

# Ten Dos and Don'ts I Wish I Knew — Shared by a PhD Student Nine Days Before the Final Boss Fight

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MEB PhD student seminar

# Ten Dos and Don'ts I Wish I Knew

- #1 "Do"cumentation: your future self will thank you.
- #2 Don't just talk to people in your field.
- #3 Start from something small and simple.
- #4 Don't wait until the end to write your paper/kappa.
- #5 Always ask yourself: what is my main contribution?
- #6 Don't freak out when you're rejected.
- #7 You're alone and not alone.
- #8 Don't forget this is a marathon.
- #9 PhD is part of your life, not your whole life.
- #10 Don't forget that you are here for fun.



Link to the presentation:  
[https://enochytchen.com/talks/2025-ten-dos-and-donts/slides\\_Enoch\\_Chen.pdf](https://enochytchen.com/talks/2025-ten-dos-and-donts/slides_Enoch_Chen.pdf)

# #1 "Do"cumentation: your future self will thank you.

- Documentation is like clinicians recording their voices.
- Keep **one file** collecting all questions and small things.
- Carry a **tiny notebook and pen** for notes.
- Humans can only hold  $7 \pm 2$  pieces of information at a time. (Miller GA. The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information. Psychological Review. 1956;63(2):81-97.)
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- If compared with computers' RAM, our working memories have about a few KB. (p.s. My laptop has 32 GB RAM.)
- Use the right tools and use them correctly. My story about **OneDrive and GitHub**.
- Trust me, your future self will thank you.

## #2 Don't just talk to people in your field.

### 1. Understand others:

- Listen to talks outside your own field.
- It's not a waste. You learn how others explain, ask questions, and organise ideas.
- You also see bad examples and learn what to avoid.

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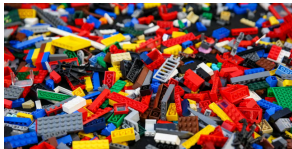
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  - Business class: Reviewers follow your research.
  - First class: A five-year-old understands the main idea of your research.

### #3 Start from something small and simple.



20 SIMPLE LEGO IDEAS FOR KIDS



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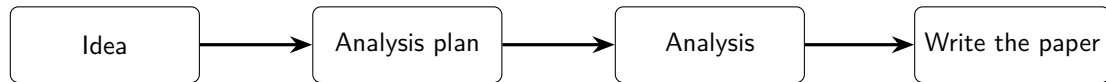
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- *"Small mistakes are easier to catch in a simple setup and easier to fix before they grow."*  
---Enoch Yi-Tung Chen (2025)

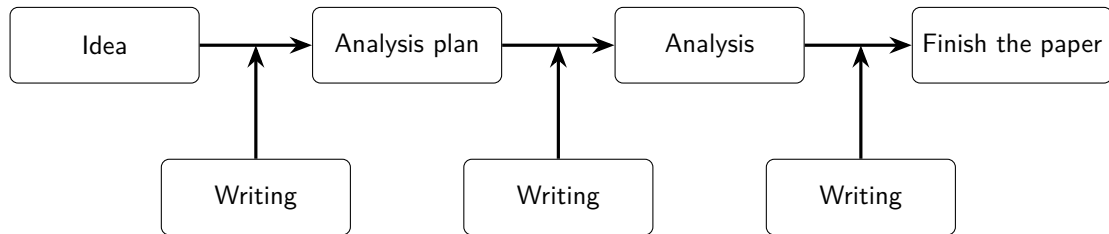
## #4 Don't wait until the end to write your paper/kappa.



