Guide to Milestones for Higher Degrees by Research (HDR)

by Jack Pezzey, Associate Director (HDR); approved by Fenner HDR Committee on 24 June 2014; updated with minor revisions on 9 February 2015

1. Introduction

This Guide explains the overall purpose of and issues arising from HDR milestone reports in the Fenner School, such as Annual Reports and Plans, the Thesis Proposal Review and the Mid-Term Review. It is addressed to HDR (PhD or MPhil) students (also called "candidates" here) as "you", but is also intended for their Supervisors (short for "Chairs of supervisory panels"). It replaces the Guide dated (only) 20 June 2014, and it takes into account the online milestone system introduced in January 2014 within ISIS, the Interactive Student Information System (https://isis.anu.edu.au/). For guidance on online milestone procedures, see Fenner's Notes on online procedures for HDR milestones, found on the HDR Webpage1.

Mainly consistent with, though in one instance departing from the ANU Code of Practice for Supervision in Higher Degrees by Research (HDR)2, the Fenner School requires the following milestones and due dates for a full-time PhD candidate’s degree:

- Annual Research Plan, due at 3 months.
- Thesis Proposal Review (TPR), due at 6 months; see Appendix A for detailed guidance.
- "Annual" Research Report, including Plan for the year ahead, due at 9 months and 18 months, and annually thereafter.
- Mid-Term Review (MTR), due at 18 months; see Appendix B for detailed guidance.
- Exit seminar or "(Final) Oral Presentation", due 6 months before submission.

Full details are given in the full-time PhD milestones table, which also includes other events like confirmation of candidature details. This Table can also be found on the HDR Webpage, as can an MPhil milestones table and part-time versions of both.

As stated in the Code of Practice, milestones “are designed to encourage timely completion, that is, within the ideal timeframe of three years [for a full-time PhD]”. They do this by ensuring both student and supervisory panel fulfil their responsibilities stated in the ANU Guideline on Candidature and Supervision of HDR Students3. In plainer language, following milestones will mean HDR students work effectively and get good supervision. Additional purposes for, and benefits from, the Thesis Proposal Review are listed at the start of Appendix A; most of these are also true for the Mid-Term Review. Milestones are also needed to highlight any problems with progress, and hence any need to consider major changes such as a new topic, a new Supervisor, Program Leave4 (“suspension”) or even in very rare cases, conversion from PhD to MPhil, or withdrawal. Your Supervisor is required to discuss with you the comments he/she has written on any milestone form, before submitting the form back into the online system.

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1 See http://fennerschool-internal.anu.edu.au/node/110 (part of the Fenner Intranet).
4 See http://www.anu.edu.au/students/program-administration/program-management/research-program-leave.
Because milestones are important, the ANU requires them to be up-to-date before you can get a program or scholarship extension, or apply for various grants. However, see section 2(c) on when and if so how you can postpone some milestone due dates. But milestones can also be burdensome, if only because there are so many of them, especially in the first year. So this Guide:

- tries to lessen the burden by highlighting which milestones are more important, and under what circumstances (Section 2);
- describes procedures for the seminars required for Thesis Proposal and Mid-Term Reviews (Section 3, with further details in Appendices A and B respectively);
- suggests how to avoid problems with supervision (Section 4);
- describes what happens when there are problems with progress, for whatever reason, that result in an unsatisfactory milestone (Section 5);

For ease of reference, though, Box 1 summarises the documents you need to or may Add in the Attachments box when submitting your milestone online, while Box 2 gives some tips to students for avoiding the most common procedural mistakes in submitting milestone reports.

### Box 1: Required and optional documents in addition to milestone report forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Required documents to Add in the Attachments box before you Upload the report form and Submit the milestone</th>
<th>Optional documents to Add in the Attachments box before you Upload the report form and Submit the milestone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Plan</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>- any details (e.g. timeline) you choose not to insert into Section 1 of the form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Proposal Review</td>
<td>Proposal document, in addition to the TPR report form (for details, see Appendix A)</td>
<td>- Powerpoint presentation from your Review seminar (but this does not substitute for the Proposal document)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- any other document you think is relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Report (and Plan)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>- any details (e.g. timeline) that you choose not to insert into Sections 1 or 2 of the form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Review</td>
<td>Mid-Term Report, in addition to the MTR report form, and Written Work (for details, see Appendix B)</td>
<td>- Powerpoint presentation from your Review seminar (but this does not substitute for the Report or Written Work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Final) Oral Presentation</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>- Powerpoint presentation for your Final Oral Presentation</td>
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</table>

### Box 2: Common Do's and Don't's for HDR students submitting milestone reports

**Do** check your ANU email, so you see reminders of when to submit your milestones. **Don’t wait** for your Supervisor to ask you: it’s **your responsibility to start** all milestone forms.

