

# Planning your PhD

Dr Duncan Stanley

Postgraduate Researcher Development (PGRD)

Student Development (SD)



University of  
**Leicester**

# Key learning outcomes

- By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:
  - Plan a timetable for your research, in discussion with your supervisor
  - Develop strategies to use your time effectively and efficiently
  - Monitor your progress and compare it with your plans

# Stages to planning a PhD

1. Defining research focus and questions
2. Breaking down the work required
3. Fitting to a timeline
4. Working towards objectives

# Stages to planning a PhD

1. Defining research focus and questions
2. Breaking down the work required
3. Fitting to a timeline
4. Working towards objectives

# Stage 1 – Define questions

- How to turn an idea into a research project?
  1. narrow down your field of study;
  2. define what to investigate;
  3. establish a thesis or an argument.

# Defining your research focus

## Task 1 (individual activity)

Write a paragraph based on the following:

Complete the sentences as they relate to your work.

- **1. Topic:** *I am studying ....*
- **2. Question:** *because I want to find out ...*
- **3. Rationale:** *in order to ...*
- **4. Significance:** *so that we will know more about...*

## Example:

- **1. Topic:** *I am studying literacy and social class*
- **2. Question:** *because I want to find out if there is a link between literacy and social class*
- **3. Rationale:** *in order to establish if people can move up or down their social class*
- **4. Significance:** *so that we will know more about how to improve achievements and socio-economical conditions in the society.*

# Defining your research focus

Task 2 (peer-to-peer activity):

1. Hand the paragraph you have just written to the person sitting next to you.
2. Read the paragraph you have been given. Try to pull out what you think the research questions are and write them down, then report back to the person it belongs to.

