

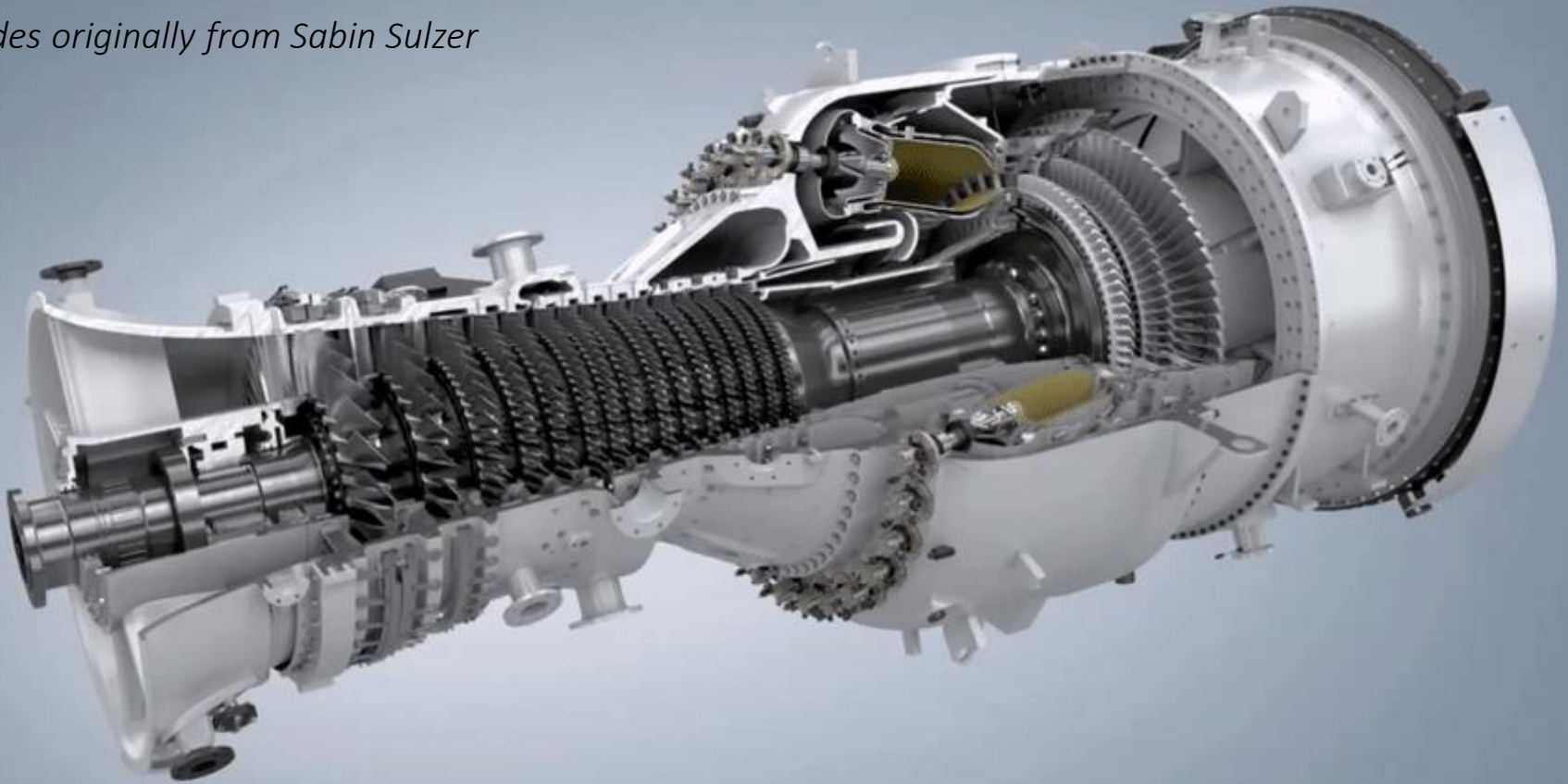
Tips for Managing a Successful Research Project