**Don’t** submit a Powerpoint printout of your Review seminar presentation in place of the additional document(s) required for a Thesis Proposal Review or Mid-Term Review.

**Do** put headers on all additional documents submitted with online milestones. Put **your name and the date of writing** at the top of each document, followed by the document's **purpose** (e.g. "Research Plan for year starting 1 October 2013", "Draft thesis Chapter 3, for Mid-Term Review", etc). If you don't do this and submit milestones late or in batches, readers won't know when documents were written or which milestones they belong to.
2. Differences in purpose and timing of Reviews versus Plans/Reports

To greatly oversimplify the following, Fenner School cares more about the timing than the content of Annual Reports, and more about the content than the timing of the Thesis Proposal Review and the Mid-Term Review. Now read on...

The Fenner School intends the Thesis Proposal Review and Mid-Term Review to be treated by you and your panel as both important opportunities for communication, and serious academic tests which have to be passed thoroughly if your candidature is to continue. For you to pass your Thesis Proposal Review, the panel should be convinced you have a viable plan to make a significant contribution to knowledge (the key aim of a Higher Degree by Research); while for you to pass your Mid-Term Review, the panel should be convinced you are already making a contribution to knowledge, and have a viable plan to finish the degree on time. For each Review, the most important thing you write is not the online report form itself, but the document(s) you should send to your panel before the seminar and panel meeting, and then need to attach when submitting the milestone online (as listed in Box 1 above). If a Review is unsatisfactory, various options may be recommended by the supervisory panel (see Section 5), though if an unsatisfactory mark seems at all likely, your Supervisor should discuss it with you well before the formal Review process starts.

By contrast, Annual Reports are mainly intended to provide timely, regular checks on your research progress, or your personal situation if you're on Program Leave for whatever reason. So if you are progressing normally, it's OK to lessen the burden of milestone reporting by borrowing from one milestone report to the next if the two reports are submitted only a few months apart and no significant changes have happened in that time. In particular, it's OK to either copy extensive text from your Thesis Proposal Review (TPR) document to your 1st Annual Report, or simply refer parts of the Report to your Proposal document, if the Report is submitted only 3 months after the TPR as scheduled. The same applies to your Annual Plan and TPR (due 3 months apart), or to your Mid-Term Review and 2nd Annual Report (due at the same time). But if one milestone is submitted, say, 6 months after another, then some progress should have happened during that interval, and any text from the earlier milestone used in the later one should first be updated to reflect progress!

The effects of leave or slow research progress on milestone dates are thus as follows:

(a) If you have taken any Program Leave for longer than 1 month in a block, the due dates for your remaining Review(s) will be delayed by the length of any leave. And if you change from Full-time to Part-time load, the due dates for your remaining Review(s) will be changed to the appropriate Part-time schedule.

(b) By contrast, even if you are on Program Leave or change to Part-time, your Annual Reports and Plans must remain annual: their due dates are unchanged.

(c) If your research progress is slow for whatever reason, it may be academically sensible to delay the next Review until you've made enough progress for the Review to be worth doing. However, delaying a Review raises two important points:

(i) If a Review is delayed until after the next Annual Report is due, the Report must still be on time and report fully on the problems causing delay.
(ii) As noted, an overdue Review, or any overdue milestone, will be automatically flagged by the ANU student system and will, for example, prevent you applying for a VC’s HDR Travel Grant. To postpone a Review’s due date on the ISIS system, email your Supervisor stating a good reason(s) for delay and the new due date requested; your Supervisor must then approve your request and forward it to the Associate Director (HDR); and the AD(HDR) must then approve the request and inform the HDR Coordinator, who will change the due date in ISIS. Providing the reason is good and no one is on leave, this process can and often has been completed in one day.

