

Track record  
on a  
shoestring.



Flinders University • Lecture • Research • Self-management

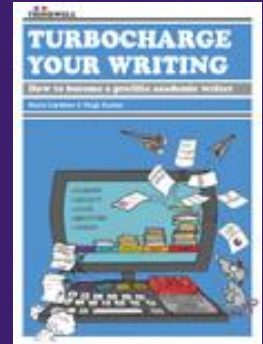
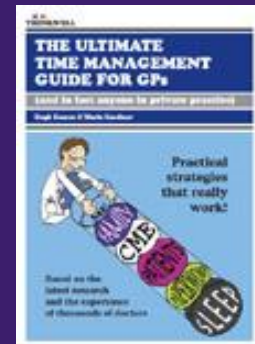


**THINKWELL**

# 52 WAYS TO STAY WELL

**During your PhD, Post-doc or Research Career**

Hugh Kearns



## COLUMN

## The care and maintenance of your adviser

Graduate students bear as much responsibility as their mentors for ensuring that they are well guided through their degrees, say Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner.

Ever since the advent of graduate school, students have complained about their advisers. It is almost an article of faith. The adviser is never available or too available; gives too much feedback or not enough; is too critical or isn't providing enough direction; and soon. Exchanging horror stories with other students is a great way to bond. But advising goes both ways — and if, after careful reflection on their own studies and progress, students determine that they are not getting the guidance they require, they must address the deficiencies.

It is not surprising that advisers figure large in graduate students' conversations. In 2009, the US Council of Graduate Schools in Washington DC reported survey results showing that 69% of the 1,856 doctoral students who responded identified mentoring or advising as a main factor in PhD completion. Our own research at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and our experience at graduate-student workshops across the world suggest that the adviser-student relationship has a big impact on completion time. It certainly influences whether students are still smiling at the end of their degrees!

Students often assume that once they call someone an adviser, he or she automatically acquires all the skills of advising. After all, if your adviser is the world leader in stem-cell technology, he or she must excel at the seemingly simple task of advising — not to mention possess highly developed interpersonal skills and a keen interest in graduate-student development. Sadly, that is not the case.

Sometimes, advising is a weakness of an otherwise very accomplished scientist. This is not surprising. Mentoring tends to be a private business, and often the only model available is an adviser's own experience of having been advised. If it was good, they decide to copy their style and methodology; if it was bad, they do the opposite. There is no guarantee that either approach will provide the student with the guidance he or she needs.

A proactive approach is necessary. If your adviser isn't looking after you in the way you need, then you need to look after them. At some point in the PhD journey most graduate students come to an important realization. This is my thesis. My name is written on the front of it. I need to become the driver. The sooner they

can do this, the better. If you're not getting feedback, clear direction or the necessary resources, then you must do something about it. What does this mean in practice? Let us take some examples.

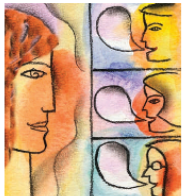
## MEETINGS

A comment we often hear at our workshops is, "My adviser is lovely but he/she is just so busy that we never get to talk about my thesis". And our response is, "Yes, your adviser is busy. All advisers are busy and will continue to be busy. Regardless, you need to organize meetings where you can get real face time and talk about your thesis." We're not recommending a quick chat in the coffee room or a brief word in the lab. No, we mean a lab meeting.

**FEEDBACK** Again, in an is skilled at delicate in pe ment and def of feedback. One student (once so stulla shooting — al riddled with bloodied mes To be fat e and saying "C ing into a nee food." You n When handr type of feedb might say, "I want feedback. Please focus. If the feedback, more detail. B asking for wh that he or sh

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Hugh Kearns and research h University in workshops, for. (see [thiswell.com](http://thiswell.com))



do in the next two weeks, the next meeting. This all sounds very straightforward. But if more students followed these steps, many adviser-student issues could be resolved.

## MEETINGS

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## COLUMN

## Waiting for the motivation fairy

It's easy to give in to procrastination — but Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner offer some tips for getting your drive back.

"I love deadlines. I love the whooshing sound they make as they go by!"

— Douglas Adams

If you were trying to set up ideal conditions for procrastination, conducting a research project would provide them. Such projects tend to be large and time-consuming, completing a doctoral research project, for example, often takes three years or more. Deadlines and endpoints are often fuzzy and ill-defined. Then there's the reward structure you can put in a lot of effort with little to no positive feedback along the way, and the rewards, if there are any, take a long time to come. Add to this the fact that scientists are often procrastinators by nature, and you have a recipe for disaster.

