# Applying the PhD Model Canvas

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The PhD Model Canvas is a one page venture plan for your PhD. It was inspired by the Business Model Canvas designed by Alexander Osterwalder, the Lean Canvas by Ash Maurya, and the Creative Canvas by Terri Lonier which were designed to replace elaborate business plans with a single page business model for the startup and creative disciplines.

The PhD is like a startup. It can be defined as a process intended to create an original contribution to knowledge under conditions of extreme uncertainty. 50% of startups fail and 50% of PhD students drop out. The attrition rate is high for both.

If the PhD can also be likened to a journey or a quest, what's the map?

The PhD Model Canvas was designed to provide a roadmap for PhD students so that they can better navigate and orient themselves in order to achieve their goal faster and more effectively.

As research is an evolving and iterative process the PhD Model Canvas will change as the student progresses through their PhD to reflect different iterations of their learning journey.

The first step in filling out the PhD Model Canvas is to begin with the End in Mind – what success looks like to you. Start at the bottom of the Model Canvas in the What Success Looks Like to Me box. Always write in the present tense, so for example:

1.  I achieve my PhD within 4 years without any debt. I publish 3 articles in peer-reviewed journals. I celebrate my PhD graduation with my family and friends. [Be as specific as possible. You can also draw it]

2.  Next fill in the box Knowledge, Expertise, and Interests. These should include areas of interest that you are knowledgeable about and subjects that could sustain your interest over the duration of your PhD.

3.  Channels What are the channels through which your research will be presented? That will be your PhD dissertation, but could also include journal articles.

4.  Key Partners Who are your key partners? Obviously your supervisor would be included here, but also the funding body who supports your research, your university department, and also if you have a peer support group.

5.  Audience Who is going to read your work? This will be your examiners, scholars in your field etc. Think about the audience for your work in advance.

6.  State of Art What has already been done in your research area? Most research does not happen in a vacuum, but is built upon a body of knowledge. Try to put down here the principal publications, authors, or works that will guide you in your literature review of principal publications.

7. Research Questions What are the major two or three questions for you at the moment that will drive and steer your research so that it is as focused and targeted as possible? Lead with questions.

8. Key Activities What are the key activities that you will be doing on a day to day basis? These will vary by discipline, but could include among other things:

    • Bibliographic searches
    • Sourcing materials
    • Reading, Note-taking
    • Writing
    • Teaching & prep
    • Liaising with scholars in the field

9. Key metrics How will you know you are on the right track? How will you measure your progress? It is important to choose one or two metrics that you can keep an eye on and measure daily. Rituals = Results. What are the daily habits and rituals of your work as a scholar? These could include for example, measuring the time I spend on research or writing using the Pomodoro technique so I might aim for

    • 8 Pomodoro a day / or
    • 500 words per day /
    • Read 3 articles per day, or whatever that is in your field.

    Focus on one or two metrics for your own inner scorecard. This helps to build flow and small wins into your process.

10. What is your Original Contribution to Knowledge as it now stands? This will change over time. In my case it was:

    Jonas of Bobbio wrote to critique the changes in monastic practice after Columbanus' death and each of his works had a programmatic intent that should be studied as a corpus.

11. Twitter Thesis. This is your High Pitch Concept or what you respond to people who ask you what your PhD is about. It's short and to the point and tries to explain your research as simply as possible for a non-specialist. In my case it was something like this:

    My research focuses on an early medieval Italian author Jonas of Bobbio who wrote a biography of the Irish monastic founder Columbanus who travelled throughout Europe in the seventh century.

12. Revenue Stream How will you fund your PhD and your living expenses? One of my principal criteria for pursuing my PhD was that I wouldn't do it unless I got full funding. The first year I applied for a Carnegie Scholarship I was unsuccessful, but I applied again the following year and this time was successful – I received full funding and tuition costs for 3 years from the Carnegie Trust. I supplemented this funding with teaching in the department after my first year

and in my final year by working two evenings a week at a local wine shop.

13. Cost Structure What will your PhD cost you in terms of time, university fees, accommodation, and living expenses? Be as specific as possible. This will help you to gauge whether the overall commitment in terms of time, money, emotional investment, and opportunity costs are worth it.

    Fill in the blanks marked X.

    - Time: 4 years
    - Accommodation: X per week
    - Subsistence: X per week
    - Supplementary: X per week
    - Car & Fuel etc.

14. Fill in the Three Next Steps which you need to take now.

    The PhD Model Canvas is a one page blueprint or roadmap for the PhD journey that provides a dashboard overview for the project. It will change over time as the research progresses and develops which can be mapped by filling out new versions of the Canvas. The aim is to enable the student to be more focused, less overwhelmed, and have a greater sense of control over what is often a stressful, bewildering, and meandering process.