

You're ABD: Now What?

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Congratulations! You're officially ABD! This is a great accomplishment and milestone towards your ultimate goal of earning a doctorate. After you have returned from cloud nine, you may start thinking, "Now what?" Of course, you realize that now is the time to start, or continue, to do research for your dissertation. But researching and writing the dissertation are not the only things that occupy a Ph.D. candidate's time. This guide is meant to discuss some of the many tasks that you may want to balance during your time as a Ph.D. candidate. These topics include: deciding on archives to visit and planning your research trips, choosing a note-taking system, attending and presenting at conferences or seminars, applying for travel grants and fellowships, getting published, and gaining teaching experience.

Which Archives Must I Visit?

If you have not already done so, once you are ABD, you need to decide which archives you must visit in order to conduct your dissertation research. Depending on your topic and your school's library collections, you may be surprised to find out that you can do some or even a substantial amount of your research locally. This possibility is especially true if you look at published material and if your school has subscriptions to some of the historical online databases or an interlibrary loan policy. Databases can provide you with a wealth of sources to examine, and some of them are even keyword searchable. Many archives are digitizing their collections, making them available online, so you may be able to gain access to such collections, which will enable you to do some of your research without leaving home.

Take advantage of all the resources that are available to you locally. Maximizing your use of local libraries and archives will inevitably save you time and money because you will not have to travel as much to view the records; you might be able to do some of your research in your own home, without the limitations of an archive's daily hours of operation; and you may also save time by not filling out quite so many travel-grant applications.

In all likelihood, there is an archive or two that you know are critical for you to visit, but what about other libraries or archives that hold material that is relevant to your work? There are several ways you can determine which repositories are on your "must go to" list, versus your "if I have extra time and money" list. First, go online and search their catalogs. Many depositories have a substantial part of their collections catalogued online and doing a thorough search will help you determine if you need to go to that collection. But a word of caution: read the library's Web site thoroughly, or even pick up the phone and call the depository to ask what collections are posted online and which are not. You don't want to cross an archive off your list of places to visit because you didn't realize that certain collections are only searchable in the card catalog on site.

Next, speak with others who have already traveled the road you're going down. Ask your advisor, other committee members, and other graduate students about the archives you are considering visiting, if they have done research there. Their experiences and input may help you

make a decision on which places you should visit if you are unable to make a decision based solely on the documents available at each repository. Other factors to consider when choosing archives to visit are the availability of research fellowships, travel grants, and local housing options. If money is tight for you, as it is for just about all graduate students, you will also need to think about these very pragmatic issues. If one archive you are considering visiting offers research fellowships or travel grants and affordable housing for visiting scholars, while another one offers none of these, it may be wise to go to the former archive if there is not a clear advantage for your research objectives in each archive's respective holdings.

How Do I Plan For A Research Trip?

Diligent planning is the key to having a productive research trip. Once you have decided on a location, plan ahead. If you are eligible for research grants through the repository, apply for them. If you need housing, contact the archive or library and see if it has housing available for visiting scholars. Archives that have housing options for scholars often book up quickly, so contact the repository as soon as possible. Also, like any trip, if you need airfare and a car rental, look into these necessities early. Waiting until the last minute to book such things can be costly.

Many potential distractions and interruptions can occur while in the archives, but careful planning can eliminate most of these nuisances. For example, when traveling to the archive or library bring along plenty of quick, energy-filled breakfast foods and snacks such as granola bars, almonds, and fruit. By having these items on hand, you will not be forced to spend a lot of time or money on food. The very nature of working in an archive makes it impossible to sip on a drink or have a snack as you work. Bringing your lunch accomplishes the same things, saving both time and money, but also be open to meeting other scholars and dining out with them occasionally because getting to know other scholars who are working in the same repository can be advantageous. Making such connections may lead to future opportunities or collaborative work, and your new acquaintances may be willing to share tips with you that they have learned regarding the archive. Although temperature may seem like an odd thing to mention, depositories are often kept cold for the preservation of documents. Trying to work despite feeling cold can be a difficult task, so wear layers and bring an extra sweater or cardigan. There is nothing worse than doing research for eight hours while shivering.

Equipment issues represent another potential distraction from your archival research. Make sure you don't forget anything! If you use a laptop, bring its power cord, a jump drive (to back up notes), pencils, paper, and, if you own one, a digital camera. Even if your camera is older and cannot hold many pictures, bring it anyway. There may be a situation in which you cannot order a photocopy because a document is too fragile, but the library permits you to take a digital picture of it. In this case, you can take the picture and then download it to your laptop, immediately freeing up space on the camera for any additional pictures you might take. Noise can also be a distraction at some locations, so it may be helpful to bring an iPod or headphones, if listening to music helps you block out other people's chatter.

Last, but certainly not least, have a list ready of documents you want to see. It may help to contact a librarian ahead of time, tell them about your project, and see what they suggest you examine. Also, some libraries allow you to request material ahead of time, so the minute you

walk in, there are documents ready for you. These types of preparations will help you manage your time in the archive more efficiently.

How Do I Organize All Of My Notes?

It is just as important to have your notes organized and easily accessible as it is to actually read the documents and take down notes in the first place. Unfortunately, organizing notes, copies of documents, and even copies of journal articles can be a messy task. The most important this is to find a system that works for you. One suggestion is create a file folder for anything you print or photocopy. Label the folder appropriately and file it in a filing cabinet. This ensures that all the documents for which you have hard copies are located in the same place, in an orderly fashion. There will be little room for error and misplacement if this system is maintained. But again, that is just one suggestion. Find a system that works for you and stick with it!