In our experience, just scheduling the meeting isn't enough. You can assume that your adviser hosts productive meetings or can interrupt what you need to know. You need a specific, unambiguous agenda that could include such action items as what you've done in the past two weeks, feedback on written work, what you'll

useful, and you may well be, but it's not the thing you should be doing right now. So why is housekeeping, for example, so much fun when you're supposed to be working on your dissertation or a paper? It's a displacement activity, used to dispel the self-reproach or discomfort that we feel for not doing something else. Reading a novel or taking a nap

not keep get. Of course motivated i strategies ca ditions that's the first pla ken down it steps, but tar you'll make t — which pro ing — the t you'll read t or you'll mal Second, yo deadline by tiny step. Se tomorrow is line needs to it. Third, immediate ri ing the com 10:00 a.m., y have a coffe



causes too much guilt. But have you ever, say, reorganized your folders to make it easier to find the files? It would speed up your writing after all. Or perhaps you've diligently labelled all the cupboard in the lab to make it easier to find things.

Although these activities or excuses seem acceptable, their fatal flaw is that once they're over, you still haven't finished that article, started that experiment or written your dissertation. You probably have an increased sense of guilt because you're not making progress on your goal. And although you've found and read that reference, you still don't feel motivated to write. Sadly, while you were answering e-mails or counting the glassware, the motivation fairy didn't stop by and make

that difficult task loe That's just not how m Most people have a standing, we like to leads to action, or n you feel like doing s This model might we doing, such as wchi walk. But it's not par tasks with fuzzy dea that you may never i and rethink that pa a hard-and-fast deadl different mood.

## MOTIVATION MYTH

Some psychologe ms leads to motivation, more action. You hav ready, then you'll fe then you'll take mo ally had this experier running an analysis if decide to do it, and o yourself. "This isn't a not keep get. Of course motivated i strategies ca ditions that's the first pla ken down it steps, but tar you'll make t — which pro ing — the t you'll read t or you'll mal Second, yo deadline by tiny step. Se tomorrow is line needs to it. Third, immediate ri ing the com 10:00 a.m., y have a coffe

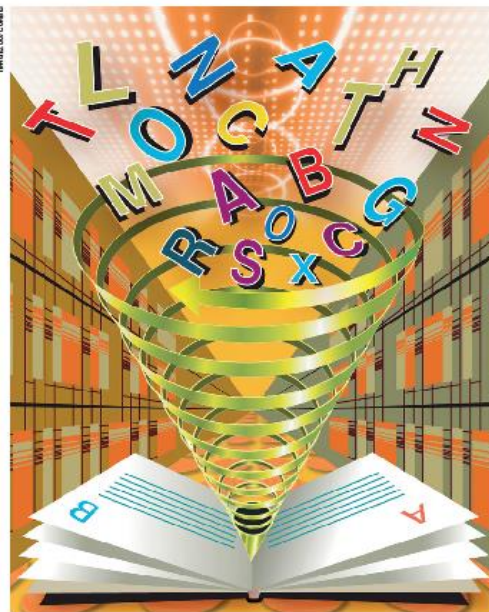
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IMAGE COURTESY



## COLUMN

## Turbocharge your writing today

Before you can tackle the overwhelming task of huge writing projects, you must first put aside some widely held myths, say Maria Gardiner and Hugh Kearns.

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# CAREERS

EDUCATION US needs to improve science literacy to prepare workforce p.110

TURNING POINT Biochemist's high-risk research direction pays off p.101

NATURE JOBS For the latest career listings and advice [www.naturejobs.com](http://www.naturejobs.com)

As a graduate student, you might find yourself well on the way with your education and ABD (all but dissertation). Day after day, you tell yourself that you really, really intend to start writing your paper. After all, you've collected all the data, analysed them many times and entered them into tables. But then you start thinking that maybe you need just a few more data. Perhaps, too, you should try a different analysis technique. And what if the tables you used aren't the right ones, or need to be formatted differently?

Many of the thousands of researchers we have worked with are constantly being tripped up by finicky, nagging details that keep them from writing up their research. Every day, they mean to start, but every day, something gets in their way or seems more important — and this can go on for years. Some very common obstacles get in the way of high-quality, high-quantity scholarly writing, but powerful, evidence-based techniques can help researchers to overcome repetitive and unhelpful habits and get moving (see "How to get out of a dissertation-writing rut").