3. Review seminar: booking and conduct

(a) You should book your Review seminar many weeks in advance with Amy Chen, the HDR Coordinator at <hdr.student.fses@anu.edu.au>. The standard times available, all in the Fenner Seminar Room, are 9-9.45, 9.45-10.30, 11.15-12.00 and 12.00-12.45 on the 2nd Wednesday in each month, except January or when there’s a clash with HDR Induction.

(b) The Coordinator has been told not to make any booking unless a seminar title is given. This to make you realise that, from Proposal stage onwards, having a current title is essential to make your research both focused and communicable to others. Titles can and often should be changed several times during your candidature, and in particular can be changed by notifying the Coordinator up to two weeks before a seminar. You should also send her an abstract two weeks beforehand, so the seminar announcement can attract the best audience.

(c) Seminars are chaired by your Supervisor, who is responsible for ensuring that seminars start and end promptly, so that later candidates get their full 45-minute timeslot. A maximum of 30 minutes should normally be allowed for presentation, in order to leave at least 15 minutes for discussion, but detailed timing can be decided by you and your Supervisor on the day. To avoid delays, at least one day before your seminar, check you can load and operate your file on the Seminar Room presentation system, as professional staff cannot help with this on the day.

4. How to avoid problems with supervision: responsibilities and feedback

(a) A common problem for HDR students, especially new ones, is not knowing what they are entitled to expect in terms of supervision, and in turn what is expected of them. Detailed guidance on the responsibilities of Supervisors and students are therefore set out in the Guideline on Candidature and Supervision of HDR Students. But details like how often you and your Supervisor should meet, when you should submit written work, and how quickly your Supervisor should reply with comments, vary widely across Supervisors and change over time. So students and Supervisors are strongly encouraged, though not required, to each fill out a Supervision Expectations Form (on the HDR Webpage) and then compare expectations, at least in the first three months of the degree, and ideally each year thereafter.

(b) Supervisors are also encouraged to invite you to report annually to them on their own performance as Supervisor, at the same time as you write your Annual Report. The HDR Webpage has a HDR Supervision Survey form which Supervisors can edit and send you for this purpose. If such an invitation is not made, you may be too reserved to speak openly about your minor or major concerns about supervision, so that possible straightforward solutions, or a necessary change in Supervisor, may be delayed and harm your progress.

(c) However, even when you are invited, you may not feel comfortable reporting directly to your Supervisor about problems with his or her supervision. If so, there are several other

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6 The key step in changing your Supervisor is for you to find another academic willing to be the new Supervisor, and to sign the Change to Supervisory Panel form (obtained from the HDR Coordinator).
people with whom you can discuss supervision problems, including: another member of your panel, a Fenner HDR Advisor (see HDR Webpage for details), the HDR Coordinator, the Associate Director (HDR), or the Director; or if you want to talk to someone completely outside the Fenner School, try the ANU Research Integrity Advisors network (see HDR Webpage).

5. What if problems with progress occur and a milestone is unsatisfactory?

Problems with your progress in a research degree can occur for many different reasons. You may fall ill, or need to care for someone who falls ill; you may find you want to study a very different topic and/or have a different Supervisor; you may be over-ambitious and/or not focus soon enough on achievable research objectives (both common); Supervisors may be over-preoccupied elsewhere (also common); funds may have run out; field-sites may have been burnt or flooded; laboratory equipment may have broken. In very rare cases the admission process may have been faulty, meaning you do not have what it takes to finish the research degree you started, and should convert (to an MPhil, if currently doing a PhD) or withdraw, rather than continue, waste your own and the panel’s time, and perhaps lower the standard and reputation of the degree.