You may want to consider choosing a computer system that helps you organize notes. FileMaker and Zotero are two popular choices. If you are unfamiliar with these programs, try to learn about them before you embark on your research. Compare the software and ask around to see what faculty and other graduate students use. You may find that some people are exceedingly generous and helpful with this process. Regardless of what method of note-taking you decide upon, familiarize yourself with how you will actually take down and organize the notes. This will save you time in the archives and also at home by avoiding situations where you try to recollect how or where you filed something away.

Should I Go To Conferences?

Yes! Attending and presenting at conferences provides scholars the opportunity to network, share their scholarship, and gain feedback from other scholars in the field. Try to go to conferences that are most relevant to your studies and scholarship. Now is also the time to think about presenting at conferences if you have not done so already. To get your feet wet, you may want to send in proposals for conferences that are specifically for graduate students, works-in-progress, or ones that explicitly say it is a friendly environment for first-time presenters. Presenting at such a conference may make you feel more at ease when you are delivering your paper. These conferences often have very reasonable deadlines for submissions of proposals or abstracts, which make them ideal for first-year ABD students who may not be able to submit a proposal in time for some of the larger historical conferences, such as the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Southern Historical Association. Larger conferences typically require proposal submissions a year in advance of the actual meeting, which means that you would need to get a proposal and panel together while you are studying for your exams, something that not all students can accomplish. Once you are ABD, however, start thinking about proposing a panel to a larger conference.

How Will I Pay For My Research Trips And Conferences?

Thankfully, there are many avenues for financial aid available to graduate students. These include year-long fellowships, summer fellowships, travel grants, and research grants. You may find that your home institution offers several fellowships and grants for which you are eligible to apply. External fellowships and grants through larger organizations such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the American Association of University Women, and the American Historical Association are also great opportunities for funding. Many archives and libraries offer

research fellowships and travel grants, so look into those options too. And if you are wondering how to pay for conferences, you may find that your school offers a reimbursement for some of the costs, especially if you present a paper. Some historical organizations and the conferences themselves help pay for graduate students to attend. If you take the initiative to seek out funding, you will often find it!

When Should I Try To Get Published?

There is no time like the present. If you have not already done so, once you are ABD you should seek out opportunities to get published, keeping in mind the pieces you publish do not have to be articles published in a peer-reviewed journal. You do not want to publish prematurely—after all, that piece will be around for anyone to see—but you also do not want to sit on the bench forever. You may want to start small, perhaps contributing articles to a newsletter. Writing such a piece will not “count” as a publication on your c.v. but it will get you used to the idea of a lot of people reading something you have written. Authoring encyclopedia entries and book reviews are two other options for publishing. Both of these endeavors take less time than an article, but will help demonstrate your ability to get pieces accepted for publication. For the readers of your work, they demonstrate your analytical thinking and writing skills.

A major goal for most Ph.D. candidates is to get an article published in a peer-reviewed journal before they go on the job market. Such an accomplishment is a testament of the scholar’s research, analytical, and writing abilities. Start thinking about this goal shortly after you become ABD, even if you do not start writing (or revising an existing paper) for several months. Once you have drafted a piece, get feedback from fellow scholars, including members of your dissertation committee if they are willing to read it. If your school has working-group meetings, seminars, or other venues in which scholars present their research, you may want to advantage of these opportunities to get feedback on your work and ideas. You especially want to put a lot of time and effort into writing this first article because it, most likely, will be your first major publication. In short, you only want to publish your absolute best.

Should I Try To Get Teaching Experience?

During your time as a Ph.D. candidate, it will be crucial that you acquire teaching experience. Getting such experience is essential when you are on the job market and may also make getting used to that first job a bit easier. You will already have taught, so teaching several courses in one semester probably will not be as daunting as it would be if you had never been an instructor. Another positive consequence of teaching is that you also will become more knowledgeable about your subject area once you have taught.

Teaching experience can come in several forms. Grading and being a teaching assistant are not the same as teaching, but they are a great way to get familiar with the duties of an instructor. Many, if not most, graduate students are required to be graders or teaching assistants during their graduate school careers, so this type of experience will not be difficult for most Ph.D. candidates to obtain. Once you are ABD, more opportunities present themselves for you to get teaching experience. Some options to explore include: teaching courses during the summer at your home institution, teaching during the school year in order to fill in for a professor who may be on sabbatical, teaching a course during the school year as part of a requirement of a fellowship, and teaching at other institutions of higher education in the area. Acquiring teaching experience not

only brings in a paycheck but also makes you more marketable by showing that in addition to your research abilities, you are also comfortable in front of a classroom of students. Nevertheless, you do not want to teach so much that you neglect your dissertation! Make sure you are able to balance your teaching and research.

Where Can I Go For More Information About These Topics?

The SAWH Mentoring Toolkit is a rich resource that has individual essays on many of the topics briefly addressed in this guide. The following list of toolkit contributions may help you learn more about these topics.

Jessica Brannon-Wranosky, “How to be a Successful Teaching Assistant,” http://www.h-net.org/~sawh/Toolkit/Teaching_Assistants.doc.

Carole Bucy, “Grants and Fellowships,” http://www.h-net.org/~sawh/Toolkit/Grants_and_Fellowships.doc.

Shannon Frystak, “A Guide to Completing Your Dissertation,” http://www.h-net.org/~sawh/Toolkit/Completing_Your_Dissertation.doc.

Elizabeth Gritter, “Archival Research Tips: How to Get the Most Out of Your Archival Adventure,” http://www.h-net.org/~sawh/Toolkit/Archival_Research_Tips_.doc.

Kelly Kennington, “Conference Papers,” http://www.h-net.org/~sawh/Toolkit/Conference_Presentations.doc.

Connie L. Lester, “Publishing in Peer-Reviewed Journals,” http://www.h-net.org/~sawh/Toolkit/Publishing_in_Peer_Reviewed_Journals.doc.

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