**Figure:** Regular research process. Figure adapted from: Simon Peyton Jones. How to Write a Great Research Paper. Microsoft Research (2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WP-FkUa0c0M>



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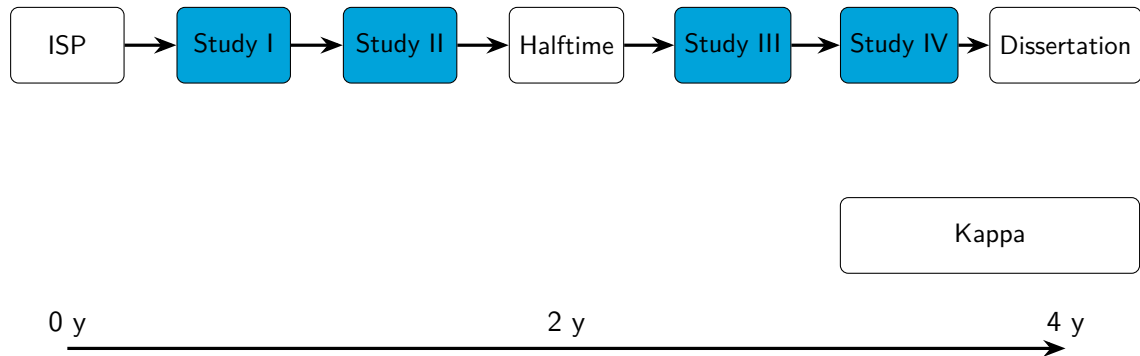


Figure: Regular PhD process at KI MEB.

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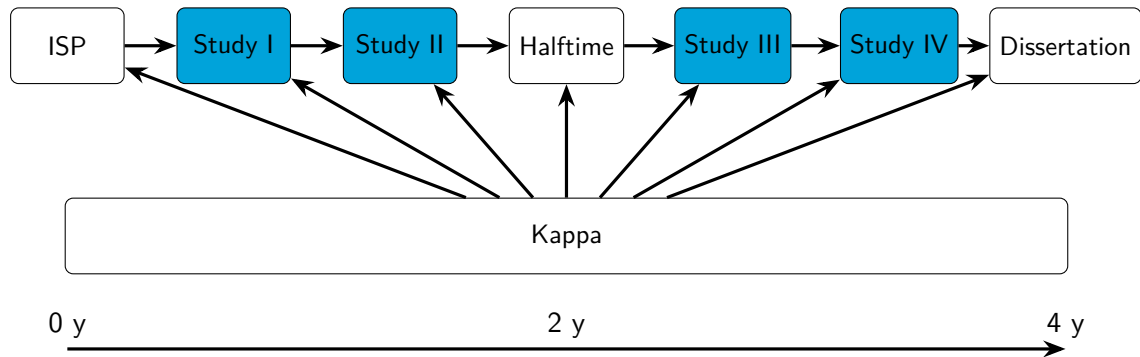


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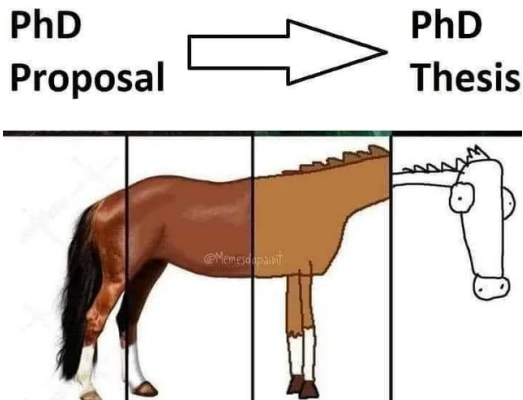
### **Recommended template by KI Dissertation Committee (2025)**

You can begin writing the underlined sections already (no matter where you are in your PhD)!

50% of the sections (8 out of 16)!

