

Participant #7

Field: Geology/Earth Sciences

Rank: PhD Student

Q: Why did you decide to become a scientist?

A: Honest answer a popular science movie, a proper answer probably GSCE geography. I found out about paleoclimatology from The Day After Tomorrow.

Q: How would you define what a scientist is?

A: Someone that goes out and discovers new thing and shares it with other people.

Q: Some people define scientists as truth seekers. Would you agree with that?

A: I think so. It depends if they're competitive or not. If they become a scientist just because they are like, 'Oh, I can out do the other person whose done something before me' then maybe not so much truth seeker in a genuine sense, more like on an arrogant note.

Q: How would you describe yourself as a scientist?

A: At the moment probably learning how everything works. I think there's certain science etiquette that I haven't figured out yet, like how you talk to people, networking, conferences, how you approach things, whether there's a certain approach you take or not, and learning new things within the field.

Q: You mentioned the competitiveness of scientists. How does it make you feel that the culture in science can be very competitive?

A: I think it's very. They're not better than you. If you meet two kinds of PhD students, people who are happy and bouncy and then people who are like super arrogant and try to throw you down at every level. But we're at the same level, like there's nothing that either of us has done that's better than the other, we're both PhD students, so academically we're the same. So, it's not too bad, but it's out there but it's not something that should hold you back or discourage you.

Q: What pressures do you feel in preparing to be an academic scientist while you're a PhD student?

A: Well, papers are academic currency, so when you leave it's nice to already have some stories already formed. So when you leave you can eventually publish them, but if you want to go into academia that would be one of the things that would be pushing you from behind

but it would depend if you're a scientist on the edge or a happy go lucky. Decide that I'm going to do some science and make the world a happy place, or that's my field of work and therefore I need to publish or I won't get anywhere without it.

Q: Do you want to stay in academia when you complete your PhD?

A: I think I'd give it a go. If I really like it at the end of my time [PhD] when I'm writing up I might just keep it as one option and keep industry as another and then museum curation, that's still like academia but you get to look at things and organise. It's really cool, but you can still do your academic things on the side, but it's not your main focus and you can still take part in academia without having that sort of push of "I have to do science, I have to publish." It seems happy, but curators always talk about how they don't have time.

Q: Since you recognise that you have three paths you can go down, does that make you feel more relieved, less pressured?

A: Yes, I picked this PhD in particular because I knew it had an industrial side that I could use if I really didn't like it. I didn't want to pick something that was purely academic that would limit me entirely, so I thought, if I get to the end of the four years and I don't want to do it, then what is my life? What can I do? So, I thought if I picked a PhD with an industrial application and one that has an academic application I could choose at the end.

Q: Is science different from how you thought it would be when you were a teenager?

A: When I started I didn't have a clue about academic hierarchy or how PhDs worked, and then I think I only got into it when I got into it or found out more because I had friends a couple years older and they would explain to me how conferences worked, how academic framework worked as well.

Q: Do you feel pressured to publish by the end of your PhD time?

A: I don't know. I think everything should be publishable by the end [of the thesis] as a rule, so using that as an aim is good.

Q: You have one publication that has been accepted with minor revisions. Was your co-supervisor the one who decided where to publish?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know what criteria they had in choosing a journal?

A: If you're funded you have to publish Open Access now, it is now a requirement. I assume that it will be Open Access. I think he picked this journal, people have told me it's a bit easier to get published in it but also we couldn't find a journal that quite fit everything but this one covers a lot more. It covers chemistry, physics, and deep earth stuff, and also recently they've found, or at least I've seen, a lot more stuff on monsoons that people are publishing in it.

Q: If you were choosing where to publish, what would be the biggest factors for you?

A: Just that the journal would attract the right people. So, I wouldn't try to publish a fully chemistry paper in a paleo journal, because they wouldn't be interested. Even if it had a very small relevance and it would be easier to get published in that, I wouldn't want to do that just because I know the people reading it wouldn't be necessarily interested. I would want to publish in a journal where I would get the right audience. There's one new journal that is Open Access that's called *Climate for the Past*. It's quite new, but I think it seems like a lot of the paleo climate community are going there and publishing, so I think it would be a good thing to aim for.

