



QUEENSLAND  
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## HDR CAREER BUDDY GUIDE

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# CONTENTS

<b>What is a career-buddy?</b>	1
Benefits of a career-buddy connection	1
What is expected of me?	2
<b>How does a career-buddy connection work?</b>	2
Step 1: Find a career-buddy	2
Step 2: Communicate your preferences	4
Step 3: Connect with your career-buddy	5
<b>Tips for being a great career-buddy</b>	6
<b>Content guide</b>	7
Suggested topic 1: Setting the scene	7
Suggested topic 2: Current skills	8
Suggested topic 3: Future skills in the workplace	8
Suggested topic 4: Career development action plan	9
Suggested topic 5: Self-reflection	9
<b>Appendix A: Career journey examples</b>	10

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This Guide is based on a pilot higher degree by research (HDR) career-buddy program run as part of the HDR Experience and Employability Project, and incorporates feedback provided by the HDR participants in this pilot.

Although targeted at the career-buddy connection, much of the content and discussion points of this Guide may be useful for HDR students to consider regardless of their intention to form a career-buddy relationship.

# WHAT IS A CAREER-BUDDY?

Career-buddies are peers that support each other in their career goals and professional development. For example, this may include forwarding on job opportunities; providing feedback on CVs and job applications; sharing networks; talking through possible career pathways; suggesting skills development and so on.

Unlike most buddy or mentoring programs at professional organisations, no career-buddy is expected to have more experience, expertise or seniority than another. This is a mutually beneficial two-way relationship in which both buddies offer support and learn from each other.

## Benefits of a career-buddy connection

### Career goals

Career-buddies can provide feedback and a new perspective on your career plans and goals—and help you look at your career from multiple angles. If you are unsure of your next steps, the simple act of talking about your plans with another person can help you define your career goals.

### Feedback and support

A career-buddy can provide feedback on your CV and other employment materials, share opportunities and resources, and practice networking strategies and interviews. Your career-buddy might also be available to be your ‘wing-man’ for networking events so it isn’t so awkward to go alone.

## Learning through helping

Listening to how your career-buddy answers interview questions or responds to selection criteria can open your eyes to the components of a good answer and help you to improve your own answers. Considering how to provide relevant feedback and suggestions to your career-buddy can also be a valuable professional development activity.

## Exposure to new knowledge

Your career-buddy has a wealth of previous employment, learning, and life experiences—and they may also have knowledge on disciplines, processes, research tools or methodologies that are new to you. This relationship therefore provides a valuable opportunity to tap into their knowledge and experiences.

## Reciprocity

The reciprocity of a career-buddy relationship is an important factor not commonly articulated or even identified. Many HDR students are hesitant to ask their colleagues or wider network for help because they feel they have little to offer in return. Having a career-buddy therefore makes it easier to ask for assistance because the relationship is designed to be mutually beneficial.

*“It really helps to have someone else look at you, your work and your CV. My buddy was way more objective about myself than I am most of the time—she made me more convinced me of the skills that I have and inspired me to promote them better.”*

*—3<sup>rd</sup> year PhD student, UQ*



# What is expected of me?

In a career-buddy relationship it is generally expected that you will:

- ◆ Provide honest feedback in a kind and constructive manner.
- ◆ Share resources, job advertisements and /or other career opportunities that may be of interest to your career-buddy.
- ◆ Be positive and supportive.
- ◆ Treat discussions with your career-buddy and materials they send to you as confidential unless stated otherwise.

You are not expected to:

- ◆ be a career expert or solve problems for your career-buddy
- ◆ write or re-write your career-buddy's CV, cover letters or other application materials
- ◆ find your career-buddy a job.

*"We found the career-buddy pilot program very helpful and have decided to continue with it. We've actually merged with other buddies in the program to create a bigger group of six students, and we are meeting once a month."*

*—3<sup>rd</sup> year PhD student, QUT*

# HOW DOES A CAREER-BUDDY CONNECTION WORK?

The nature of the career-buddy connection is completely flexible. It usually involves pairs but can also include small buddy-groups. Meetings may be in-person or virtual, frequent or infrequent, long or short, structured or informal, and so on.