## WRITING MYTHS

The biggest impediments to scholarly writing are long-held myths that seem to get passed down through the academic ranks like precious but unhelpful ancient wisdom. The first is the Readiness Myth — "I should write when I feel ready, and I don't feel ready yet." The secret to high output is that you have to write before you feel ready, because you might never reach that point. Researchers read endlessly and conduct countless experiments in the belief that it will eventually make them feel ready to write — we call these habits readiness and experiential. But ironically, all that reading and experimenting often makes them less likely to write, and more confused. So the first way to speed up your writing is to stop waiting, stop reading and experimenting, and start writing. You won't feel ready, but you have to do it anyway.

This brings us to the second myth, the Clarity Myth — "I should get it all clear in my head first, and then write it down." This isn't how writing works in practice. You have probably had the experience in which you were sure about how a paper would go until you started to write it. Then you discovered that there were inconsistencies, or it didn't flow well, or the links didn't make sense. This tells you that it wasn't all that coherent in your head, after all. In fact, writing clarifies your thinking. Writing is not recording — you don't just take

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## Welcome to ThinkWell™

ThinkWell™ uses the latest psychological and educational research to develop workshops and materials to help you be more effective in your daily life.

We work extensively with doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and many others to assist them to:

- manage their time more effectively and perform better
- set goals and achieve them
- achieve sustainability in their career
- think more clearly and make better decisions
- reduce stress
- find out what is making them stressed
- learn how to evaluate and deal with emotions
- feel more content and confident
- spend more time with their family and those who matter

## Latest News

### New book - Time Management for GPs

Billed as the ultimate time management guide, this is tailored specifically for GPs and people in private practice.

### New edition of The 7 Secrets

This favourite has been given a new look and feel.

### Interview on ABC 891

Hugh and Maria talk about feeling overwhelmed.

[Recent media](#)

## Books

ThinkWell™ has put together a series of books to assist a range of professions and positions, including doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and many other occupational groups.

These books are available via our [online bookshop](#).



# Ben Bulbin, County Sligo, Ireland





Nice to meet you!

Name

Role

Stage of your career

## What is a track record?



# Being Strategic



## The hard way

### Work like a frightened idiot

- Apply for every grant
- Teach every topic
- Sit on every committee
- Do it on your own
- Mile wide – inch deep

## The slightly less hard way

### Work smarter

- Apply your big brain to your career
- Pick winners (or at least avoid hopeless causes)
- Say No
- Focus your research efforts
- Collaborate, network
- Finish things
- Promote yourself
- Others?

YOU ARE  
HERE



But WHY?

Expectations



Where are you going to?