Whatever the reasons, milestones, especially Reviews, should be used to face up to progress problems in a timely way. As noted in Section 2, if an unsatisfactory7 assessment seems at all likely, the Supervisor should discuss this with you well before the form-filling stage of a milestone, to see if any resolution of problems is possible. However, resolution may prove impossible, and a thorough discussion by the whole supervisory panel – not just the Supervisor, who signs the form – may decide that an unsatisfactory assessment needs to be recorded. Up to three courses of action can then be recommended for a Review:

(i) A revision of the Review or parts of it. This should almost always be tried before considering the more serious options (ii) or (iii). But just what needs to be revised, and when, is very variable, so the Supervisor must send you the panel’s requirements in writing, along with detailed reasons why your Review was considered unsatisfactory.8 One option that should be considered is a review by external reviewers, if the panel thinks this will help for whatever reason. However, any repeat presentation should be just to the panel or external reviewers, not as a Fenner School HDR seminar.

(ii) For a PhD only, conversion to an MPhil degree. The Review can recommend but not enforce this: the choice to convert is only for you, the candidate to make.

(iii) Termination of candidature. ANU has a very detailed procedure for this rare event, set out in the flowchart found at http://drss.anu.edu.au/asqo/advice.php.

Appendix A: Detailed guidance on the Thesis Proposal Review

Purpose, structure and timing

The Thesis Proposal Review (TPR) is the first major milestone in your PhD or MPhil tenure. It should be undertaken in the first 6-8 months of your degree (hereafter called a PhD, because the

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7 The choice of unsatisfactory is deliberate, because all milestone forms require the Supervisor to record an assessment of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. However, the guidance in Section 2 means that anything equivalent to an “Unsatisfactory” mark should normally be considered only for a Thesis Proposal or Mid-Term Review, not for an Annual Plan or Annual Report.

8 The wording in the flowchart found at http://drss.anu.edu.au/asqo/advice.php for this part of the "HDR Academic Progress & Termination Procedure" is: “Student is put on notice. Supervisor sets thesis related tasks and deadlines for the student to meet to assist in getting student back on track. Supervisor monitors regularly. Requirements and progress towards meeting them are put in writing to the student & on file.”
large majority of Fenner HDR students do a PhD not an MPhil). This should be a sufficient period of time for you to have undertaken considerable reading and thinking about and planning of your research area and approach, and to have made some decisions about what you will - and as importantly, what you won't - be exploring in your PhD.

The balance between reading, thinking and planning will vary enormously, depending on your research discipline and project. Some projects, more usually in social science, will be fairly loosely defined at the start, and will not be seasonal (because much fieldwork with people, if required, can be done at most times of the year), so the emphasis is on reading and thinking. Other projects, more usually in science, are quite tightly defined at the start (because they rely on existing field sites or lab equipment) and highly seasonal: so it's often vital to do your TPR early enough, to get the advice you need and still start fieldwork soon enough not to miss a whole year of data-gathering. For example: If you start your PhD in March and your research project requires you to start field/experimental work in August (i.e. at 5-6 months), you will likely get far more benefit from doing your proposal at 4 months (even if you don’t feel quite “ready”), than leaving it till 9 -12 months. Your TPR is a great opportunity to get diverse expert advice on your research aims and methodology, so usually it's important not to leave it until it’s too late to adjust your approach.

However, as so often in the Fenner School, talk to your Supervisor and panel for detailed advice, and for how to interpret following general guidelines (which have been written mainly for a loosely defined project, where initial reading and thinking, rather than practical planning, is dominant).

The purpose of your Thesis Proposal Review is to achieve several things:

1. It is an opportunity for you to consolidate your thinking and planning so far, particularly with respect to (i) the direction and objectives of your research (ii) the research methods you might employ to achieve your objectives and answer your research questions, and (iii) a roadmap and timeline to guide your research.
2. It is an opportunity for you to tell your peers, the Fenner faculty, and interested colleagues in ANU and outside (CSIRO, government departments, industry partners, etc.) about your research, and to receive constructive, objective and informed feedback from them.
3. It makes sure you realise how fast 3 years (or 2 in the case of an MPhil!) are passing, so that you don’t spend too much of your first year on unfocused or over-ambitious plans.
4. It gives you useful practice in presenting academic research, so you’ll be better at giving seminars to any interested (non-Fenner) audience later in your PhD, a skill which can be vital in getting good feedback.
5. It is your first formal assessment, which you are required to pass, and which lets you know how well you’re doing.

