

Table 1. Self-sabotage checklist.

Self-sabotage checklist		Application to PhD students	
Behaviour	Description	Example	The alibi
<input type="checkbox"/> Overcommitting	Taking on so many things that your high priority goals suffer	A PhD student who already is heavily committed with study, a part-time job and family responsibilities accepts an offer to chair the organising committee for a conference.	I really should have finished the data analysis and I would have if I wasn't so busy with all these other things – but they are all very important.
<input type="checkbox"/> Busyness	Looking like you are very busy but, in reality, only less important things are actually getting done	The PhD student comes into the university every day, gathers lots of reading materials, attends lots of seminars and is generally very busy, but doesn't seem to be able to find time to write a draft of the first chapter for the supervisor.	I have been so busy. It's just so hard to find a quiet time to sit down and write. When I set aside some time things just come along and gobble it up. If it wasn't for that I'd have the first chapter finished by now.
<input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionism	Setting unrealistic and impossible expectations	The PhD student sets unrealistic and impossible expectations. Rather than start a draft of the literature review, the student decides that until the writing can be the best, then it is better not to start it at all.	I want this to be really good. After all, you only get one chance to do a PhD. I need to read a bit more to get it clear in my head.
<input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination	Putting off important or necessary tasks, often until the last minute	Putting off and finding excuses not to begin a project. For example, the student decides that cleaning glassware in the lab or surfing the Internet becomes far more important than doing the experiment or writing up results.	I find I work better under pressure. If I leave it to the last minute I'll put something together. If it's not the best, well, what could you expect? If I had more time I would have done better.
<input type="checkbox"/> Disorganisation	Not developing a routine or system that makes managing your time and life easier	The student is unable to find things, forgets to bring important documents to meetings, turns up to meetings at the wrong time.	If I was more organised I'd be winning Nobel prizes. It's my disorganisation not my ability.
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not put in effort	Not practising or trying very hard	The student intentionally does not practise for a seminar presentation.	If the presentation doesn't go well it's because I hadn't prepared rather than lack of ability.
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose performance-debilitating circumstances	Trying to work in a busy or unsuitable location or situation	The PhD student tries to write a complex chapter while sharing an open-plan office with three other gregarious students.	Well, if it wasn't for all the distractions I'd be much further on.