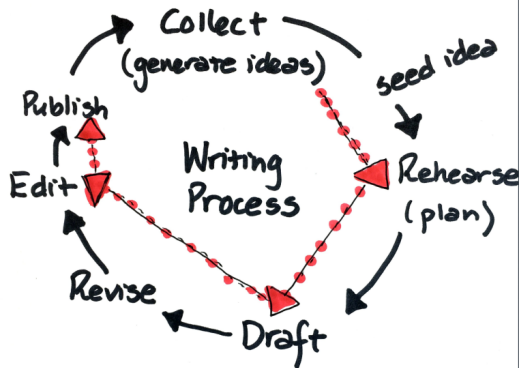
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <u>Title</u>                                 | 10. Results                                |
| 2. <u>Popular science summary of the thesis</u> | 11. Discussion                             |
| 3. Abstract                                     | 12. Conclusions                            |
| 4. List of scientific papers                    | 13. <u>Points of perspective</u>           |
| 5. Contents                                     | 14. Acknowledgements                       |
| 6. <u>Introduction</u>                          | 15. <u>Declaration about the use of AI</u> |
| 7. <u>Background</u>                            | 16. References                             |
| 8. <u>Research aims</u>                         |  |
| 9. <u>Materials and methods</u>                 |  |

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Retrieved from @phdhelp on Instagram.

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Lanny Ball. Revising for Meaning. 2019.

<https://twowritingteachers.org/2019/04/04/revising-for-meaning/>

## #5 Always ask yourself: what is my main contribution?

How many people will read, understand, or even be inspired by your Study I?

- (A)  $\geq 1000$  people
- (B) 100 people
- (C) 50 people
- (D) 2 people
- (E) 1 person

## #5 Always ask yourself: what is my main contribution?

Typical structure of a research paper  
(random number of readers)

- **Title & Authors:** ~1000-2000 views
- **Abstract:** ~100 (most only read conclusion)
- **Introduction, Methods, Results:** ~10 each
- **Discussion:** ~20
- **Conclusions:** ~50
- **References:** ~20 (most are those who you cited and want to make sure they are inside the list. Yeah!)

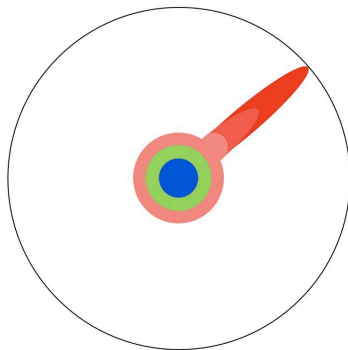


## #5 Always ask yourself: what is my main contribution?

- Know your real contribution.
- Review the literature thoroughly. (Don't outsource everything to LLMs.)
- If you don't like your research contribution, how could you convince others to buy your idea?

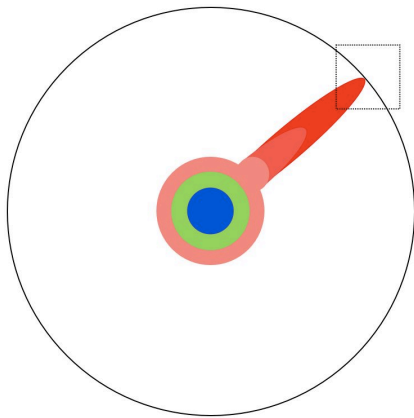
(Preach to yourself first.

At least fake it until you make it.)



**Figure:** Retrieved from: Matt Might. The illustrated guide to a Ph.D. <http://matt.might.net/articles/phd-school-in-pictures/>. Licensed under CC BY-NC 2.5.