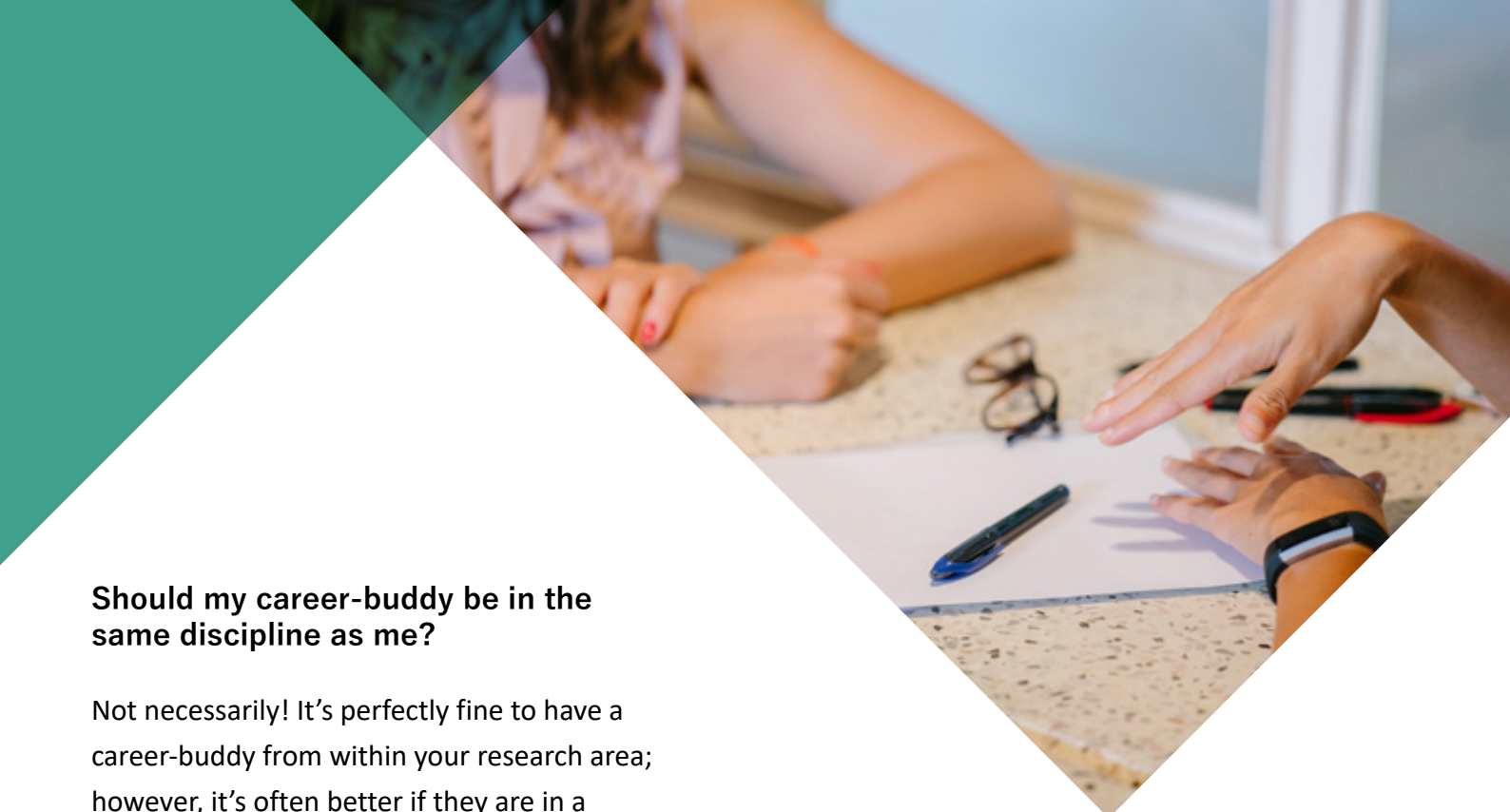
Rather than being prescriptive or providing explicit instructions, this Guide offers suggestions and considerations that may be followed, disregarded, or modified as needed to meet the preferences of the individual buddies involved.

## Step 1: Find a career-buddy

Your career-buddy can be anyone you consider to be a peer and who you can have a genuine two-way relationship that supports your career goals. Fellow HDR students or recent HDR graduates will often be the most appropriate choice for your career-buddy, and that's the type of relationship this guide has been written for.

You may also find the information and activities on establishing and maintaining connections in Guide 5 of the HDR Employability Guide Series useful for identifying potential career-buddies and building this relationship.





## Should my career-buddy be in the same discipline as me?

Not necessarily! It's perfectly fine to have a career-buddy from within your research area; however, it's often better if they are in a different discipline:

- ♦ Sharing common career goals rather than a similar research area is usually more important in a career-buddy relationship. Career goals may include, for example, wanting to work in a particular sector such as academia; commercialising your research; having a teaching focus; being an international student and launching a career outside of your home country, or balancing a career with a family.
- ♦ Your existing professional network likely already includes quite a few people in your discipline area—such as your supervisors or fellow HDR students—that you can turn to for content-specific questions or who can share relevant employment or funding opportunities.
- ♦ Terms and phrases can mean very different things in different fields and different contexts. Therefore, a career-buddy from a different discipline can alert you to anything in your application material that might mean different things to different audiences. For example, consider the words tool, method, framework, process, technique, and mechanism—these words can all be used interchangeably in some contexts but not others, and there is no simple rule for this!

