

PhD Blues?!

What to do when the going gets tough...

A doctorate is a process of ups and downs that most doctoral researchers go through in one way or another. Each stage of a doctoral journey has its own specific challenges that repeatedly test your limits.

Orientation phase issues: Complexity of the research field, big ideas, euphoria, matching & expectation management with the supervisor(s), adjustment of the research topic, overwhelming size of the tasks.

Research phase issues: Productive phase, drowning in data, disillusionment, mid-thesis blues, procrastination & self-sabotage, self-organisation & project management.

Finishing phase issues: Intense writing & publication pressure, coping with increasing time pressure and multiple insecurities, self-doubt & fear of failure, adjusting priorities, goals and expectations, career orientation & decision making.

Becoming aware of these fundamental dynamics can help you to get through and actively overcome the challenges they present.

This GraduateCenter^{LMU} leaflet will help you to do that! Turn it over and check the many contact points and counseling services that can help you grow with the challenges and, where necessary, make a change.

You are in the driver's seat

It's your project, take responsibility for it!

Don't wait for someone to tell you what and how to do it – be proactive, try to find your own solutions and go for it! It's up to you to develop a professional attitude, make use of the resources available to you, and learn to set priorities.

Personal responsibility is a key skill in your future career – not only in the academic world!

Reach out for feedback

Come out of your shell!

Reach out, talk about your project, and exchange ideas with others. Look and listen around for inspiring people, programs and initiatives and get in contact. Take advantage of the opportunities your academic environment is offering you!

Maybe it's also time to get yourself a mentor?

Check the back side of this leaflet for further information.

Talk to your supervisor(s)

Stay in touch, be proactive, and clarify expectations!

It is your responsibility to take care of and manage the relationship with your supervisor(s), even if it is not always easy to approach them or let them in on what you are struggling with and how you are feeling.

Be clear about your supervisor's expectations, but also dare to address your own expectations, your insecurities and difficulties along the way – and to discuss possible options. Take heart and try to find ways to talk about things that concern or burden you even if they are not directly related to your research project.

Be realistic

Be honest with yourself and learn to set boundaries!

Do your best, use well-proven management concepts and tools, and reflect on your priorities. But also accept your limits and train yourself to stand up for them.

Your goal is not to change the world, it is to finish your doctorate!

Get out of your comfort zone

Dare to challenge yourself!

Doing a doctorate is a journey into the unknown! Work towards your goal in manageable increments and keep reviewing your plans and also your work patterns from time to time.

If things aren't going the way you want them to, dare to change something and try something different or new. Expand your skills profile!

Find support

You are not stranded on a desert island!

Nobody has to do everything alone. Connect with like-minded people, share your experiences and build up your own support group. Sometimes also talking to professionals can be helpful in mobilizing your own resources and developing hands-on solutions and coping strategies. Don't hesitate to look into local counselling services and take advantage of professional assistance!

Keep in mind: you are neither the first nor the only one looking for support and advice! It is highly likely that people around you have also experienced the stressful nature of doctorate. Postdocs also have gotten through this process, so they may have some useful tips ...

Avoid self-sabotage

Don't make it harder on yourself than it already is!

Establish healthy routines, make sure you get enough sleep and also pay attention to how you treat yourself: Don't be overly critical of yourself, don't make yourself crazy about things you cannot control, avoid comparing yourself to others! Instead, be kind to yourself, ask yourself: What do I need to feel good?

Developing good self-care strategies from the very beginning will support you in better managing even the critical moments. There are a wide range of support services and online resources to help you maintain your mental and physical wellbeing.

Keep your spirits up

Make friends, expand on your interests and enjoy life!

And remember: You are not your dissertation, there's so much more ...!

... still struggling?

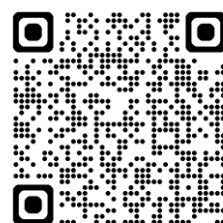
There is often only a fine line between a difficult situation ('challenge') and an overwhelming one ('crisis'). If you feel that working on your dissertation is stressing you out, and that your doctorate is heavily affecting your mental health and wellbeing, there is absolutely no shame in reaching out for help.

Better today than tomorrow!

See the back page for contact points and counseling services for doctoral researchers at LMU and beyond to help you to tackle the situation.

Graduate
Center^{LMU}

Your contact for nearly everything to do with your PhD!
www.en.graduatecenter.lmu.de



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Motivation & Stress Management

Frustrated with your dissertation?

Frustrated by making little or no progress? Having a hard time in keeping yourself motivated? Maybe you are already struggling with writer's block or even thinking about abandoning your dissertation?

You can find courses on academic working techniques, self- and time management in the [GraduateCenter^{LMU} workshop program](#) and at [LMU Academic Careers](#). Graduate programs in your area may also provide specific skills training – just ask!

In addition, the [GraduateCenter^{LMU}](#) offers individual advice and coaching on topics such as dealing with stress, difficult communication or other challenging situations.

Perhaps it's also time to find peers and get involved with the wider academic community. Ask around to find out which academic initiatives and networks might be of interest to you. Peers can also be found at the [LMU Writing Center](#), the Munich university communities [ESG](#) and [KHG](#) or through voluntary work.