However, please don’t think your Proposal must lay down rigid plans to be followed come what may as the PhD develops! For most PhDs this is ‘early days’ in your research, and your research questions, methodology and plan will inevitably change over time, often significantly and/or right up till thesis submission. So never fall into the common trap of delaying your Proposal until it is completely “finalised” or “finished”, because that day will never come. A coherent Proposal is good, but a “final” one is unattainable.

At the Fenner School, the structure of a Thesis Proposal Review is:

- a Proposal document, sent to all your supervisory panel before the seminar;
- a public seminar, given in the Fenner School;
- a private panel meeting, ideally with all your panel members and very soon after the seminar.

Your first step in the Review process will be to check available seminar dates with Fenner’s HDR Coordinator, agree a date with your panel members several weeks in advance, and then book the date with all concerned. As noted above in Section 2(c), there may be good reasons for holding your TPR significantly later than its due date; but if so, you must get the date formally deferred, and you must still submit your Annual Plan and 1st Annual Report on time.
The Proposal document

As stated on the current Thesis Proposal Review form (which you download as part of the online milestone procedure), the review process starts with your writing “a detailed thesis proposal and literature review”. Again, because of the breadth of disciplines at the Fenner School, it is your Supervisor’s responsibility to establish minimum requirements for your proposal document. For a project that’s highly seasonal and/or constrained by existing field sites or lab equipment, the emphasis will be less on the literature review and Proposal document, and more on practical planning of your research methodology and schedule so you can make a timely start to fieldwork and/or experimentation.

At a minimum, the Fenner School expects to see a document which contains:

- **A literature review**, which explores, variously, the research that has been undertaken in your field hitherto, gaps or deficiencies in the literature that you have identified, interesting overlaps between literatures etc. Clearly this will not be exhaustive, and it is likely to be quite high level at this stage. This part of the document may also ‘unpack’ key concepts that have arisen in your research so far, demonstrating your understanding of these concepts and how they relate to your broader research objectives.

- **Rationale for the research**: A clear assessment of why your research is important and what your research objectives are (broadly). As well as importance, you need to use your literature review to show how your research is new and different, or in the wording of the Review form, “explain how your proposed research will make an original contribution to the study of this subject”.

- **Research questions**: Tentative at this stage, and they usually follow from the research objectives. They may be clustered, or not.

- **Research approach/methodology**: Preliminary thinking on how you intend to achieve your research objectives, in terms of:
  - Analytical/theoretical framework: the intellectual framing which will provide the foundation for your research.
  - Research methodology: the ‘how to’ aspects of the research, which might involve case studies (how many should you do? What will your selection criteria be?), qualitative and/or quantitative data collections (how much, from where, how to select?), or simply a conceptual analysis using scholarly and/or grey literatures etc.
  - Publication schedule: A PhD whose sole output is a thesis in the ANU library will have minimal impact on the world, and in most cases will not be satisfying to you and will do far less than it could to advance your career. Preliminary thinking on what you intend to publish during and/or after your PhD, and how your publications will contribute to answering your broader research questions, is therefore critical. You might like to indicate possible journals to target for each paper, and/or publisher to target for a book. Doing this will also help you to establish who your primary audience is (aside from your eventual Examiners).
  - Risks and mitigation strategies to address them: Examples here include, case studies falling through owing to a lack of financial resources (e.g. rejection of grant application) or fieldwork mishaps (too few interviewees respond to survey, expensive lab machine breaks down, fire or flood destroys site, etc, etc); or a paper rejected after six months under review, thus setting you back a potential further six months; or your chosen translator or data set not turning up, etc.

- **Research schedule**: Essentially a roadmap of your next steps, which should include key research milestones, plans for fieldwork, etc. It should also include details of grants or scholarships you hope to apply for (see next point) because applications are time-consuming, and may also dictate where and when you will undertake fieldwork.
• **Financing the research:** Where relevant, preliminary thinking on how you intend to meet the costs of your research. For those of you with generous scholarships, e.g. with a CSIRO top-up, you need to think carefully about your operational expenses. For those without a top-up scholarship, you might like to note other sources of income you intend to apply for.