*“I think being paired with someone I felt comfortable with was crucial for the success of the program. I believe that because [we] got along so well we were able to discuss personal issues that impact our careers, and if there was any sense of competitiveness or discomfort between us I don't think those meaningful conversation would have happened.”*

*—2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD student, QUT*

- ♦ Tensions may arise if you find yourselves competing for tutoring or RA work, post-doc positions, committee positions, internal grants and so on. This is more likely to occur if your career-buddy is in the same discipline, and this may impact the career-buddy relationship and support levels.

You may also like to consider establishing multiple career-buddy relationships to address various aspects of your career development.

## Step 2: Communicate your preferences

To get the most out of your career-buddy relationship, it is essential that you understand and communicate your preferences clearly to each other. You may have heard the phrase ‘manage expectations’—this is critical for a successful career-buddy relationship!

This includes the amount of feedback you will be able to provide to your career-buddy and the level of feedback you wish to receive. For example, consider where you sit on these scales:

How much feedback do you like to receive?

Minimal i.e. I prefer to address only a small amount of feedback at a time



Maximum i.e. I love feedback and I want to hear everything you have to say

Do you like when other people give you suggestions?

Minimal i.e. I prefer to hear only a few key suggestions at a time that are well thought out and relevant to my situation



Maximum i.e. I love hearing suggestions from others and want to hear as many as you can think of

How confident are you in providing feedback?

Not confident i.e. I may circle some mistakes but only if they are very clearly typos



Very confident i.e. I constantly notice areas for improvement, and I want to rewrite this guide

How comfortable are you with providing feedback to others?

Very uncomfortable i.e. I prefer to only point out minor mistakes such as inconsistent punctuation marks in bullet points



Very comfortable i.e. I love providing feedback to others and never feel awkward about it

Use the preferences of your career-buddy to guide your approach—you are not helping them if you avoid giving feedback because you find it awkward; however, you are also not helping your buddy if you overwhelm them with too much feedback or crush their spirits!

Some other key considerations include:

- ◆ How much time are you able to devote to this relationship? You might find it easier to think of this as a project and consider the number of hours per month or week that you are willing to spend on this.
- ◆ Would you prefer to meet up in-person, over the phone, or using digital methods such as skype or email/chat?
- ◆ Would you prefer to schedule regular meetups, take a relaxed approach to meetings, or meet up only when needed (such as when you are completing a job application)?
- ◆ Consider the style and length of your meetings too. Perhaps you would prefer regular but brief meetups, or perhaps you would like to catch up infrequently but for a lengthy period of time.

Of course, these will be dependent on your workload and personal commitments and are likely to fluctuate substantially over time—but thinking about these factors and providing approximations to your career-buddy ensures you are both on the same page.

*“My career-buddy and I grew up near each other and had very similar upbringings, so it’s been a real eye-opener to discover how differently we understand some phrases like ‘tool’ vs ‘platform’, and to realise how the norms of our disciplines are so ingrained in us that we don’t even see them!”*

*—4<sup>th</sup> year PhD student, Griffith University*

## Step 3: Connect with your career-buddy

Connect with your career-buddy, share your career goals, and support each other in your career development.

### What should/shouldn’t we talk about?

You should also talk about anything that you feel is an important component of your career journey! This will probably include skills development, CVs and application material, preferred employment locations, preferred types of jobs, and so on.

This document includes a Content guide (starting on page 7) with some suggested discussion points, activities and questions for your meetings.

There are also many additional topics that may be related to career development for some people such as internships, building a career as a person with dependents (e.g. as a parent), challenges of gender-dominated fields, visa issues, and so on. However, you should try to discuss these within the context of developing strategies to deal with these challenges – take care not to devote too much time to venting!







## TIPS FOR BEING A GREAT CAREER-BUDDY

### Be open and honest

Feedback is essential for improving your employability and you must be able to provide honest, candid and constructive feedback to your career-buddy. For instance, if your buddy's resume needs an overhaul or their elevator pitch isn't ideal, they can only benefit from constructive criticism. You are not helping your career-buddy if you neglect to identify these flaws because you're afraid of offending them.

You must also be open and honest when it is your buddy's turn to provide feedback to you. This means you must be open to hearing their point of view and their suggestions—and you should be honest if you feel that their feedback is too critical or perhaps not critical enough.