# Your Plan?



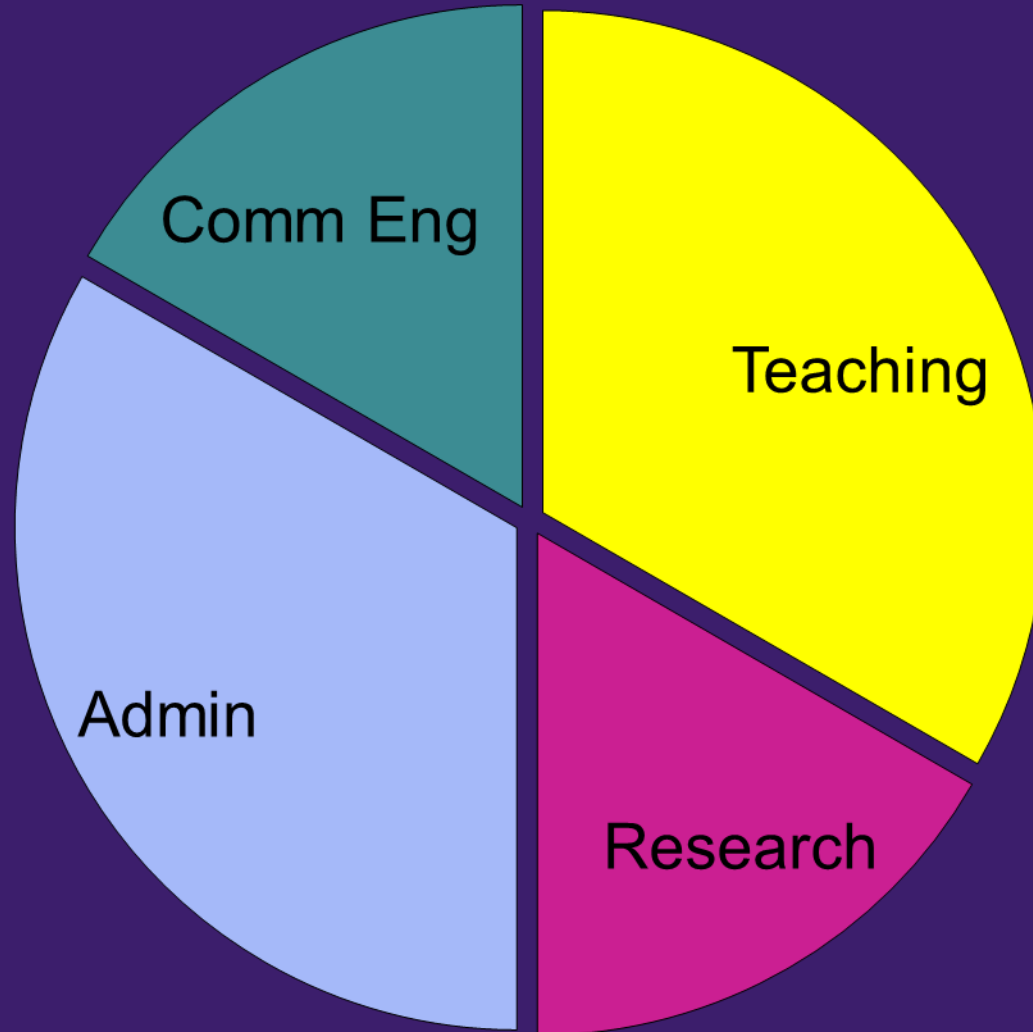
1 year

3 years

5 years



# The parts of the role



Teaching? Research? Leadership?

Areas of expertise?

- Broad? Narrow?

Promotion? Grants?

What are the gaps?

# Research outputs

## Backward planning

What is your target or aim

- A position?
- A promotion?
- A grant?
- Impact?

Long lead time

Promotion criteria

Grant criteria

# Your Plan?



1 year

3 years

5 years

# Research

# Timeline

Learning how to research  
Building links  
Conferences  
Finish PhD  
Publish

PhD



Individual focus

# Timeline

Building track record  
More independent  
Establishing yourself  
Some supervision

Post-doc



Individual focus  
Some team focus



# Timeline

Leading Researcher

Lone wolf



Individual focus  
Bigger achievements

# Leading researcher

High impact publications

Invited presentations

International profile

Impact on field

Independent funding

Successful translation, relevant

Status

# Timeline



Research  
Leader

Leading a team

Team focus  
Attracting and keeping  
Developing

# Research leader

Helping others, bring on people behind them

Good supervisor/mentor

Advocate

Pass on knowledge

Provide opportunities, networks

Communicate ideas to a wide audience

Define their vision

Encourage/support

Generosity

Innovative

Publish from PhD

Publish from existing data

- Literature reviews
- Methodology
- Results

Shows that you deliver

Less \$ needed

## Money

Start small and build

Money begets more money

- Establishment grants
- Special projects
- Prizes and awards
- Consultancy funds

Research Office

## Small pilots

- Proof of concept
- Easier to get future funds
- Shows determination
- Tests methodology, techniques
- Builds linkages

How could you pilot your research is a small way?



Offer to assist in bigger projects

Clarify role and outputs (authorship)

Choose wisely

You have to take the initiative

You will have to do most of the work

Senior researchers – peers

What's in it for them?

Who could you collaborate  
with?

Building your capacity

Honours, Masters, PhD

Select wisely

Support them

A good start

Time consuming

Networking

Conference junkies

Turning presentations into papers

Write the paper first

Papers and posters

Workshops, colloquium, panels, SIG

Build into study tours

Build in writing time

Report and paper

# Capitalise

2 x 1

3 x 1

4 x 1

# Capitalise

Incorporate into teaching

Guest lecture

Seminars

Professional journals



How could you capitalise on  
work you've already done?

# Promoting your work

Media

In your department?

Key researchers?

People you cite?