The above topics should all be contained in a single document, but its detailed structure is up to you and your panel. The exact length of the document not crucial, but addressing each of these elements in some detail is likely to produce a document in the range **1,500-6,000 words**. You will probably have addressed several of the topics in your Annual Plan, which is done before your TPR; and as noted earlier in Section 2, it’s OK to use text from your Annual Plan in your Proposal document, as long as the text is still relevant and accurate. Lastly, give your proposal document to your panel at least a week before your proposal seminar! They then have time to study it and give you well-considered rather than off-the-cuff feedback at your seminar and at the panel meeting afterwards, both of which are rare opportunities which should be used to the full.

**The Proposal seminar**

In the Fenner School, the Proposal “review format” mentioned on the TPR form comprises a School seminar, followed by a private meeting of your full panel (about which see below).

Your seminar slot is 45 minutes in total. An appropriate division of the available time would be 25-30 minutes presentation, followed by 15-20 minutes of discussion. See Section 3 of the main Guide above for details of seminar chairing and use of the Fenner Seminar Room.

The structure of your presentation should broadly reflect the structure of your Proposal document.

You don’t need to use PowerPoint slides, but if you think it will help you and the audience to follow your thinking, then please do. Remember: less is more with PowerPoint slides. A key tip for not putting too much on any slide is: never use any font size less than **20 pt** (this Appendix is written in 10.5 pt).

Paper handouts can be a useful supplement to a PowerPoint presentation, so audience members can keep referring to some key points when the relevant slide is no longer showing.

Don’t assume your audience is familiar with your discipline, research field, or subject matter – more than likely they are not. This makes your opening sentences vital for ‘setting the scene’, but it also means you must speak plainly and explain key concepts clearly. A fantastic presentation is one where the audience leaves knowing more than when they arrived and, furthermore, they understand why that newly acquired knowledge is important. Your proposal seminar should be no different to any other presentation in this respect.

Practice your presentation a few times before you deliver it, ideally at least once in front of your Supervisor if he or she has time. Your audience has given up their valuable time to listen to you and to give you valuable feedback on how you can achieve your most immediate professional goal; don’t waste it by giving an incoherent/waffly/uncertain/boring/laboured performance which gives the audience very little to respond to. Two key points to check in your practice are:

- If you’re using PowerPoint, make sure the content and timing of your slides match what you find yourself saying, otherwise your slides will distract from your talk, not enhance it. Don’t put up slides with material you won’t have time to discuss (a rule of thumb is: show no more than 1 slide per minute), but equally, do put any important points that you will talk about onto a slide.
- Stand to the side of the screen, so you’re not between any audience member and the screen.

**The Proposal panel meeting, and milestone submission**

The ideal timing for the meeting of your full panel is at least a week after you send them your Proposal document, and on the same day as or day after your seminar, so that you get your panel members’ detailed comments while your seminar is fresh in their mind – and also often before they have to travel back elsewhere.
A Proposal panel meeting is typically at least an hour long, and is very valuable, because it’s when you’re likely to get the most detailed feedback from your panel on the many and varied issues raised by your Proposal document. How good is your basic research idea? Is it sufficiently new and different to be a contribution to knowledge? Do you have the time, ability, knowledge and resources (financial and otherwise) to do the proposed research in the remaining two and a bit years? How can all of these things be improved? (Everyone’s, even Nobel Prizewinners’, research proposals can be improved!)

Be prepared for a wide range of responses. You’re still quite new to PhD research, so you may get unexpected praise, or unexpected criticism – or both, on different parts of your proposal. Be prepared to listen carefully, but also to explain some points in more detail, and correct any misunderstandings that may have resulted in your ideas being criticised unjustifiably. Also it is reasonable for you to ask panel members to write to you or meet you later, to explain detailed points which would take up too much time at the full meeting.

After the meeting, you must complete your TPR online milestone, in which you have to submit the TPR form and your Proposal document (which you may first wish to revise somewhat in the light of comments made at your seminar and panel meeting), and may submit other documents if you wish. Please write the dates of your seminar and panel meeting at the end of Section 1 of the form, even though the form does not ask for this, for otherwise Fenner has no other formal record of when these meetings actually happened. See the Notes on procedures for online milestone for HDRs for details. Do NOT also submit an Oral Presentation form online: this is used only for your Final Oral Presentation that you give about 6 months before thesis submission.

