**Keeping a PhD Journal**

Rod Pitcher

I have found that keeping a PhD journal is a very useful and profitable way to occupy my time. I note down many things that happen during the day, such as meetings, discussions, decisions and ideas that come to me. All are grist to my PhD journal mill.

Occasionally something in the journal turns out to be important such as proving that something happened at a particular time or place to satisfy an argument. But more often the journal is just a place to play with ideas.

I use the journal as a sounding board for my ideas. I ‘talk’ to it about what I’m thinking and how my thoughts surround some idea that may or may not have any relevance to my research at some later or earlier date. The journal helps me to think through ideas and clear up my thinking about them.

I keep my journal on my computer. If I try to write longhand to keep up with my thoughts I can’t read my own writing. Using the computer allows me to get the ideas down quickly. It doesn’t matter if the spelling and grammar are not the best. At least it’s readable. If the idea becomes important for some reason at a later date it can be cleaned up for public consumption. For my own use, near enough is good enough. The important thing is to get the flow of thoughts written down. As the pages fill up I print them out and put them in a folder. Each year goes in its own folder to make it easier to go back and find something when I need it. I have spent many happy and profitable hours going back and reading my old thoughts.

A PhD journal can hold your thoughts about many things. What you chose to put in it is up to you, but I would recommend that you start one if you don’t already have one going. Use it as a sounding board, a test of ideas, an archive for bits and pieces about your candidature. You never know what might be useful. If you don’t write it down somewhere you will forget it. A journal is an ideal place to put all the bits and pieces of writing that you don’t know what else to do with.

I am writing my thesis as the story of my development as a researcher. My journal is being very useful for the notes I made in the past as I sorted out particular problems with my research or played with useful ideas. It is also interesting for its own sake as a document of my time as a PhD student. If ever I write my autobiography my PhD journal will become invaluable for the information it contains about my time as a PhD student.

There’s no reason why you have to stop keeping a journal when you finish your PhD. If you go on to an academic career, keeping a journal will still be useful, for all the same reasons as keeping a PhD one was useful.

**Rod Pitcher** is a PhD student in Education at The Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods at the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. The focus of his study is the metaphors that doctoral students use when describing their research and other matters related to their studies. [Rod Pitcher’s LinkedIn profile](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rod--pitcher?originalSubdomain=au).