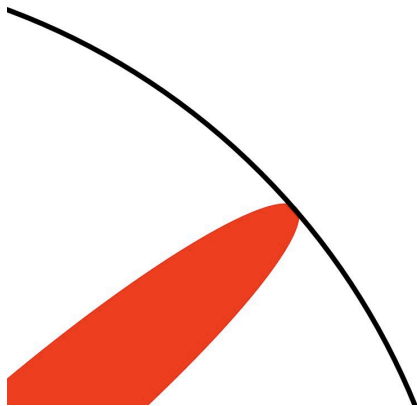
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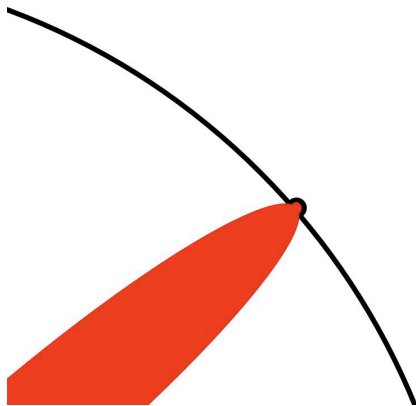
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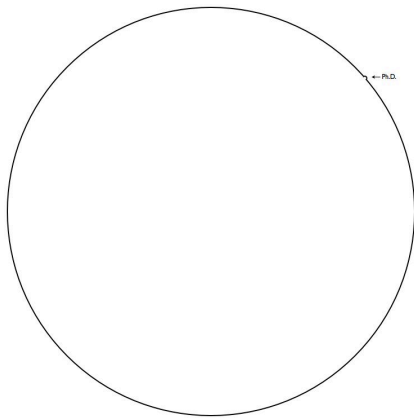
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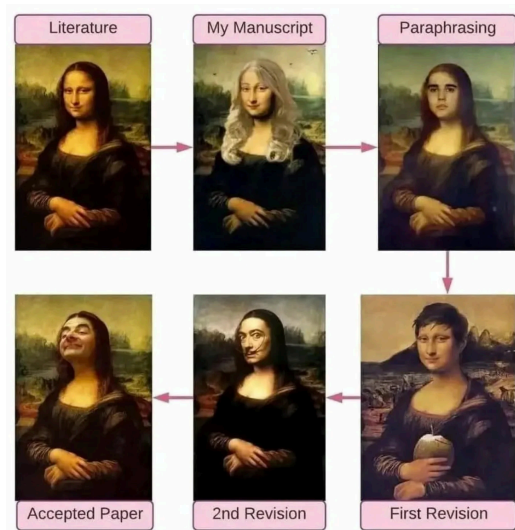
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## #6 Don't freak out when you're rejected.



Retrieved from @scholarly\_reels on Instagram.

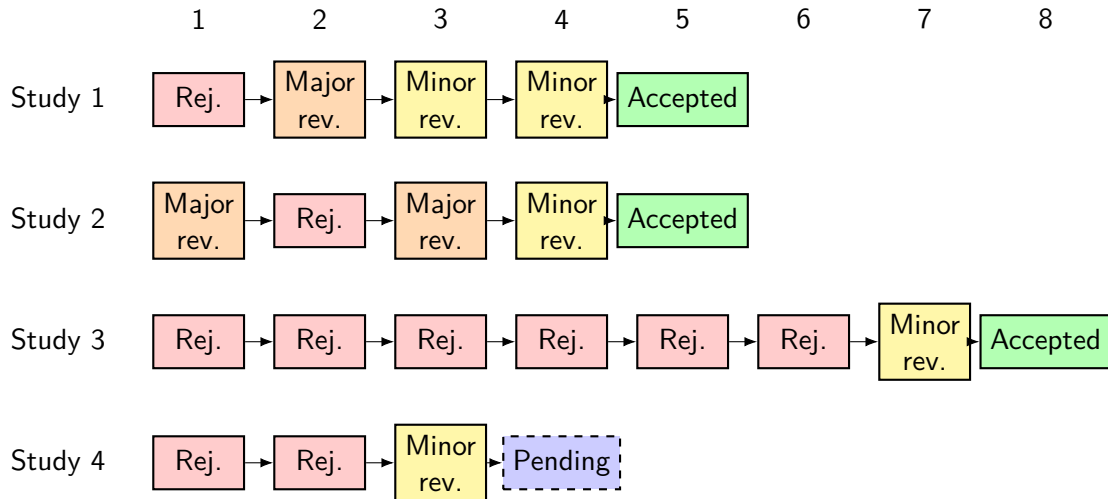
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Retrieved from @MemmingPhD on Twitter: High Impact PhD Memes.



