

# **Journey of Ph.D.**

Expectations and Pitfalls

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Feb. 2026

# What Advisors Look For

- It's about trajectory, not just talent
  - Advisors rarely expect brilliance on day one; they look for a positive upward slope.

<b>Reliability</b>	Doing what you say; meeting deadlines consistently
<b>Initiative</b>	Bringing potential solutions to the table, even if they are imperfect
<b>Ownership</b>	Converting vague feedback into concrete, actionable steps
<b>Intellectual Integrity</b>	Admitting failed experiments rather than hiding results
<b>Coachability</b>	Seriously testing suggestions before rejecting them

- Advisors can forgive a slow start, but they cannot fix disengagement.

# Red Flags That Derail PhDs

- **The "Silent Killers" of Success**

- Even the strongest students can fail if these behaviors become ingrained habits

<b>Lack of Ownership</b>	Waiting for instructions instead of driving the project
<b>Perfectionism</b>	Over-optimizing until papers never actually get submitted
<b>Defensiveness</b>	Taking feedback personally, which stalls professional growth
<b>Isolation</b>	Working in a vacuum, leading to fewer ideas and poor mental health
<b>Avoidance Behavior</b>	Ghosting emails or skipping meetings when progress is slow
<b>Sunk-Cost Fallacy</b>	Clinging to a "dead" project long after it has lost its viability

# From Absorption to Contribution (Years 1–3)

- **Years 1–2: Absorption**

- Focus: Mastering the literature and technical tools; replicating existing work.
- Goal: Asking "Why?" to understand the foundation.
- Risk: Feeling behind (Normal for everyone).

- **Years 2–3: Contribution**

- Focus: Identifying research gaps and proposing "What if we..." scenarios.
- Goal: Experiencing the first round of peer review and rejection.
- Risk: Overcommitting to a single idea too early.

# From Ownership to Synthesis (Years 3–5+)

- **Years 3–4: Ownership**

- Focus: Defining original problems and politely pushing back on advisors.
- Goal: Transitioning into a peer whom others seek out for help.
- Risk: Burnout.

- **Years 4–5+: Synthesis**

- Focus: Connecting ideas across projects and mentoring junior students.
- Goal: Writing with confidence and preparing for the defense.
- Risk: Perfectionism delaying the graduation date.

# Training Your Professional "Muscles"

- **How to Intentionally Build Skills**

- These qualities aren't innate; they are trained

<b>Build Ownership</b>	End every meeting with a clear " <b>I will do X by Y date</b> "
<b>Build Communication</b>	Practice explaining your work in 1 sentence, 1 minute, and 1 slide
<b>Build Resilience</b>	Normalize rejection by tracking it like "reps at the gym"
<b>Build Adaptability</b>	Set "kill criteria" for projects in advance to avoid the sunk-cost fallacy
<b>Build Sustainability</b>	Treat every success or failure as an essential part of the journey and build productivity daily