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Appendix B: Detailed guidance on the Mid-Term Review

Section 1 of the online Mid-Term Review (MTR) form says: “The specific requirements for a Mid-Term Review have been left intentionally vague. It is your responsibility to make an appointment with your research supervisor to discuss what is expected in this report. The report may include both written and oral assessments.” This Appendix gives guidance on what the Fenner School considers to be the purpose and content of your Mid-Term Review.

Purpose, structure and timing

Most of what is in Appendix A about the purpose and structure of the Thesis Proposal Review also applies here. The main difference is in that your report and seminar presentation must refer to some kind of original, albeit fledgling, contribution to knowledge (included as your Written Work); and the whole Review process should leave your panel confident not just that you have a workable idea for your thesis (the purpose of the Proposal Review), but also that you’re very likely to complete your degree.

The structure of a Fenner School Mid-Term Review is quite similar to a Thesis Proposal Review:
- a report, sent to all your (supervisory) panel before the seminar;
- a public seminar given in the Fenner School;
- a private full panel meeting, soon after the seminar.

Your first steps in the MTR process are to check available seminar dates with Fenner’s HDR Coordinator, agree dates for both the seminar and the panel meeting with your panel members several weeks in advance, and then book the dates with all concerned.

The procedures and requirements for the seminar are the same as those set out above in Section 3 and in “The Proposal seminar” part of Appendix A; and the procedures and requirements for the panel meeting are the same as in “The Proposal panel meeting” part of Appendix A. However, the Mid-Term Report is a bit different from the Proposal document, as described below.
Lastly, your Supervisor may organise an external review of your progress, if they and/or you wish to include external inputs to your MTR process. Reports by external reviewers, if required, should be attached by your Supervisor to the MTR package online.

As noted above, there may be good academic reasons for holding your MTR significantly later than its due date. This is even truer than for the Thesis Proposal Review, because the Mid-Term Review requires you to have some substantive research results, and these can vary greatly in timing. But if you need to delay your MTR, you must get the date formally deferred, and you must still submit your next Annual Report on time (see Section 2(c) above for details).

The Mid-Term report

As noted in Box 1 in this Guide’s Introduction, your MTR report is normally separate from the MTR form you download from ISIS and submit after your seminar and panel meeting, even though (somewhat confusingly) the form calls itself a “report” in several places. You write your report from scratch, to include at least these items (see also the Proposal document section in Appendix A for details you might wish to address in your report):

- a summary of progress to date, including a mention of your Written Work (see below);
- a thesis outline (draft Table of Contents);
- a schedule for thesis completion.

Because this should take up well over a page, you should usually attach your report as a separate document when you submit your MTR milestone package online, though some people choose to put the report into the blank space in Section 1 on the form. Either way, you must also then attach:

- a separate piece of Written Work. This should be a complete draft of at least one publishable paper, or of a substantive, chapter-like piece of academic writing, well beyond that submitted for the Thesis Proposal Review. It forms the most important part of your Report.

As with your Thesis Proposal, you're not expected to make rigid plans and stick to them regardless of how things go. Many changes of research direction, some quite radical, take place as a result of the MTR. But the written work should contain substantive research results (i.e. not just be a literature review) which are potentially publishable. And these results should be written in proper academic form – Introduction, content, conclusions and references all need to be there, and not just in note form – because part of the Review purpose is to allow your panel to comment on your academic writing, which is ultimately what you need to do to get your degree and to get published.

The Mid-Term seminar

Guidance is as for your Proposal seminar – see Appendix A.

The Mid-Term panel meeting, and milestone submission

Guidance for your MTR panel meeting is as for your Proposal panel meeting – see Appendix A.

After the meeting, you must complete your MTR online milestone, in which you have to submit the MTR form, your MTR report (which you may first wish to revise somewhat in the light of comments made at your seminar and panel meeting) and your Written Work; and you may also submit other documents if you wish. Please add the dates of your seminar and panel meeting to the end of Section 1 of the form, even though the form does not ask for this, otherwise Fenner has no record that these meetings actually happened. See the Notes on online procedures for HDR milestones for details. Do NOT also submit an Oral Presentation form online: this is used only for your Final Oral Presentation that you give about 6 months before thesis submission.

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