

# How to apply for Transfer to D.Phil. Status

Professor Marta Kwiatkowska



Oxford University Computing Laboratory

# The Nature of Research

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- What is a research degree?
  - *“Finding out something to find out, then finding it out”*
  - Freedom from tightly prescribed courses, textbooks, exams...
  - ... but more responsibility for organising own time and taking charge of investigation
- D.Phil.
  - qualifies you to become **an equal** to faculty
  - a **requirement** for a career as a university professor or researcher in many fields
  - useful in many other professional careers: management, consultancy, government/service, etc
- Awarded for
  - a **significant and substantial piece of research**
  - **the thesis**, examined by experts and defended in a viva-voce

# Thesis vs Dissertation

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- Thesis
  - **The case** you are trying to argue
  - Must be describable in one paragraph, e.g.
    - “Algorithm A is efficient on systems of type C”
    - “Mathematical construct F extends to functions of type X”
- Dissertation
  - **The document** in which you make the case
  - Must include the **scientific and rigorous justification** for the thesis, e.g.
    - Complexity proof for A
    - Experimental evaluation of A which demonstrates efficiency on a set of test cases, relative to known methods
    - Definition of F on X and proof of correctness
- For a D.Phil. to be awarded, the thesis must be a **significant original contribution** to the state of knowledge

# Milestones in the life as a D.Phil.

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- Life begins...
  - PRS: **Probationary** Research Student, 1<sup>st</sup> year
    - Start research, take courses, participate in research activities, ...
  - **Transfer** to D.Phil. (or M.Sc. by Research) Status, **within 4 terms**
    - Submit qualifying dissertation (research report and thesis proposal)
    - Be examined by 2 assessors (not supervisor)
    - Maximum **two** attempts, within 6 terms
  - **Confirmation** of D.Phil. Status, **within 9 terms**
    - Submit progress report, incl. thesis contents and timetable
    - Be examined by 2 assessors (not supervisor, at least one with experience of successful supervision to completion)
  - **Submission** of thesis and Examination, **within 12 terms**
    - External and internal examiners
    - Viva voce, in subfusc
- What's next?
  - Career as a researcher, lecturer, in IT, management, etc

# Requirements for D.Phil. Transfer

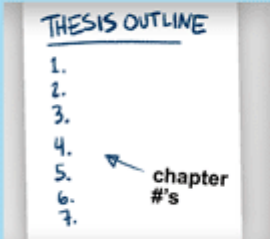
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- Application for transfer (forms MAT.1 and GSO.2)
  - By week 5 of 4<sup>th</sup> term, possibly earlier (Category A)
  - Category B (in 1<sup>st</sup> term) rare
  - Supervisor must apply for deferral to DGS, exceptional circumstances only
  - Second attempt possible
  - Can hold PRS status for maximum of 6 terms, incl. retake (exceptional extension for 1 term possible)
  - Otherwise Education Committee approval needed
- Qualifying dissertation
  - Must contain progress report and thesis proposal
- Training requirement (note on GSO.2 form)
  - Exam results on 4 courses
  - Skills training and other activities, e.g. seminar and conference presentations

# A Take on Thesis Outline

## 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:

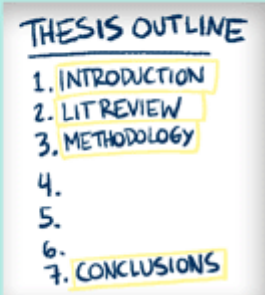


THESIS OUTLINE

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. ← chapter #'s
- 6.
- 7.

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

**STEP 2** Fill in the "freebies":

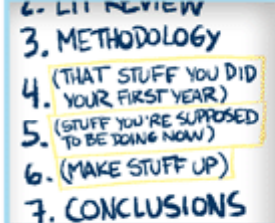


THESIS OUTLINE

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

You're half way done!

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



2. LIT REVIEW  
3. METHODOLOGY  
4. (THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR)  
5. (STUFF YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING NOW)  
6. (MAKE STUFF UP)  
7. CONCLUSIONS

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

**STEP 4** Voilà! You just bought yourself another two years



So, how's your thesis going?  
i have an outlined

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# Qualifying Dissertation

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- Two components, can be interlinked (25–30 pages typical)
- Progress report
  - the research work you have done in your first year
  - for example, a **case study** or a less ambitious problem that you have tackled
  - should describe
    - the **motivation** for the research and
    - its **significance**
  - includes a **literature review**
  - explain
    - the theoretical background
    - the results obtained, and
    - the conclusions drawn
- Demonstrates your **competence and presentation skills**

# Qualifying Dissertation

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- The thesis proposal is expected to contain
  - a clear statement of the **specific topic** you have chosen for your D.Phil. research,
  - a description of how it relates to **previous work** in the field,
  - your **strategy** for achieving the research objective,
  - the **significance** and **importance** of your work, and
  - the **scientific basis** for how you intend to evaluate the results.
- Your proposed research topic should be
  - well-defined and specific
  - should admit **novel** treatment, and
  - it must be significant enough to be worthy of a D.Phil. if competently investigated.

# Qualifying Dissertation

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- Your proposal for strategy should be
  - **concrete**,
  - clearly explained, and
  - of **justifiable promise**.
- What is a strategy?
  - A sensible plan for getting to the desired outcome
  - Risks considered and fall-backs included
  - E.g. “First, I intend to apply A to the class X. I believe this will work because XZ has recently applied it to class Y that is similar to X. If this does not work, I will analyse the cause and try A on a suitably restricted class X.”
- Remember, in research the goalposts keep moving...
  - A strategy is **not** a guarantee of getting a D.Phil.
  - You may have to adapt it or even change tack completely

# Qualifying Examination

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- Submit D.Phil. Transfer forms along with Qualifying Dissertation (or date for submission)
- Viva by two assessors (not supervisor(s))
- Must convince them
  - that you are competent,
  - have identified a problem worthy of D.Phil and
  - have a strategy
- If pass, proceed to confirmation
- If fail,
  - revise and resubmit, usually within one term
  - ... but you are unlikely to fail if handbook advice followed
- If fail 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt,
  - either outright failure or transfer to MSc by Research

# Some Advice

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- **Your** motivation and commitment essential
- Remember, D.Phil. Transfer is
  - A milestone that takes you to the next stage
  - **Insufficient** progress and **too much perfection** equally bad
- Seek advice of your supervisor and DGS if necessary
  - ... and listen to it
- Regs, regs, regs
  - Regulations clearly specify the process, deadlines, forms
  - For example, your status as research student lapses if you don't **complete** transfer within 6 terms
- **If you feel things are going wrong...**
  - Talk to supervisor
  - Next, talk to advisors
  - else DGS (via Julie Sheppard) or Director

# Sources of Information

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- The Graduate Research Student handbook
  - Comlab and Computer Science specific
  - Available on the Comlab webpage
  - <http://web.comlab.ox.ac.uk/teaching/dphil/>
- MPLS handbook
  - Essential information about the process, forms to fill, deadlines, etc
  - <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/intranet/teachingandlearning/graduateprog.html>
- The 'grey book'
  - Authoritative, but MPLS handbook more detailed on regulations and code of practice