How to survive a PhD

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(Based on earlier slides by Prof. Mark Johnson)
What is this PhD thing?

• Your goal: to become a leading expert on…
• … your chosen research topic. (So choose it carefully!)  
• There is funding, but you’ll have to compete for it.
• You’ll always need more time, so manage what you have carefully!
Planning your work

Piled Higher and Deeper by Jorge Cham

WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE

NOTHING SAYS "I'M ALMOST DONE" TO YOUR ADVISOR/SPOUSE/PARENTS LIKE PRETENDING YOU HAVE A PLAN

STEP 1: Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

THESIS OUTLINE

1.  2.  3.  4.  5.  chapter F's

5 = "That's it??"
6-7 = "Not bad"
8+ = "Are you crazy??"

STEP 2: Fill in the "freebies":

THESIS OUTLINE
1. INTRODUCTION
2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4.  5.  6.  7. CONCLUSIONS

You're halfway done!

STEP 3: Make up titles for the "meat" chapters:

1. LIT REVIEW
2. METHODOLOGY
3. THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR
4. (SOMETHING YOU ACTUALLY UNDERSTAND)
5. MAKE STUFF UP
6. CONCLUSIONS

(And years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and, by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

STEP 4: Wooh! You just bought yourself another two years

www.phdcomics.com

Title: "Writing your Thesis Outline" - originally published 5/22/2005
Planning your work

• Define your topic carefully. Your project should be:
  • Relevant to something
  • Achievable in 3 years
  • Something that interests you
• Try to publish your work in conferences recommended by your supervisor. This will give you important opportunities to meet other researchers who will help you develop your ideas.
• Concentrate on *quality* rather than *quantity*.
• Technical writing is harder than you think. When you have completed something then **WRITE IT UP … NOW!**
Technical Writing
Technical Writing

- Communicating your ideas is crucial for success
- If writing English is hard, then practise often — it’s the only way to get better.
- Learn how to use appropriate authoring tools, and also find out who has experience with those tools because they’ll be able to help you!
- Eg LaTeX is not hard, but it’s a bit fiddly so start using it now if it’s the right one for you.
Technical Writing

- Your writing should set out a clear agenda in simple language;
- Stating the problem is crucial to explain to the reader why you are bothering to make them read;
- Very small examples are normally a great way to help your reader (and yourself!)
- State the results in a way that demonstrates you have addressed some part of the problem you have set up;
- Make sure you include appropriate literature — there’s nothing that makes reviewers more irritated than a piece of work in which the writer has not “done their homework”.
We are here to help you :-) 

• We all want you to succeed!
• Make sure you don’t become isolated — talk to your supervisor, other graduate students, help each other out!
• If you are stuck on something for a long time, then put it away for a while and try something else. “Your little grey cells” will probably continue to work for you…
• … do not spend months before telling your supervisor you are stuck!
We are here to help you :-)