In your email signature

Digital repository

# Promoting your work

Your webpage

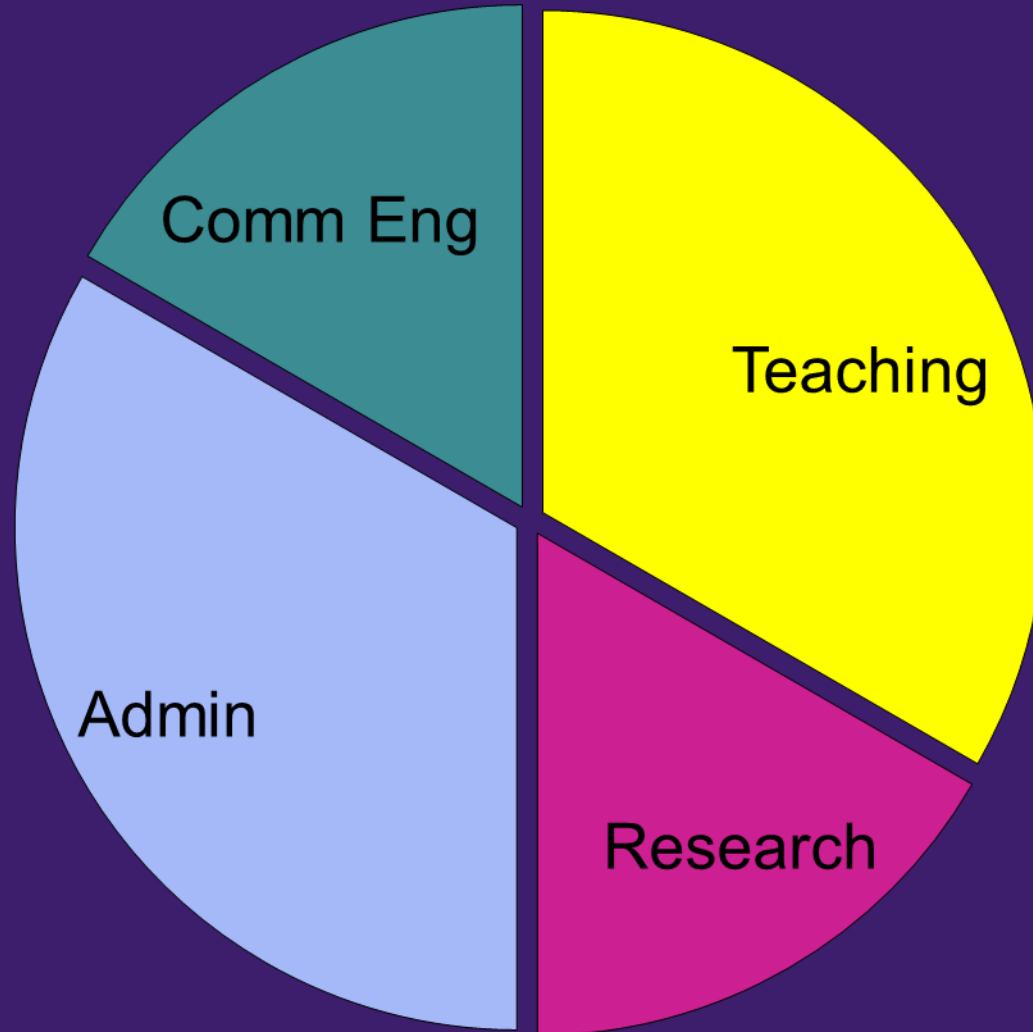
Twitter

A blog?

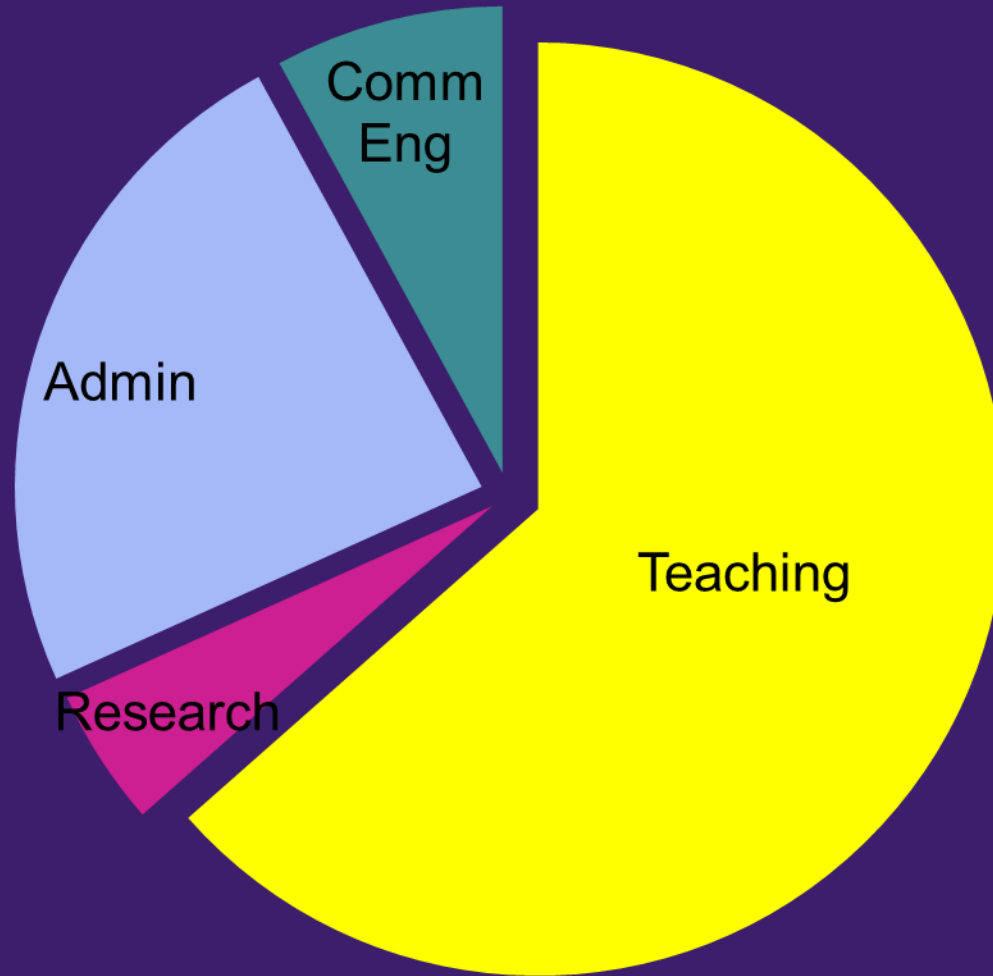
How could you promote  
your work?