For those meeting 'digitally', keep in mind that even slight time delays can skew the reading of body language and facial expressions. You may therefore need to 'speak up' more than usual instead of expecting your career-buddy to know how you are feeling if; for example, you aren't satisfied with an answer or if they have offended you. You should also take extra care to 'check-in' with your career-buddy to make sure they are happy with the level of support and feedback you are providing to them.

### Be professional

Always demonstrate professionalism when representing your career-buddy. For instance, if your buddy introduces you to a contact, ensure you follow up in a respectful and timely manner—and update your buddy on the outcome of that connection. Keep in mind that your career-buddy is risking their own reputation by introducing you to someone in their network.

### Be considerate

Be considerate of your buddy's time—for example, show up on time for meetings; send information or resources when you say you will; and provide feedback on any material they give you within a reasonable amount of time. Additionally, ensure you provide your buddy with a reasonable amount of time to provide feedback to you—don't send them your job application to read the day before submissions close!

Take care that you don't share irrelevant suggestions—if you see a job or other opportunity that may be of interest to your buddy, take a moment to check key things such as eligibility requirements before you forward it on.

### Be respectful

Be respectful of any cultural norms held by you or your career-buddy that may impact the exchange of ideas and information. Keep in mind your career-buddy may be comfortable with different levels of formality, discussion topics, or how feedback is delivered.

Be respectful of your career-buddy's preferred career path and try to make sure your suggestions align with their preferences.

Be respectful of the opinions of your career-buddy if they don't agree with your feedback or follow your suggestions.



# CONTENT GUIDE

These are some suggested topics and discussion points that might be useful to help get you started and encourage some insightful conversations.

Note that these refer frequently to some of the content and activities covered in Guides 3 and 4 of the HDR Employability Guide Series. This content has not been replicated here as the HDR Employability Guides are freely available for download from [this link](#).

You might like to do the suggested activities with your buddy during your meetings, or you might prefer to do them in advance and then discuss them in your meetings.

## Suggested topic 1: Setting the scene

The purpose of this topic is to get your career-buddy 'up to speed' on where you are in your career journey and where you would like to go.

### Activities

1. Create an overview of your career journey —this can be a basic timeline (or a table or list) of your relevant employment history, education, and career-related experiences. Some examples are provided in Appendix A to assist you with this.
2. Complete Activity 4.1 in Guide 4 of the HDR Employability Series (Building your Professional Identity).

### Discussion points

Your career journey to date and future career goals, for example:

- ◆ motivations and drivers behind your career choices and any career changes
- ◆ the type of positions you would like to work in and why—this may cover aspects such as employment sector, discipline area and job focus (such as teaching; pure research; commercialisation; consulting; writing and so on)
- ◆ where you want to work (both geographic location and types of organisations)
- ◆ your employment priorities (for example, things you *must have* in a job and the things you *would like to have* in a job but could go without)
- ◆ any specific employers that you have in mind
- ◆ when you plan to finish your HDR degree
- ◆ challenges, logistics and deadlines that may impact your career journey.

Your professional identity, including:

- ◆ key words that reflect the professional identity you wish to portray, and if these mean different things to you and your buddy
- ◆ how others may interpret or perceive your professional identity
- ◆ how you can best demonstrate your Why, What and How (from Guide 4 of the HDR Employability Series) in your online profiles, written documents, job applications and networking opportunities
- ◆ ideas for your pitch (explained in Activity 4.2 of Guide 4).



## Suggested topic 2: Current skills

The purpose of this topic is to (1) enhance your awareness of the skillset you currently possess, (2) gain insight into your understanding of a variety of skills, and (3) provide feedback on any material produced through the activities.

### Activities

1. Complete Activity 3.2 in Guide 3 of the HDR Employability Series (Assessing and Developing your Skills).
2. List all the professional activities you have planned for 2019 including your HDR project, conferences, teaching, RA work, volunteer positions, workshops and so on.
3. Apply the Task Analysis in Activity 3.3 (Guide 3 of the HDR Employability Series) to these activities, listing the skills that you will use or develop through these activities. This forms your current 'skills development schedule'.

### Discussion points

Skills identification and demonstration:

- ◆ the skills identified and how these can be transferred to other tasks or activities
- ◆ the similarities and differences in the skills identified by you and your career-buddy
- ◆ the tasks/activities that demonstrate these skills
- ◆ the importance or value of different skills in different contexts
- ◆ the differences between general, academic and discipline-specific skills—and how these relate to other categories of skills (such as technical and soft skills)
- ◆ the various factors that may have influenced the types of skills that you identified and how you define them (for example, discipline, stage of candidature, professional experience or cultural background).

