

Training PhD students

Session: Diagnostic session

Skills and competencies

critical self-reflection, clarity on progress, identifying gaps and support needs, strategising and planning

Duration and scheduling

At least two 45-minute sessions, about a month apart
As frequently as needed

Mode of delivery

In person or virtual

Outline

Diagnostic sessions support students to identify their needs so that they can go on to access one-on-one support. (See [research development clinics](#).) Students identify challenges and gaps and decide the kinds of support they need in order to make progress with their analysis and write up. The course coordinator allocates the best available facilitator, trainer or mentor to provide the necessary expertise to each student's requirements. The interactive nature of the session enables students to communicate their needs effectively and make consistent and measurable progress. Within a diagnostic session, the facilitator requires the student to map out a clear strategy to achieve a series of critical goals in order to complete their research.

Objectives

- To enable students to describe the status of their research and the challenges they face
- To support students to plan for making progress with analysis and write-up
- To assist students to develop a clear map towards completing their PhD write-up
- To prepare trainers to provide one-on-one and needs-based assistance to students
- To help trainers to identify specific/unique areas of need and address them

Preparation

Students

Prepare ahead to ensure they get maximum benefit from the student-led session
Identify the kinds of expertise they need in (for example) writing and conceptualising, demography, epidemiology, biostatistics or qualitative research methods

Course organisers

Identify and invite a range of suitable and available facilitators and mentors – in addition to students' own supervisors – to play this role
Allocate a suitable facilitator to each student
Ensure availability of a well-spaced physical space or virtual learning platform such as Zoom

Facilitator attributes

Expert in interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research
Open-minded, with an appreciation of the various research paradigms, methods and design in the given profession
Able to identify research needs
Connected with a rich professional network that they can mobilize to support students

Steps

PhD students meet in small groups or one-on-one with a facilitator.
Each student describes to the group and/or the facilitator their project and progress.
With the assistance of the facilitator, they identify the support that would enable them to progress.
They note what they have agreed with the facilitator.

Outcomes

After this exercise, PhD students should be able to:

1. Be self-critical
2. Receive critique of their PhD proposal
3. Offer constructive peer support to other PhD students
4. Identify resources (human and literature) and use them to develop their PhD proposal