## Making time

# The parts of the role



# Finding a Balance



Everything takes longer than you think

Everything takes longer the first time

Tendency to overcommit (wanting to please)

Dividing up your time - limits



# Teaching

Can take over  
Containing  
Overpreparing  
Over-servicing  
Evaluation worry  
Marking  
Feedback

# Teaching

Consultation times

Bulletin boards

FAQ

Teach topics you know

Re-use and recycle

Set clear expectations/limits

Prepare well but not over

Large classes

Assessment and marking

Use any available help

# Research Strategy

## MILE WIDE – INCH DEEP

A diagram consisting of three vertical yellow bars of varying heights and widths, set against a dark purple background. The bars are positioned on the left side of the slide. An arrow points from the text "Areas of expertise" to the right side of these bars.

← Areas of expertise

# Your research area



# Your research area





# Picking an area

Your interests

Your expertise

Opportunity – environment

Growth areas

Funding

Collaborations

# Publishing Strategy

# Publication strategy

Is there a story?

Which papers are for future funding or collaborations?

Building a team for future grant applications





- ▲ Team writing or writing with others provides deadlines and motivation (if managed well)
- ▲ It maximises everyone's success
- ▲ And often you get better papers!

# Paper tracking

Publication		Progress					Who & When			Comments	Status		
Name	Person	I	M	R	D	Other	With	Going to	On		Submit by	To	Status
Paper 1	BL	100%	100%	50%	50%		BL	LK		One para in discussion left to do. Upon return from conference	1-Jul	?	
Migration paper	BL					30%	BL			Have all data and figures.	20-Dec		
Inflammation paper	BL					30%	BL	DM (L)		Have all data and figures.	20-Dec		
Demographic paper	LK	100%	100%	100%	100%		LK	BL		Has a grant due 24th June	Sep-11		submitted
Invited review	LK					10%	LK	BL		Have started lit search	Dec-11		
Follow up study	KP					80%	KP	BL DM		Collecting data intensively at the moment	Aug-11		
Invited review	KP					30%	KP	BL DM			Dec-11		
KL2	DM					60%	DM	Others (L)		Moderately important	tbc		
Markers paper	DM					30%	DM	Others (C)		Have a draft - Important for future	tbc		

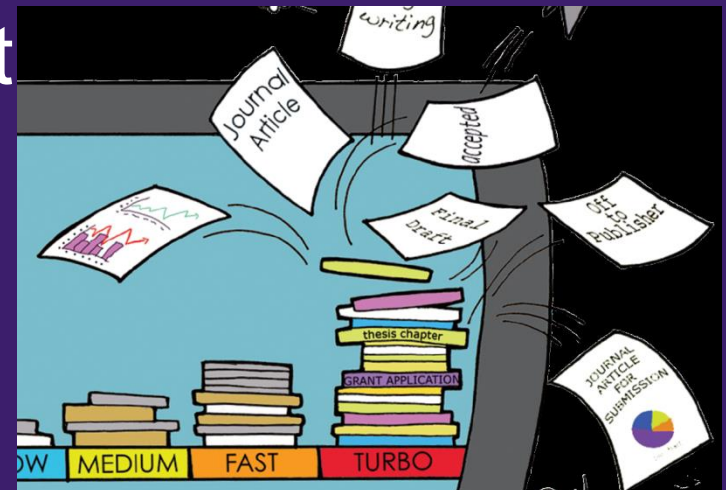
Passive

WAITING

Active



- Who else *are* you writing with?
- How is the process being managed?
- Who else *could* you write with?
- Asking and offering.



