph, or do some more analysis
- Take a break – do some exercise
- Accept that your thesis will NOT be perfect
- Self doubt is normal
- Beware “Imposter Syndrome”
- Seek help



A little help  
please?

# Advice on drafts from supervisors

- Take it
- They know better
- Do not waste time arguing with them – unless there is a fundamental point to discuss
- Make the alterations ASAP

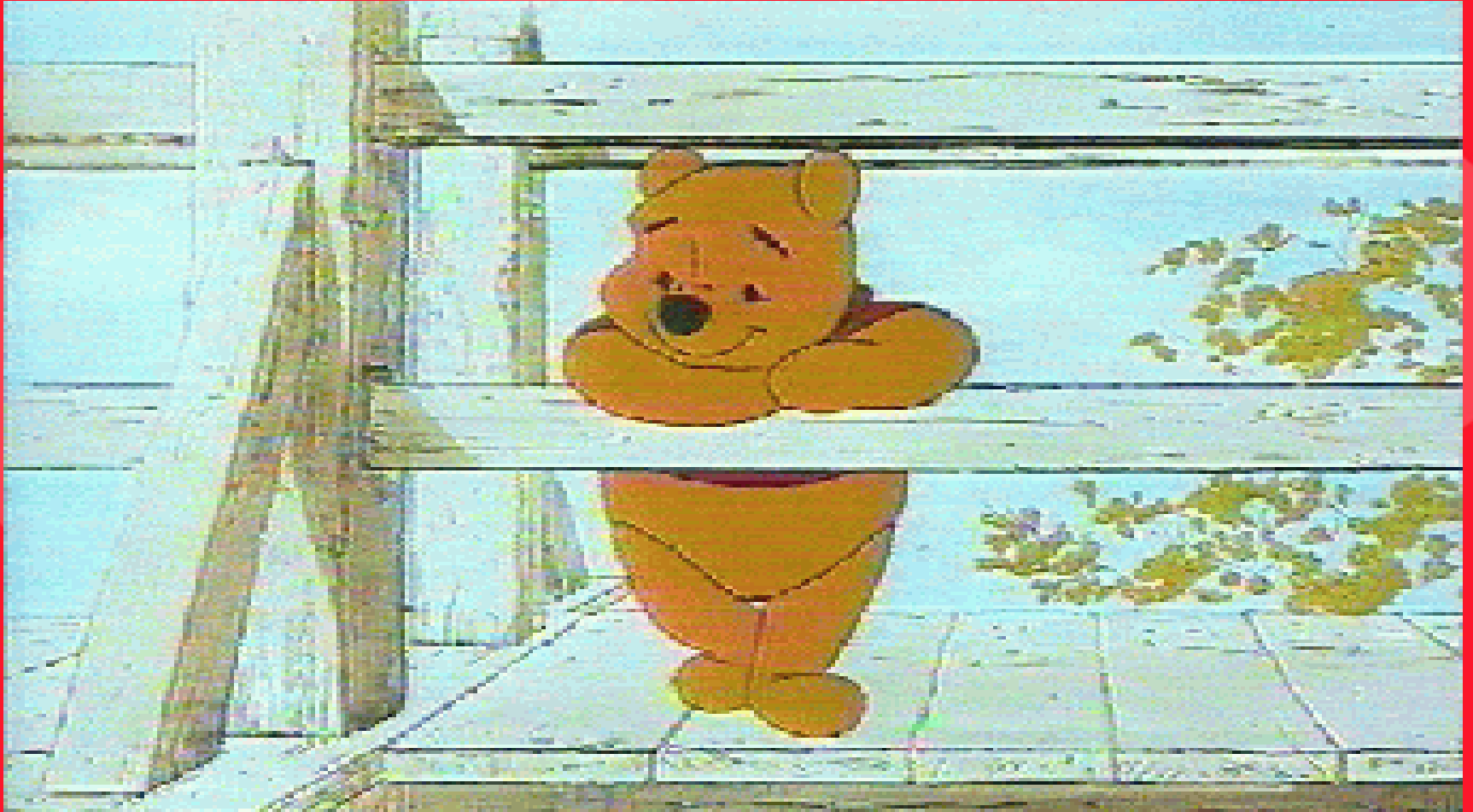
# The Outcome

- Drafts of the thesis need very careful management
- Students have sometimes handed in the wrong draft
- Keep track of drafts by printing on different colour paper, or including draft as a header on each page
- Careful naming of files (consider using dates in file name ie lit rev feb 1 09)

# The outcome

- At some point things begin to get a bit easier
- Plan to do something really nice when you submit

Sometimes, if you stand on the bottom rail of a bridge & lean over to watch the river slipping slowly away beneath you, you will suddenly know everything there is to be known.



*from Pooh's Little Instruction Book, inspired by A. A. Milne*



University of  
HUDDERSFIELD

# The Viva Voce Examination

Annie Topping  
Professor of Nursing  
Centre for Health & Social Care Research

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# Purpose

- To check its your work (authenticate it)
- That you can defend your work
- That it meets the standard for the award
  - Contributes to knowledge
  - Robust execution
  - Locate thesis in wider context

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# Game Plan

- Choice of examiners
  - Experience
  - Expertise
- Knowing your thesis
- Mock Viva
- Publications

# The ill prepared candidate.....



The one legged soccer match wasn't  
a great success.

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# Preparation

- Typos
- Familiarise yourself with your work
- Quick scan to see what is new
- Have a few prepared responses
- Sleep
- Eat & drink

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# The Event



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Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

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# The Actors

- External Examiner(s)
- Internal Examiner
- Internal Chairperson
- Supervisor
- Candidate
- An audience?

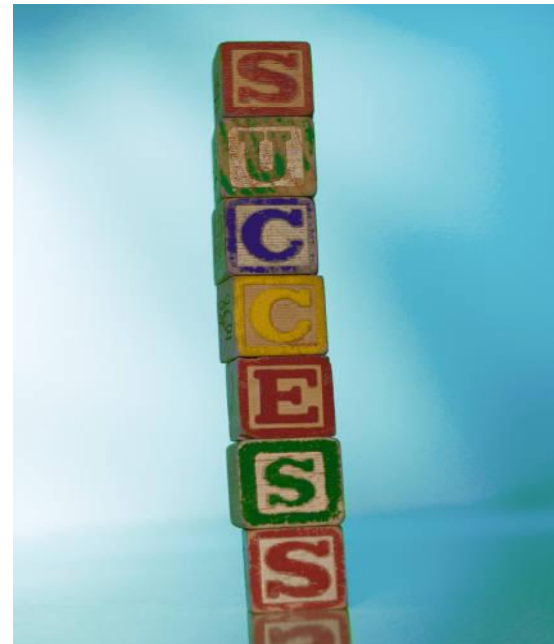
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# The Script

- Opening gambit
- Lunge and parry
- Finale
- Retreat offstage
- Decision

# Outcome

- Award Regulations
- Corrections
- Doing the work
- Graduation



# Next Steps

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“I didn’t actually catch anything, but I do feel I gained some valuable experience.”

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# Post Doc Career

- Take a brief holiday
- Publication Plan with your supervisor(s)
- Action the Plan
- Mentorship
- Planning a postdoc career

# Take Home Messages

- **Planning**
- **Preparation**
- **Aftercare**