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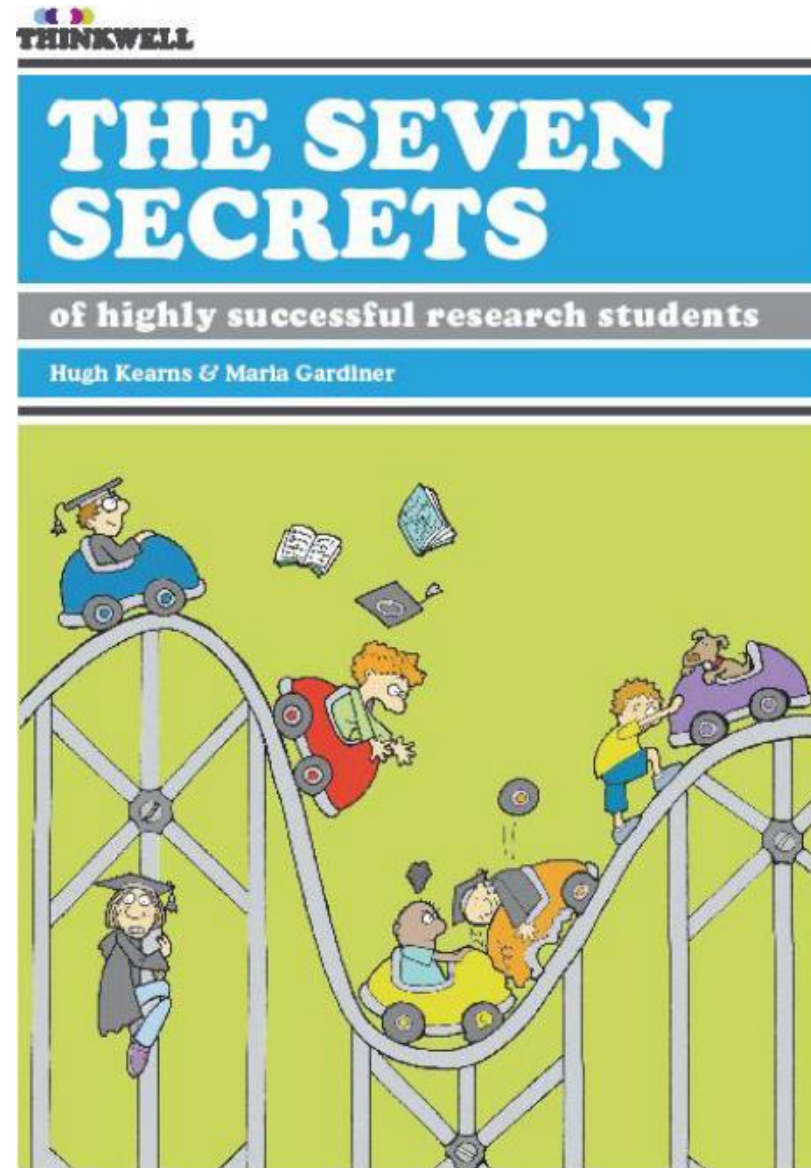
2nd year JCCG representatives.

Slides originally from Sabin Sulzer



- This presentation should only be regarded as an introduction to an important and complex topic.
- It is mostly based on a workshop titled „The Seven Secrets of Highly Successful Research Students“ by Hugh Kearns.
- Further resources concerning the work of Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner are available at WebLearn → Skills Hub → Resources for Researchers (easily reached from the MPLS course page: <https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/the-seven-secrets-of-highly-successful-research-students>).
- The MPLS division offers its own “Foundations for a Successful DPhil” course on 27 January 2017 (MPLS course page: <https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/foundations-for-a-successful-dphil>).
- Even more information available in the published literature.

- Secret 1. Care and maintenance of your supervisor
- Secret 2. Write and show as you go
- Secret 3. Be realistic – It's not a Nobel prize
- Secret 4. Say no to distractions
- Secret 5. It's a job
- Secret 6. Get help
- Secret 7. You can do it



secret



Care and Maintenance of your Supervisor



- It's your job to make sure you get the supervision you need.
- Supervisors are invariably busy. So if you need advice on your approach, if you're stuck, or if you need feedback on your drafts then it's up to you to get their attention.
- And the best way we've found for doing this is to have regular meetings. Regular meetings with a simple agenda where you discuss the work you've done, the issues that have arisen and what your next steps are.

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Write and show as you go:
This is show and tell, not hide and seek!



- You need to be writing from the get-go. Don't wait for the so-called write-up period. Get words down on paper as soon as you can.
- If you read some articles, write about them. If you run experiments, write about them. If it moves, you write about it.
- The words you write may never make it into your final thesis but they will be the grandparents of the ones that do.
- And once you've written the words then you need to show them to people. You need regular feedback to refine your writing and your thinking.
- "0th draft"

Secret 3. Be realistic – It's not a Nobel prize



- Most PhD students start off with wildly unrealistic expectations about what they can achieve in three years. They see this as their big chance to make a great contribution.
- The reality is that when you are doing a PhD you are learning to do research. The purpose of a research degree is to learn how to be an independent researcher.
- Your thesis doesn't have to be perfect. In fact it will never be perfect. It needs to be finished.
- More information available in the “Imposter Syndrome” workshop video.

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Say no to distractions:

Even the fun ones and the ones you think you must do

Newton's Third Law of Distraction

- For each and every action towards completing your thesis

there is an equal and opposite distraction.



- There are lots and lots of potential distractions.
- Some may not even look like distractions. Hunting references. Doing courses. Teaching and tutoring. Housework. Pets. And the biggest of all - email and Facebook.
- There is nothing wrong with any of these activities but the secret is to do the thesis first and fit the other things around the edges.
- More information available in the “Balanced Researcher” workshop video.

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It's a job:

That means working nine to five, but you get holidays



- One of the traps in research is the flexibility. If you don't do that analysis today it doesn't really matter – there's always tomorrow and the day after.
- But this leads to procrastination and guilt. You need to treat your research like a job. Which means regular hours, a plan, milestones and accountability.
- More information available in the “How to Plan Your PhD” workshop video.

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Get help:

You are not an owner-operator single person business!



- You don't have to do it all yourself. There's a lot of legitimate assistance available.
- Don't hesitate to ask older students in your group for assistance.
- More specific information for the case of the Oxford Materials Department and of the MPLS Division will be discussed in a subsequent talk.

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You can do it:

A PhD is 90% persistence and 10% intelligence



- Of course you need intelligence but that's not enough. You have to be able to persist. You have to be able to bounce back when things go wrong.
- The failure rate for submitted PhDs is much less than 1%. However one of the problems is that people don't get to the end.
- People often wonder if they are clever enough to get a PhD. The bigger question is are they persistent enough to get a PhD.