# Time

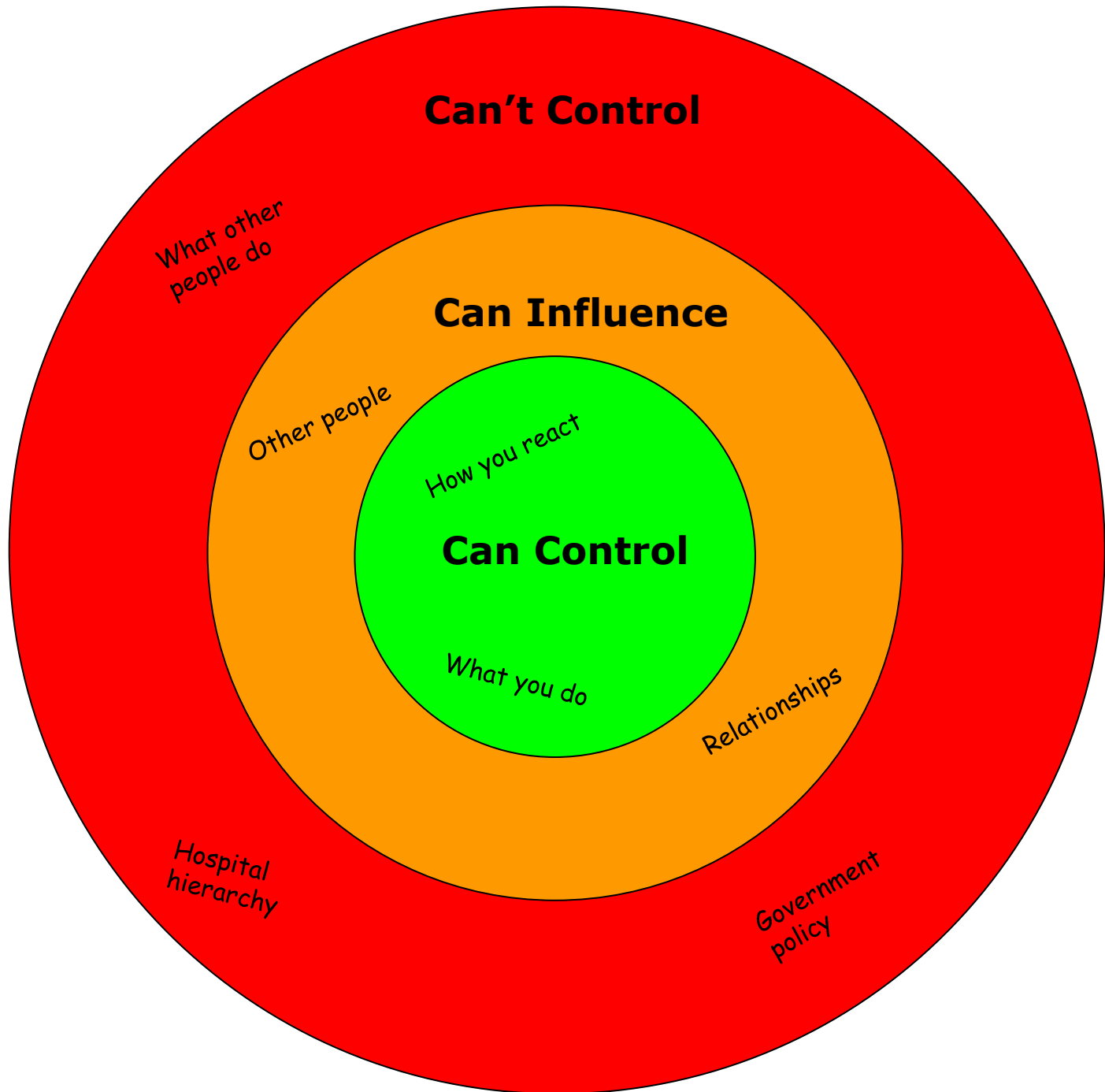
# More time for publishing

- Reduce the time spent on hands-on research (get others to do it)
- Focus on:
  - Writing papers
  - Managing others (RA's, PhDs, co-authors, teams)
  - Ideas
  - Interpretation
  - Grant writing
  - Writing papers!