... for encouragement listen to [Diss & Co](#), the podcast series of the GraduateCenter^{LMU}, or the [docPhil-Podcast](#).

Supervision & Mentoring

Unhappy with your supervisory relationship?

Your supervisor constantly wants to know what you have achieved and is putting more and more pressure on you? You feel you are not making any progress and are afraid to speak to your supervisor? You feel left alone and would like more feedback?

The [GraduateCenter^{LMU}](#) offers events on the topics of supervision and expectation management and also supports you individually in tackling challenges in supervision and building a good supervisory relationship.

For an initial orientation on the topic, the GraduateCenter^{LMU} provides a [Code of Practice](#) with recommendations on how to organize the doctoral phase and a template for a [supervision agreement](#).

As a member of a structured doctoral program, you can always contact the program coordinator to discuss your situation.

... have you ever thought about actively seeking co-supervision or looking for a mentor? Perhaps you can bring this up at the next opportunity. In any case, familiarize yourself with your doctoral degree regulations beforehand. You may also check the tile 'Future planning' for further info on mentoring.

Conflicts & Discrimination

Experiencing mobbing, unfair or unequal treatment? Witnessing threats or harassment?

You or someone you work with is being bullied because of gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, physical disabilities or other characteristics? Different backgrounds or behaviors make it complicated to work together as a team? Concerned about hierarchies in academia and power abuse?

Depending on the particular issue, you can find [support](#) from the LMU Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Semitism Officers, the Conflict Resolution Officers, the local or University Women's Representative and the Representatives for Severely Disabled People or Students with Disabilities respectively. All relevant contact points at LMU and beyond are listed on the [WeCare@lmu](#) website,

International (doctoral) researchers can also find support before and during their research stay in Munich with [LMU Gateway](#).

Information, advice and support in cases of digital violence, attacks and conflicts in science communication are offered by the [Scicomm-Support Network](#).

... not sure whom to address? The [GraduateCenter^{LMU}](#) will help you find the right contact point. A hotline and further research options are also offered by the state-funded [Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency](#).

Mental Health

Feeling constantly overloaded? Struggling with persistent illness? Experiencing sorrow or anxiety?

Your dissertation is taking up more and more space, putting you under increasing pressure? Everything is getting too much for you and you can't find a way out on your own? You're not sure whether you're in a deep motivational hole or already slipping into depression? Are you worried about someone near to you?

Don't wait, contact a counselling service immediately! [WeCare@lmu](#) provides an overview of local offers and contact points in difficult or crisis situations, including self-screening and psychoeducational material as well as further health resources provided by LMU Diversity Management.

Psychotherapeutic and psychosocial counselling and further contacts in emergency situations can be found via the [StuWerk Advice and Counselling Service](#). Psychological and pastoral support is also offered by the Munich university communities [ESG](#) und [KHG](#).

... good to know: You can find low-threshold support also via the [Nightline München e.V.](#), a listening hotline run by students for students.

For more tips and practical material you may also check online resources like the [ZEIT Campus Mental Health Guide](#) or [iFightDepression.com](#), run by the European Alliance against Depression.

Future Planning & Career Orientation

Wondering about your next career steps? Experiencing self-doubt or fear of the future?

You are running out of funding? Any doubts as to whether an academic career is really what you want? You need a perspective for the time after your doctorate?

The [GraduateCenter^{LMU}](#) and [LMU Career Service](#) offer individual advice and coaching on career entry and career development. Perhaps also the [LMU Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center](#) has something for you? You can find even more offers under [Academic Careers](#).

Doctoral candidates not funded during the final phase of their dissertation can apply for the [LMU Completion Grant](#). Doctoral programs may also be able to support you on the final stretch and provide some extra funding – it's best to ask the program coordinator directly!

International candidates may also apply for a grant from the [International Office](#) or the [Ecumenical Emergency Fund](#).

... perhaps additional mentoring could also be of benefit for you? Check-out the opportunities offered by the [LMU Mentoring program](#), the [LMU Career Mentoring](#) and the [Move! program](#) by Frauenakademie München. Some scientific associations have also set up specific mentoring programs – it's worth asking around in your academic community.

Research Integrity

Questions about good scientific practice or scientific misconduct?

Would you like to find out more about research ethics? Are you unsure how to identify and steer clear of questionable practices? Are you worried that data sets might not be properly documented and analyzed? Are you experiencing authorship conflicts?

Fundamental principles of good scientific practice are laid down in the [LMU regulations for safeguarding good scientific practice](#), the [DFG Code of Conduct Online Portal "Research Integrity"](#). The [e-learning courses](#) and the [Diss & Co](#) podcast by the GraduateCenter^{LMU} help you to get started with the topic. If you would like to learn about Open Science, contact the [LMU Open Science Center](#) and/or the [University Library](#).

Depending on the circumstances, other contact points may be relevant, such as the [LMU Representative for Self-Regulation in Science](#) or the [Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany](#) an independent body for advice and mediation.

If you have specific suspicions, first find out about possible points of contact at your faculty, e.g. dean, doctoral committee, ombudsperson or other officers. When in doubt, the [GraduateCenter^{LMU}](#) supports you in identifying the right contact point and possible next steps.