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- On average ( $n=4$ ), I had "5.75" rejections/reviews before my article was accepted to publish (,and I am about to defend my thesis next week!)
- Don't be surprised if others don't recognise the value of your masterpiece right away.
- Absolutely normal.
- **DON'T FREAK OUT.**

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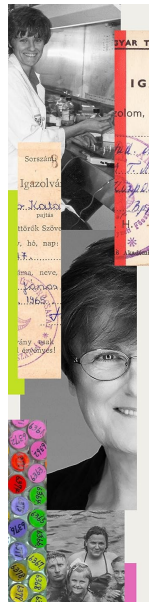
### Katalin Karikó, Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2023

"...you have to focus on what you can change. Whatever it is, if your paper or your grant gets rejected, you should always ask: "What can I do?", not what other people can do."

*Recommended reading: Katalin Karikó.*

*Breaking Through: My Life in Science. 2023.*

Reference: [https://www.news.uzh.ch/en/articles/news/2024/katalin-kariko-paul-karrer-medal.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.news.uzh.ch/en/articles/news/2024/katalin-kariko-paul-karrer-medal.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



## Breaking Through

My Life  
in Science

Katalin  
Karikó

## #7 You're alone and not alone.

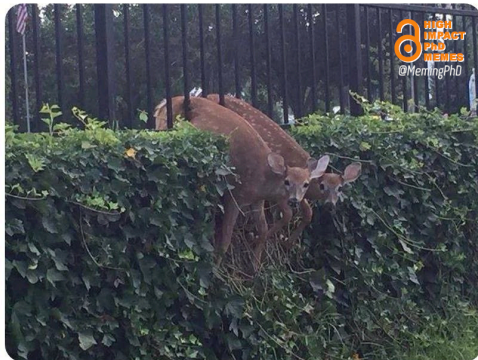


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## #7 You're alone and not alone.

Advisor: "If you're stuck on a problem, ask your lab mate".

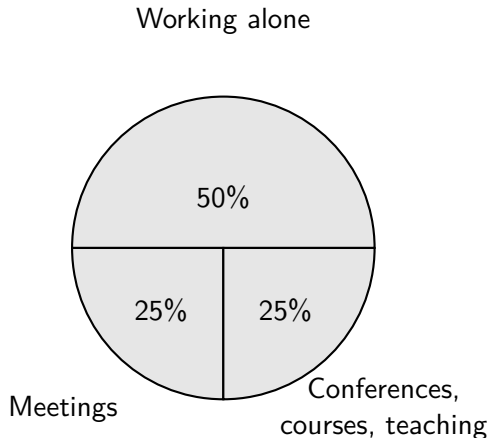
Me and my lab mate:



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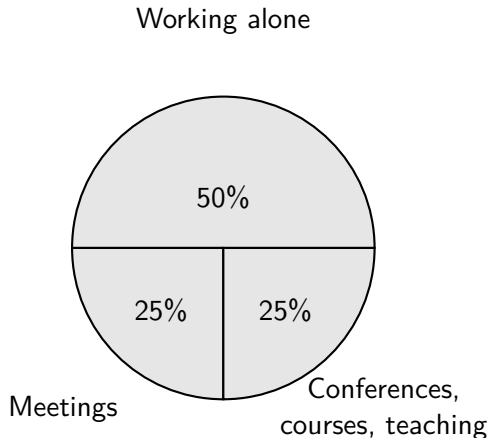
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**Figure:** Example of the distribution of time as a PhD student.

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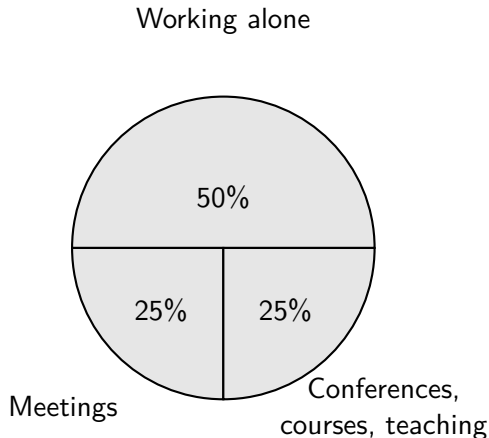
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- "Speed (quantity) versus velocity (quantity + direction)".