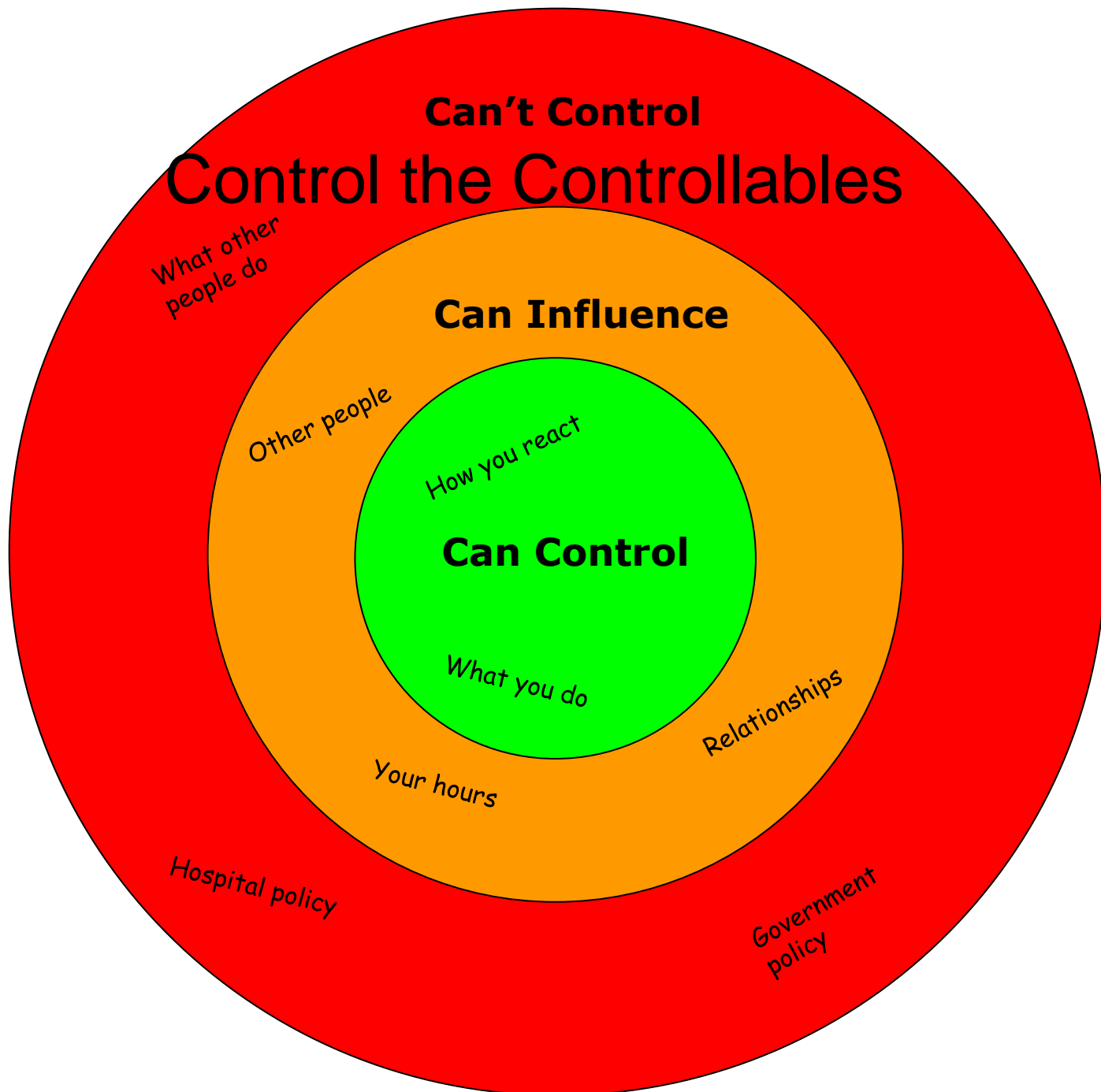
- Number one job is to look after the team (PhD students, RAs, post docs, co-authors)
- Priorities
  - Regular meetings
  - Responding quickly to drafts
  - Clarifying the “next” publication
  - Making people feel valued

# Taking Action

# Circles of influence



# Control the Controllables





What specific action will you take?

When?

What will get in the way?

The most interesting or useful thing?