## Suggested topic 3: Future skills in the workplace

The purpose of this topic is to (1) enhance your awareness of the skills you might need for future positions, and (2) identify patterns in required skills across a range of position descriptions.

### Activities

1. Find some job advertisements/position descriptions for (1) jobs that you would like to get after finishing your HDR degree, and (2) 'dream jobs' you would like to get in the future (10, 20, even 30 years away). Note that Guide 2 of the HDR Employability Series may be useful for this. You may also like to use the LinkedIn profiles of people currently employed in the kind of roles you would like to work in.
2. Complete Activity 3.4 in Guide 3 of the HDR Employability Series using the position descriptions you have collected.
3. Compare the position descriptions and look for patterns in the skills that they require. Note that Activity 4.4 in Guide 4 of the HDR Employability Series may be useful for this.

### Discussion points

Trends in required skills:

- ◆ the most frequent skills listed in position descriptions
- ◆ similarities and differences in the required skills of HDR 'graduate level' positions and the senior or 'dream job' positions that you selected.

Interpretation:

- ◆ Do you and your career-buddy have the same understanding of the skills, responsibilities and selection criteria described in the position descriptions?

## Suggested topic 4: Career development action plan

The purpose of this topic is to identify and address gaps in your skillset according to your career goals.

### Activities

1. Identify and prioritise your skills gaps by comparing your career plans from Suggested topic 1, your skillset proficiency and skills development schedule from Suggested topic 2, and the required skills of your desired jobs from Suggested topic 3.
2. Use this to complete Activity 3.5 in Guide 3 of the HDR Employability Series and build your career development action plan.

### Discussion points

Skill proficiencies and gaps, including:

- ◆ examples from your existing skills and experiences that can demonstrate the requirements of your desired jobs
- ◆ what constitutes 'sufficient experience' for demonstrating skills
- ◆ whether you and your career-buddy agree on this, and why this might be.

Skill development, including:

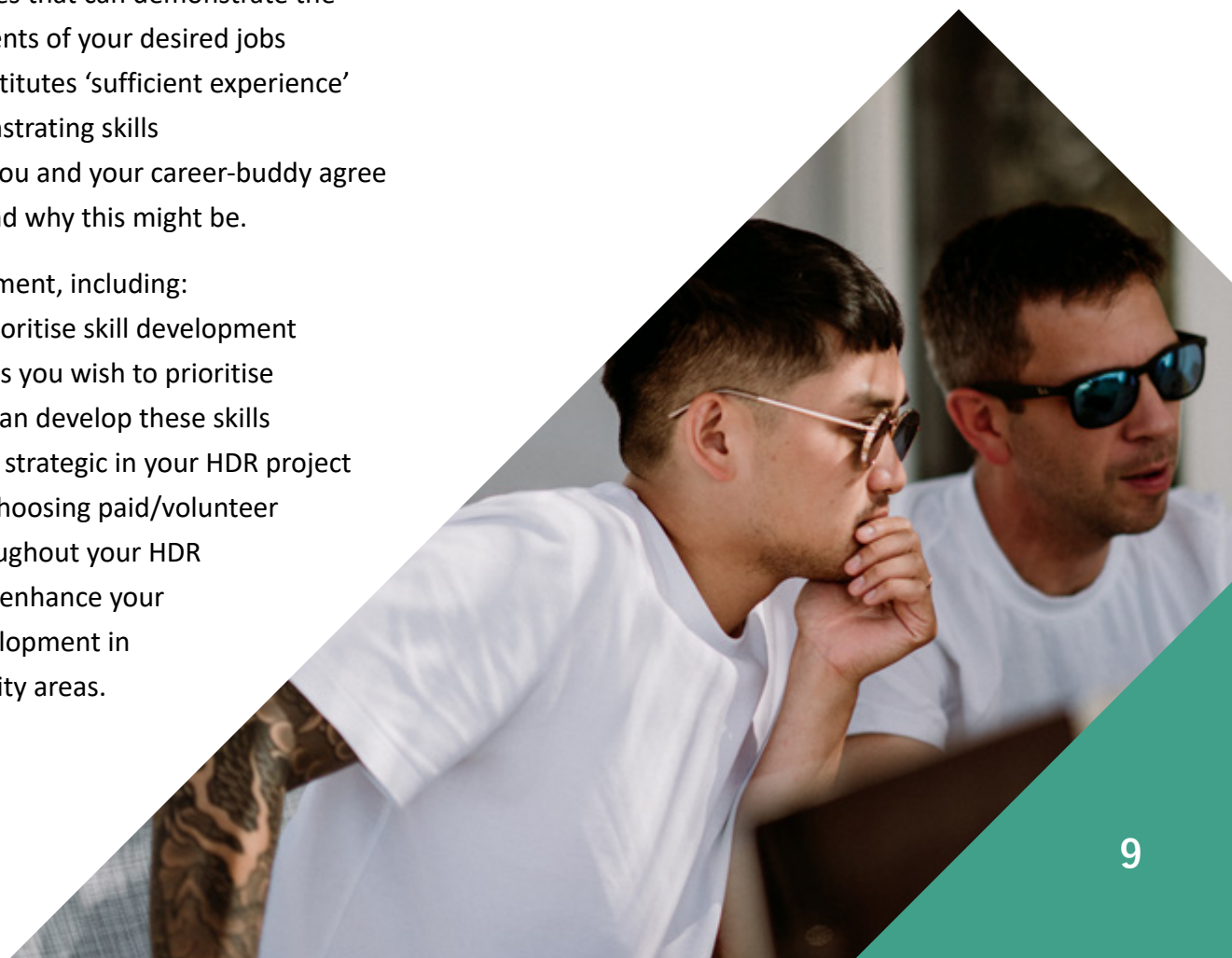
- ◆ how to prioritise skill development
- ◆ which skills you wish to prioritise
- ◆ how you can develop these skills
- ◆ how to be strategic in your HDR project or when choosing paid/volunteer roles throughout your HDR degree to enhance your skills development in your priority areas.

