

John Creedy, *Research Without Tears: From the First Ideas to Published Output*

(Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008)

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Research Without Tears is a collection of talks by John Creedy on three topics: 'A First Research Paper', 'Working on a PhD' and 'Publishing Research'. These essays contain general advice drawn from a lifetime of experience by a senior Australian academic and passed on to the future generation of researchers. The book is most useful for PhD students who are about to begin the research component of their PhD studies. The third essay is also useful for those at the beginning of their academic careers. Another group that can benefit from this book are those academics who, as a result of a run of good publications and success in supervising a handful of PhD students, get promoted to full professors and soon after are asked to give talks on research, PhD supervision and publishing.

All universities in Australia offer a series of talks on research and publishing for PhD students and staff every year, and typescripts or slides of most of these talks can be downloaded freely from the Internet. So, it seems that this book may have many close substitutes that are free. But I particularly like this book more than most other essays on the topic for two reasons: (i) it does not pretend that any part of the research production process is easy, and (ii) it is written for the middle rather than extreme right or left tails of the distribution of PhD students. I will elaborate these in turn.

Despite the title, Creedy never implies that any part of the journey from finding the first ideas to publishing the output is simple. In fact, he is quite explicit that every stage of the process can be difficult and frustrating; and he emphasises that, in order to increase the possibility of success, one needs intense concentration and effort over a long period of time, often longer than expected. Reading the book, a reader will conclude that during the journey from the first ideas to published output, it is quite natural to cry, be it from frustration or from joy.

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The second reason I like this book is because it reflects that Creedy has tried to draw robust conclusions from his vast experience in research and supervision, and because of that the book is likely to be helpful for most PhD students. In contrast, many talks on advice for PhD students, especially talks given by relatively inexperienced academics, are tainted by a small number of outlying observations. In such talks, we often hear “Do not disappear for six months at a time” or “Do not go to see your supervisor when you are drunk” — which although amusing and funny, are definitely reactions to a single extreme observation (who is probably not attending the talk) and a waste of time for the audience. There is just one occasion where Creedy seems to fall into this trap. In Chapter 4 he writes: “If you think your supervisor is wrong about something, do not argue but express your desire to rewrite your analysis more clearly for future discussion.” This is likely to be based on an unpleasant experience with a single outlying student. It is strange because it does not specify what the student should do in the next meeting when she goes back with revised analysis still thinking that her supervisor is wrong. Should she argue or not? Or is this advice based on the assumption that supervisors are never wrong (an assumption that is certainly false)?

One common piece of advice on writing that is missing from the book is ‘Do not trust automatic spell-checkers and typesetting software’. Good examples of what can go wrong are in evidence in the Preface of this book, where we see ‘regu-lation’ and ‘encourage-ment’, and reference to ‘Greedy (2001, 2006, 2007)’. To be fair, these are exceptions. The book is well-written, and other than in the Preface, properly proof-read.

I concur with most advice given in the book and I suggest to all PhD students that they add this book to their list of ‘recommended reading’. But I emphasise to them that this is not a substitute for their ‘required reading’: *The Craft of Research* by Booth, Colomb and Williams, published by the University of Chicago Press.