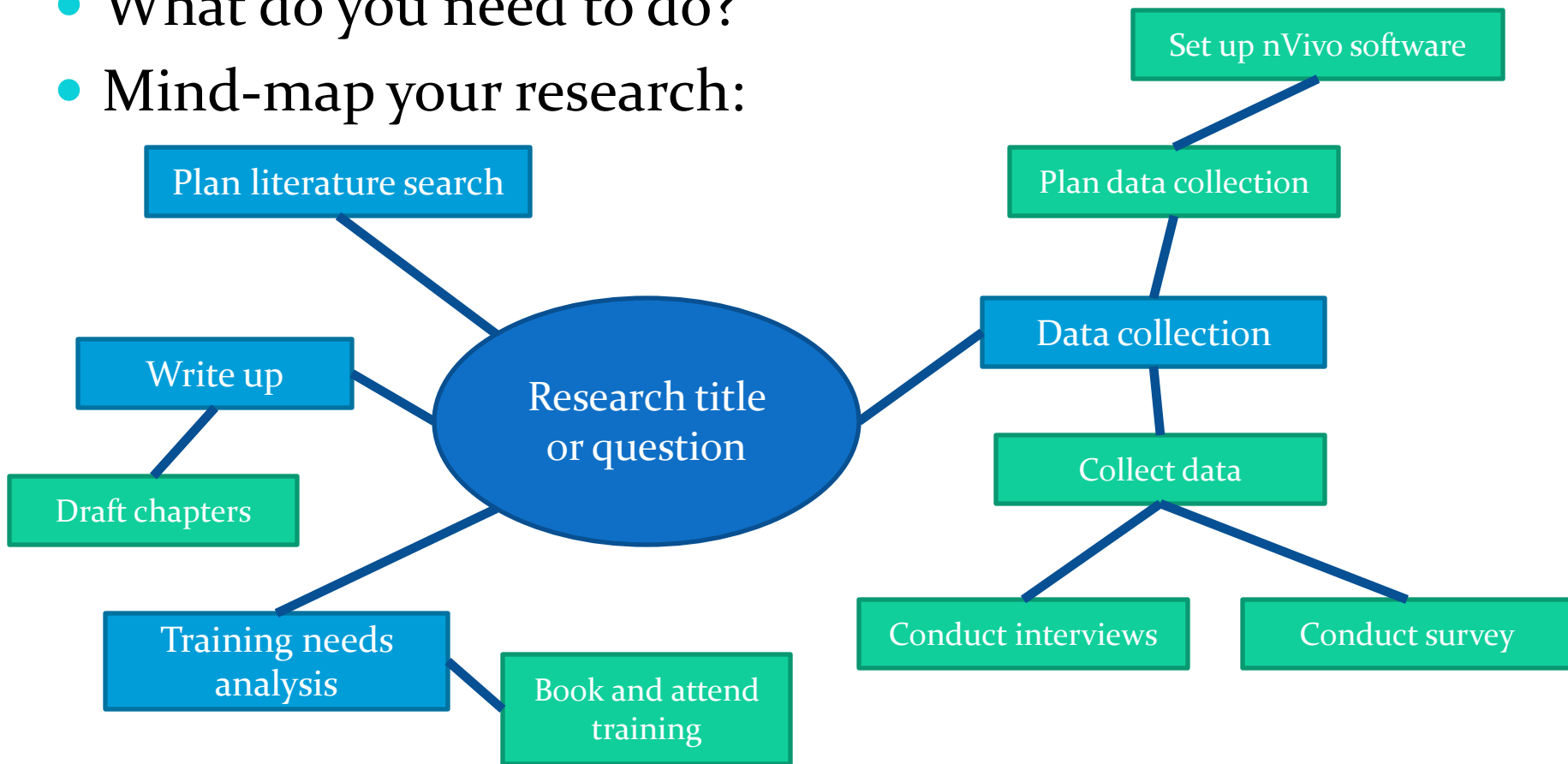


# Stages to planning a PhD

1. Defining research focus and questions
2. Breaking down the work required
3. Fitting to a timeline
4. Working towards objectives

# Stage 2 – Work breakdown

- What do you need to do?
- Mind-map your research:



# Work breakdown

- Concrete activities:
  - developing materials, pilot interviews, carrying out interviews.
- Process activities:
  - literature review, planning information collection, meeting your supervisor, annual review.
- Concrete deliverables:
  - end of year report, draft chapters, thesis.

# Stages to planning a PhD

1. Defining research focus and questions
2. Breaking down the work required
3. **Fitting to a timeline**
4. Working towards objectives

# Stage 3 – Timelines

- It can be hard to judge how long things take.
- Talk to others about your workload (supervisor, fellow PGRs etc) and possible timings.
- It's easier to set timings for work if you break it down into smaller bits.
- Make deadlines, and make them public – with supervisor, colleagues etc.

# More timelines

- Try to fit the work that you have to do to a timeline.
- Be as realistic as possible!
- Allow “slippage” time.
- Remember:
  - Research always take 10% longer than you think it will – even if you take that fact into account...
  - It’s never too early to start writing your thesis...
  - And everyone needs a holiday!

# Time is slipping away...

- What would you do if your project was slipping from its plan?
  - Surge?
  - Reassess?
  - Move on?
  - Reshape?
  - Record?
- Talk to your supervisor!

# Stages to planning a PhD

1. Defining research focus and questions
2. Breaking down the work required
3. Fitting to a timeline
4. Working towards objectives



# Stage 3 – towards objectives

- Objectives should be:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-based
- Agreed

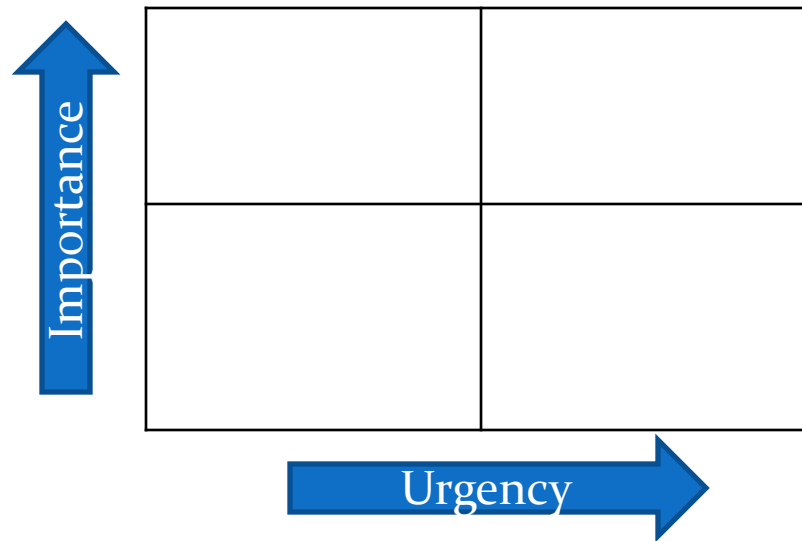
At any time you should have one or more objectives driving your research. Write down a current objective in the “SMARTA” format.

# Managing your time

- Once you've planned a broader picture, need to manage time effectively. This consists of:
  - Prioritising
  - Estimating time
  - Scheduling
  - Managing interruptions

# Focussing

- Think of the tasks that are required to complete an objective.
- Prioritise these on the basis of importance and urgency:



# Planning is a continual process

- You will need to frequently review your plans
- Start with detailed objectives
- Work back to your grand plan
- If you have concerns, talk to someone about them!