

How to Make a Study Plan

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Abstract

This small note is meant to guide primarily new Ph.D. students at the IT University of Copenhagen to write the mandatory study plan.

This little document is meant as a small guide for new Ph.D. students at ITU that has to write a study plan for the first time. I will not write so much about *why* you have to write a study plan; this is more of a check list of things that you should include.

I have been a member of the Ph.D. study board for three years now, and I know what things that are considered when the board evaluates a study plan. This document is meant to list those items. For reference, I have put my own study plan online at

<http://www.itu.dk/people/noah/>

Please note that this note is my own, and the Ph.D. study board are not responsible for anything that is written here. It just sums up my own experiences from being a member of the board.

There are two Ph.D. programmes at ITU. If you are on the three-year programme, your study plan should account for all of the three years. However, if you are on the 4-year programme, the plan you hand in after six months of studies need only account for the first two years. Along with your qualification report after those two years, another study plan with a plan for the remaining two years has to be enclosed.

The Ph.D. regulations at ITU has a list of items that must be included in a study plan. I will give an explanation of some of them here (some are obvious and do not need an explanation). Please note that whenever you revise your study plan, make sure to update *all* of these items (where relevant), not just the milestones.

Project Description As a relatively new student, it is hardly possible to give a full description of what your research for the next three or four years is going to be about. But since you've started as a Ph.D. student, you should have some vague idea as to what the area is, and there are probably some questions whose answer is the goal of your research project. Try to write this down. It is extremely helpful to have done this since it will help you focus your work on these goals during your studies. Note

that the board does not have the competence to evaluate the project description; this item is meant to make sure that the project is (relatively) well-defined by you and your supervisor – remember that when your supervisor signs the study plan, he/she confirms that it is a good and realistic plan. It might be that during the course of your studies, you find out that it is not realistic to solve all the open problems that you and your supervisor came up with after 6 months, or it might be that new questions have arisen since your first study plan. If and when this happens, make sure to update the study plan.

Plan for Stay Abroad After six months of studies, it might not be clear yet where the best place in the world for your stay abroad is, and it might not be possible to go there in practice. But you might have some ideas, and you might know when it will be a good time to go. Just write that information down if that is all you know.

Plan for Teaching Activities Write here what your plans for taking courses are. It might be hard to know from the offset, both because you do not know which courses will be offered, and your need for courses might change if your research changes direction. But you might know when it is feasible to take courses; for example, it is not a good idea to take all your courses in the last semester before you have to hand in your dissertation, and maybe it is not the best idea to take courses while you are abroad - but then again, maybe it is, if they have an excellent course elsewhere? Also you might have some courses that you plan to take already. Put this information down, and make sure that it is updated on a regular basis.

Milestones The above items sum up what the study regulations say about what should be in the study plan. But there is also another issue. In order for the board to evaluate your half year reports¹, however, the plans you make should be such that it is possible to *measure* whether or not you have met the requirements, you have set for yourself. Therefore, there should be a set of *milestones* for each time in your Ph. D. studies that you hand in a half year report. Half year reports are to be handed in on every April 1st and October 1st. Hence, the milestones should account for the periods April-September and October-March. However, if you start your studies on July 1st, for example, your first milestone should account for the period July-September, and the last milestone for the period April-July – you do not have to make a plan for what happens after you submit your dissertation ;-). It should be possible for the board to measure these milestones, so it should be absolutely clear what the goals are. Examples of measurable goals are

- Take course on Mobile Computing.
- Write Technical Report / paper to Human Computer Interaction Conference on the role of the player in online games.

¹To avoid confusion, note that half year reports are *not* the same as study plans, although there are connections between them.

- Teach course on Object Oriented Programming.
- Visit University of Saarbrücken for five months.

Some goals that are *not* measurable are

- Read the book “Cryptography” by Stinson.
- Get up-to date in the field of “strategic games” since 1995.

Please note that these are absolutely valid goals, but there is no way that the board can know whether you have obtained them or not. So, if there are only that kind of goals, it is hard to see if your studies are going well or not.

If, when handing in a half year report, you have not met the milestone, it is time to revise the study plan. Do *not* consider this a failure. It might just be that things have changed, that some problem turned out to be harder than expected, or that some course was not offered, so that you could not take it, or something else. This is not a failure, and it does not mean that you’ve wasted the six months accounted for in the half year report. It just means that you should rethink your plan, revise (all of) it according to the changes that has happened, and turn it in again.

Checklist In conclusion, here are the things that are checked (apart from all the obvious stuff, e.g. your name, address, CPR, etc.) by the study board when they evaluate a study plan.

- Is there a project description?
- Is there a plan for obtaining ECTS?
- Is there a plan for a stay abroad?
- Are there milestones that are synchronised with the dates for handing in half year reports? Are these milestones *measurable*?

If any of these are missing, the board will not approve the study plan.