## Suggested topic 5: Self-reflection

Reflecting throughout your career-buddy experience can be an important process to (1) consolidate lessons you may have learnt during your meetings, and (2) gain valuable insight into your communication skills.

Suggested considerations for self-reflection include:

- ◆ Were you able to clearly articulate your career goals and feedback preferences to your career-buddy?
- ◆ How confident were you in understanding your career-buddies' goals and opinions?
- ◆ How open and supportive were you to the goals and opinions of your career-buddy if they differed from your own?
- ◆ How comfortable were you in providing feedback or engaging in constructive discussions with your career-buddy?

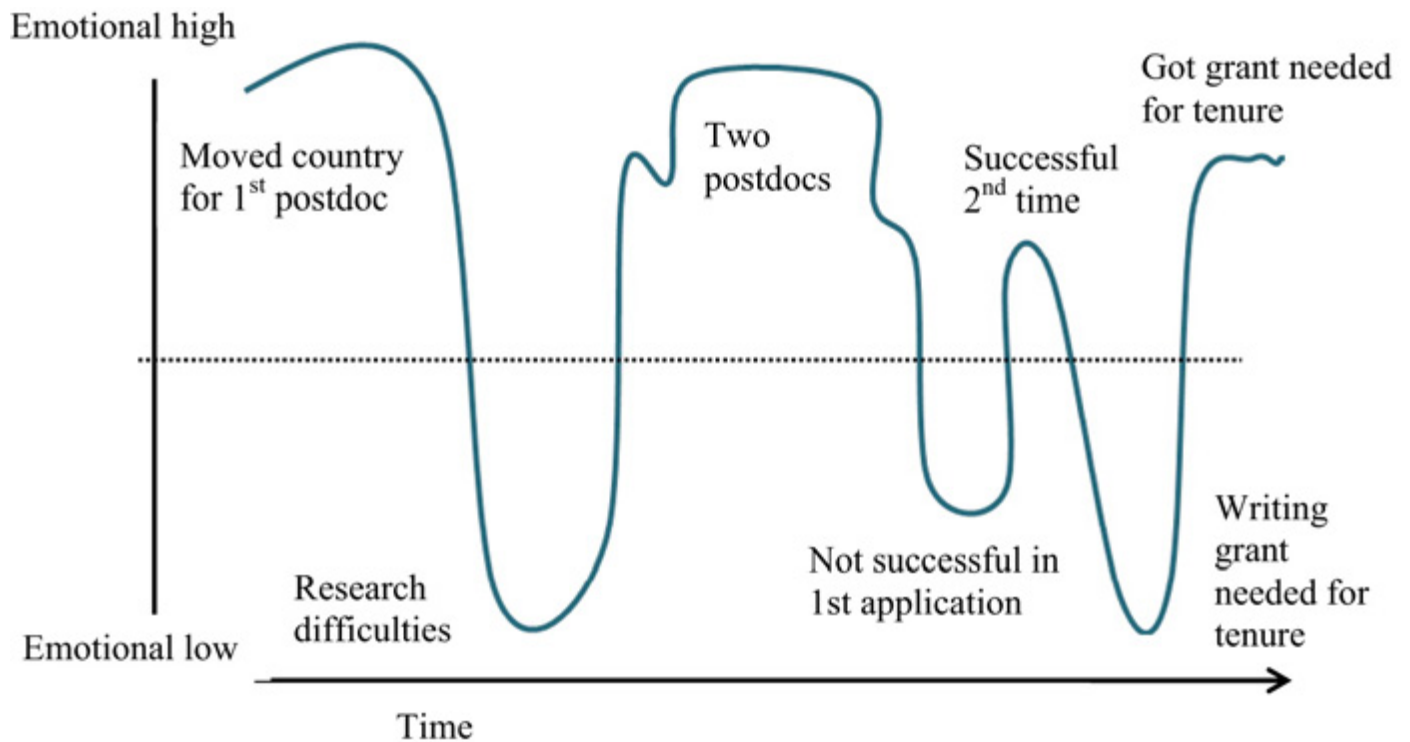