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- "Speed (quantity) versus velocity (quantity + direction)".
- How to have "velocity" and not just "speed"?
- Have someone to talk to/hang out with!



**Figure:** Example of the distribution of time as a PhD student.

## #8 Don't forget this is a marathon.

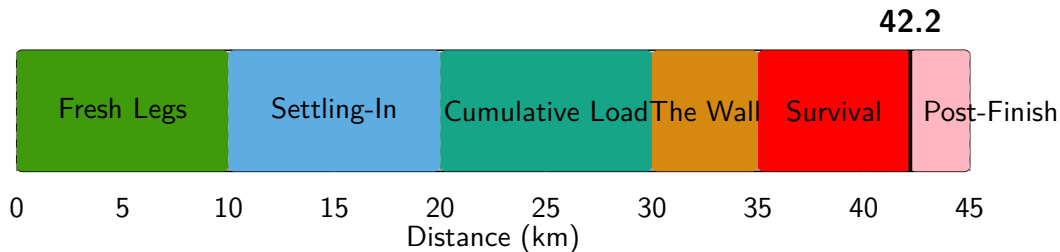


Figure: Typical states of a human body during a marathon.

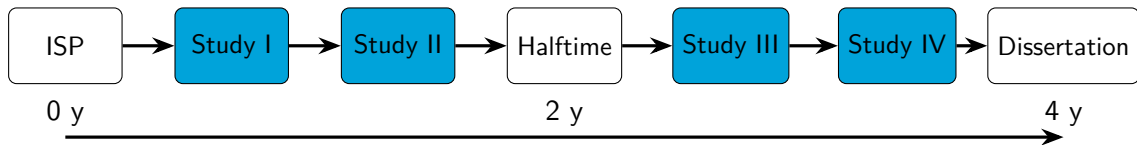


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*"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (World Health Organization)*

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- **Money**

Plan your finance so it does not become a stress.

*Recommended reading: Morgan Housel, The Psychology of Money (2020).*

## #9 PhD is part of your life, not your whole life.

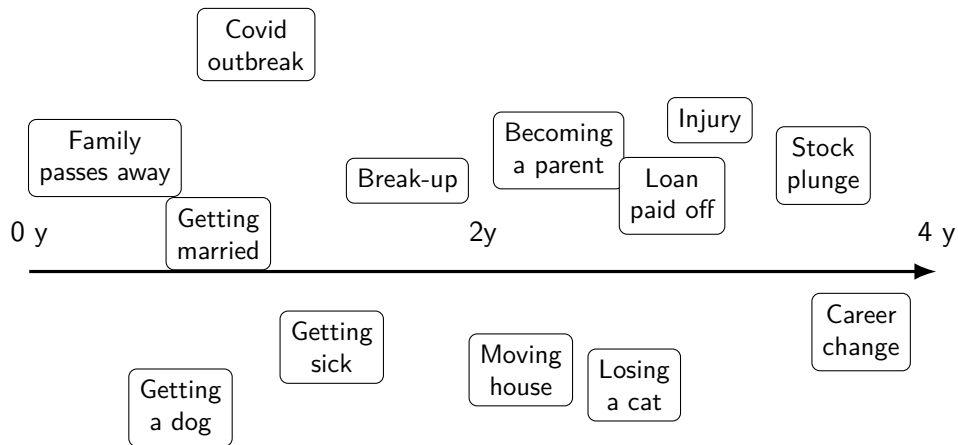


Figure: Many things can happen during your PhD. It is okay to pause if needed.

## #10 Don't forget that you are here for fun.

"School" originally came from the Greek *σχολή* (*scholē*), which surprisingly meant **“leisure”** or **“free time”**.

An idea that only people with leisure could devote themselves to study and discussion.



**Figure:** Retrieved from UNICEF. The Playbox. <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/playbox>

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Link to the presentation:  
[https://enochytchen.com/talks/2025-ten-dos-and-donts/slides\\_Enoch\\_Chen.pdf](https://enochytchen.com/talks/2025-ten-dos-and-donts/slides_Enoch_Chen.pdf)