Q: Do you feel like you have to publish in high impact factor journals?

A: I think it's something to aim for, because if you're going to publish a fully micropaleo paper and getting it published in *Nature* are incredibly slim. I think it's a good idea to try, if you have something that is really cool and ticks the ground breaking box, then why not? It's a great thing to do and you get the experience of it and you I've heard you can know within a half hour if you don't get it anyways, which is crazy. Or within a couple of weeks you'll be back, so you don't have to wait long. I wouldn't say no to doing it at all. *Nature Geosciences* is something to aim for. I just think it's a bonus. If you get it, you get it. I just like it, because I can have a paper that if I Google myself [laughs] which is kind of the cool part.

Q: Is Google the first time you think you'll see yourself cited?

A: Yeah, that's what my supervisor told me. That once he got cited it was worth it. He got more excited than the actual publication, which surprised a lot of people at the conference I was at.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add?

A: I don't like people that say on Facebook, "I just submitted a paper to x journal." You just submitted! If you don't get in, you'll have to write again and say you got rejected, and that's just embarrassing. In terms of publishing you may as well be slightly more modest.

E-mail follow up correspondence:

So I was re-thinking last night and I have some things to add for your dissertation.

You said I was really laid back about publishing/you found me quite laid back as a PhD student. The laid back PhD attitude is really not very normal for me at all - I don't know what's happened over the past few months but I think I've hit the 2nd year slump that I thought I'd never hit. My labs also break ALL the time and I find it really frustrating and incredibly stressful when I want to do something and I just can't. So maybe subconsciously I'm hoping that by not getting stressed something good might happen and everything will work out. I don't know. The times I get really stressed are generally in the run up to conferences or summer schools where I just want to get loads of stuff done before I go.

In terms of publishing. The times when I get more stressed are when I realise someone could be working on the same stuff as me but as I said yesterday my supervisor tends to help me out and talks to people so we don't overlap with them. I also get a bit stressed when I sometimes realise friends of mine are getting ready to publish/have enough data to do that. But then I realise that not all PhD projects/geological facets are the same and that everyone gets data at different speeds, so I really shouldn't worry too much. I also think my general attitude to research comes from everyone having a (relatively) positive attitude towards it from my undergrad. At [previous university] it always seemed like the academics encouraged you to like academia and to enjoy the experience. So many people I know also went on to do postdocs after they finished their PhDs, and published papers either during or immediately after their PhDs that I think it made me think everything will be okay and that if they could do it, so can I. And there were lots of people who were good 'role models' too, and I think it also helps their graduate tutor made sure they were all on top of their work with regular reviews so they all did well. Of course there were a few shock-horror type stories where people had been working incredibly hard and then had 75% of their story published but they always seemed to find a way to step back, see outside the box and then work towards an alternative. Maybe cos I was immersed in such a happy environment that was more like a family for such a long time without things being too competitive it made me have a different outlook. Or maybe the competitive side was there and I wasn't exposed to it and I entered academia way too blindly without knowing everything about it (I definitely didn't realise the amplitudes of the PhD sinusoid schedule!). I know there were people who really hated their PhDs, but I think cos everyone just either used to moan together or help each other out it made it better. Also, a friend of mine who is there at the moment has a supervisor who loves

to publish, and I don't think its for competition I think he just likes telling stories (he's really eccentric that way!! He has a very varied publication list!). [Previous university] have also introduced a thesis by papers format, which I think is a good thing. Mostly cos it makes sure your work is definitely out there and not just sitting on a dusty bookshelf! The students still have the option to write a regular thesis, but there's no pressure to pick the format of a thesis by papers.

At [university] generally I've noticed people are a lot more competitive and their attitude is more different than what I was used to. And I don't like it all the time. I know its normal to be a little bit competitive in academia, but sometimes the whole department ethos just makes me sad. Because no one relates together as a department, all the separate research groups stick together and they don't mingle. I don't really understand it, no other uni department I've encountered is like that. My supervisor is really lovely though. She gets on with everyone, so seeing that 'normality' really helps. People at conferences have also said to me that they like her because she's super successful but doesn't have an ego. She's a good role model in that way :) definitely helps to keep my levels of positivity up!