# APPENDIX A: CAREER JOURNEY EXAMPLES

Your career journey overview may take any form e.g. a list, table, timeline, diagram, etc. These are some examples of career journeys to assist and inspire you in the creation of your own career journey overview.

## Example 1

Charting the emotional highs and lows of professional experiences over time (Source: [McAlpine et al, 2016](#)).



## Example 2

CV style (sourced [online](#)).

Achievements		
> [insert achievement]		
> [insert achievement]		
> [insert achievement]		

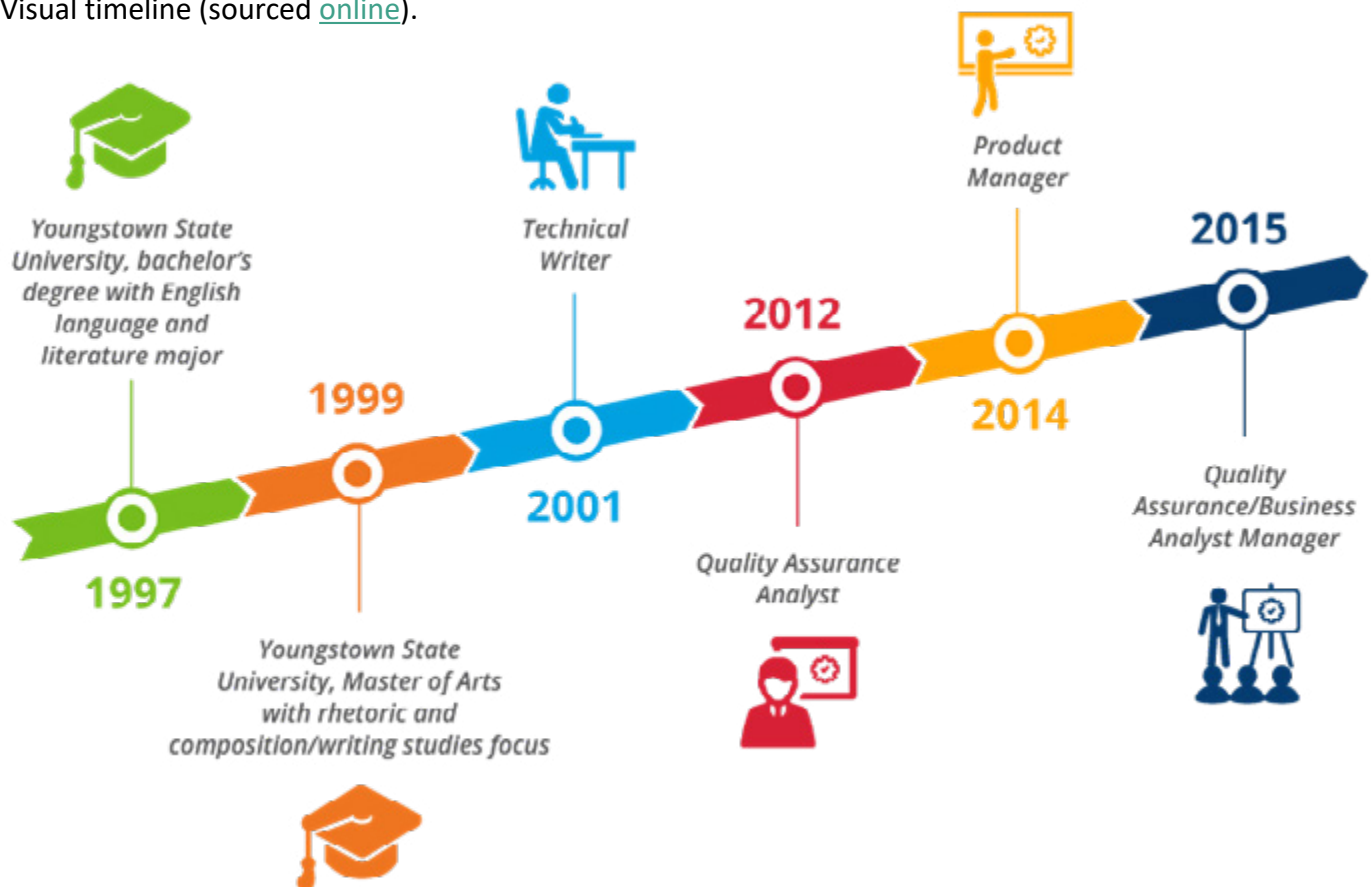
Education		
[From – To]	[Course]	[Institution Name]
Grade achieved:	[Grade]	
[From – To]	[Course]	[Institution Name]
Grade achieved:	[Grade]	
[From – To]	[Course]	[Institution Name]
Grade achieved:	[Grade]	

