

## Support oral and written dissemination

### What

Excellent oral and written communication skills, good presentation skills with a focus on effective information dissemination.

Dissemination of research findings is integral to the research process. A PhD should qualify one for a growing independent research career. Supervisors should encourage their PhD students to participate in different conferences, seminars, round tables, and workshops where they can demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills in the dissemination of research findings.

### Recommendations for good practice

#### *Train writing skills*

Writing and the production of texts are part and parcel of scientific and academic production. Different kinds of text have different styles and objectives, norms, challenges and limitations. It is important for future scientists to grapple with these different disciplines in order to eventually master them. It therefore serves PhD-supervision well to include training for various relevant text-production during the PhD-program. It is also important to firmly establish that writing is an iterative process and can only very seldom be accomplished in one sitting and without revision and review. At the same time, there are often so many opposing demands during a PhD-project that rigorously completing writing exercises simply is not an option. Even so since writing is central to academic and scientific production, it is necessary to practice writing skills and methods. As with all other acquisition of skills, hard work and training is essential. Also it helps to build up the tasks and challenges in a way that stimulates and motivates the learner, because various part-objectives are achievable and enjoyable.

A tip is to embed a cooperative and iterative approach by having PhD-students write parts of different subparts of a scientific article (methodology, discussion, data-explanation, background) in collaboration with other relatively more senior members of the research group (post docs), under the supervisor's overall instruction and with his/her frequent and direct feedback. This approach provides training in many areas during the same process: concrete training of writing different kinds of text; delivering to deadlines and to others who are dependent on the input; iteration; revision as well as the benefits of receiving and using feedback. Another tip is to give ever-increasing writing assignments from an early point in the PhD-project, starting out with more mechanical, descriptive texts and graduating by degrees to more discussion-oriented texts.

#### *Writing retreats*

One example of good practice is found in several Danish research groups who practice writing retreats on a regular basis, where the entire group goes away for a week to write.

Often these retreats have a daily rhythm with chunks of time to write individually or in small groups in the mornings and afternoons, fixed times where participants convene for updates, to solve problems or raise or answer questions, and for meals.

This is an efficient way to ensure that writing takes place and often provides welcome inspiration and enhancement of the often difficult and lonely discipline of writing. A well-established culture of writing retreats in a group can ensure a high output and can serve as a very intensive and efficient working time. Establishing such a practice as a norm and accepted culture requires that the initiators are structured and disciplined about the form, the times and activities and purpose. And that they plan ahead. It is useful to have at least two annual retreats.

Useful reference: Grant, Barbara M. (2006), "Writing in the company of other women: exceeding the boundaries", *Studies in Higher Education*, 31:4, s.483-495.

#### *Train presentation skills*

The presentation skill is central to academic and scientific career. Many PhD students experience difficulties with presenting their work to an audience. Many supervisors encourage their PhD students to present their work in front of the research group and also to visitors. In this way PhDs learn to modulate the communication based on the expertise level of the audience.

In one FESTA partner organization, both PhD students and supervisors expressed the necessity to include a course of public speaking in the PhD program curriculum. These courses should be given by experts who teach also how to behave in front of an audience.

#### **From literature and other sources**

Research dissemination, as the written or oral representation of project findings, usually happens at the end of a research project (BARNES, CLOUDER, PRITCHARD, HUGHES & PURKIS, 2003; WALTER, NUTLEY & DAVIES, 2003).

The main features of successful dissemination strategies can, therefore, be summarised as: tailoring approaches to the audience, in terms of the content, message and medium; paying attention to the source of the message; enabling active discussion of research findings (NUTLEY, WALTER & DAVIES, 2002; WALTER et al., 2003). [5].

Barnes, Vivienne, Clouder, Deanne Lynn, Pritchard, Jackie, Hughes, Christina and Purkis, Judy (2003) Deconstructing dissemination: dissemination as qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 3(2), pp. 147-164. ISSN (print) 1468-7941.

Nutley, S., Davies, H., & Walter, I. (2002). Evidence based policy and practice: Cross sector lessons from the UK No. Working Paper 9.

Nutley, S. M., Walter, I. C., & Davies, H. T. O. (2003). From knowing to doing: A framework for understanding the evidence-into-practice agenda. *Evaluation*, 9(2), 125-48.