

Miranda's question

1 The question

I'm a final year PhD student at Wessex University and am looking forward to your talk on Wednesday. I have a question that I'd like you to address if possible, which is 'how do you know when your thesis is ready to submit? - specifically, if your supervisor says it's good enough but you're not so sure, especially since your supervisor has not been very helpful throughout the duration of the PhD.

I have a supervisor that looks at my work when I've made vast amounts of progress then says "yes, it all looks great" - not very helpful, as I'd rather they criticize it than the examiners in the viva.

I have tried to address this issue with my supervisor, and they just keep telling me that I'm doing a great job and "will be fine". It's nice of them to say so, but I need to know when it REALLY IS good enough! I hope I'm

2 John's reply

Many thanks for writing to me and sharing your problem which of course I will deal with in complete confidence.

What you ask reflects a very common concern especially among conscientious students. I will deal with the general problem on Wednesday, but I will also offer some thoughts to you personally, before and if necessary after the Wednesday meeting. But before that, can I ask a couple of questions?

1. What independent feedback have you had so far? E.g. from departmental seminars, second supervisor, upgrade committee, progress reviews etc?
2. Have you spoken about your research at conferences or seminars outside Wessex?

3. Miranda's clarification

1. I have had very little independent feedback. The problem is that both of my original supervisors left when I was a third of the way through. I had both a forensic and a clinical psychologist as supervisors, which unfortunately both left at around the same time. I now have two supervisors (both social psychologists). I looked into transferring but decided to stay at Wessex because I could not find a forensic supervisor at a suitable university. I had an upgrade review after one year of starting the PhD, to be upgraded from MPhil to PhD status. Unfortunately though, there was no-one directly in my field to give constructive feedback.

2. I have spoken about my research on one occasion, right at the beginning, when I had to se