Work Experience		
[From – To]	[Job Position]	[Company name]
Main duties performed:		
[From – To]	[Job Position]	[Company name]
Main duties performed:		



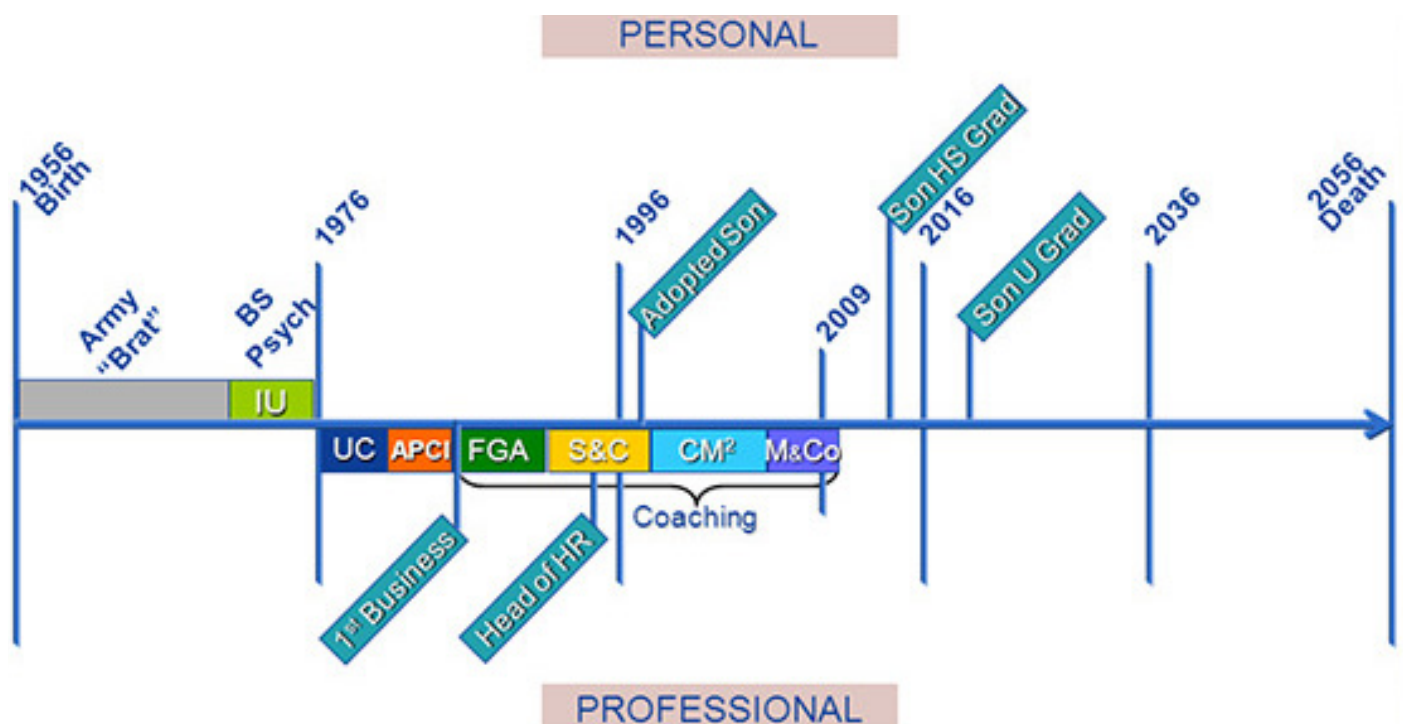
## Example 3

Visual timeline (sourced [online](#)).



## Example 4

Career-life timeline (sourced [online](#)).



**Written and designed by** Cassandra Wardle, Queensland Universities

**Edited by** Alicia Stokes, Griffith Graduate Research School

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