

Show Good Cause and exclusion for HDR students

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The University of Sydney's Show Good Cause process may seem daunting. If you receive a Stage 3 notification asking you to Show Good Cause, try to remain calm and carefully work through the required steps by the required deadline. SUPRA is here to support and assist you through the process.

What 'show cause' or 'Show Good Cause' means

Your faculty may ask you to Show Good Cause if you aren't meeting academic progression requirements. Being asked to show cause by your faculty means that they require you to show good reasons why you should be allowed to continue in your degree. It is an opportunity for you to explain in writing why you have not met your milestones and to defend your ability to successfully complete your degree. You must support your claims with evidence, if possible, and demonstrate why you should be allowed to continue in your degree.

Why you received a Show Good Cause notice

A Show Good Cause notice will be sent to you if you have received an unsatisfactory progress rating at 2 consecutive progress reviews. The faculty may also ask you to Show Good Cause on the recommendation of the postgraduate coordinator, as a result of an unsatisfactory progress rating. During the final stage of your degree a Show Good Cause notice can be sent to you if you have not submitted your thesis for examination by the latest possible date. HDR students have also been asked to Show Good Cause after receiving an allegation of [academic dishonesty or research misconduct](#).

What Show Good Cause notices say

The notice should set out:

- the reasons that you have been asked to Show Good Cause
- the actions that might have to be taken in regard to your candidature
- your right to seek independent advice (e.g. from SUPRA) to prepare your response.

How to respond to a Show Good Cause notice

Read the Show Good Cause notice very carefully. Make sure you correctly note the deadline for response.

- **Gather supporting documents.** It can take time to collect documents, so identify what you will need to substantiate your reasons for the delay in making progress, and work out a plan for getting them before the deadline to respond. These documents might include medical certificates or emails between you and your supervisors.
- **Start writing your response letter early.** It might take a few drafts before you are able to effectively explain your circumstances. Don't leave it to the last minute. There is no need to rush to submit your Show Good Cause response before the due date. Responding quickly will not affect the faculty's decision.
- **Reflect seriously on why your progress has not met required standards.** Your ability to meet milestones may have been impacted by ill health, injury or misadventure; or by lack of access to appropriate resources or effective supervisory support. You may have experienced family or relationship issues, or unexpected carer responsibilities.
- **Develop a new progress or completion plan for the remaining degree requirements.** Seek advice from your supervisors, other mentors or your postgraduate coordinator on preparing a new timeline for completing your thesis. Be realistic about your capacity to resolve all of the issues that have hindered your progress so far. Reflect on your publication and conference goals, and re-focus on drafting and submitting your thesis.
- **Consider including a weekly plan or timeline to make your letter more persuasive.** Address concerns raised in your progress review by clearly outlining how much time you can devote to writing your thesis amid other commitments. This might be helpful where:
 1. your challenges are ongoing, such as carer duties or managing chronic health conditions
 2. you are an international student who may need to [complete your thesis in your home country](#).

- **Consult appropriate support services.** It's important to do this before you finalise your Show Good Cause response letter. If you have an ongoing health issue, include evidence that you are consulting appropriate professionals. Attach evidence like medical certificates, psychologist's reports or medical appointment bookings. This will help demonstrate your commitment to successfully completing your degree.
- **Commit to improving your academic and research skills.** Even if your progress has been hindered by poor supervision or non-academic issues, it's still useful to demonstrate to your faculty that you are improving your research skills in order to complete on time. Seek out University resources such as one-on-one appointments with lecturers in the [Learning Hub](#). Think about whether you need a private tutor or look up Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for online courses relevant to your research topic.
- **Get help with your draft letter.** After preparing your draft and gathering supporting documents, [get advice from one of our caseworkers](#) to help strengthen your response.
- **Finalise supporting documentation.** If you don't have official evidence to support the arguments you make in your letter, you might need to complete a [statutory declaration](#). This is a written legal document that must be witnessed and signed by an authorised person such as [a Justice of the Peace \(JP\)](#), or a lawyer. A statutory declaration is used as evidence of your claims in the absence of other independent, documentary proof. If you cannot access a JP or lawyer, you can also complete a [student declaration form](#).
- **Submit your response.** Make sure you send supporting documents to the correct email address. Keep a copy of everything you submit. If a SUPRA caseworker assisted you in preparing your show cause response, email them a copy of your final submission.
- **Keep a copy of the faculty confirmation email.** It might take some time to receive this confirmation depending on how many student cases your faculty has to process.
- **While waiting for the faculty's decision, try to remain focused on your research.** Continue with your research work. Your supervisors should maintain their support and guidance roles for you during this process.
- **Once you receive the decision about your response, please send a copy to the caseworker who assisted you even if you are satisfied with the faculty's decision.**

What to write in your Show Good Cause letter

We suggest you include the following in your letter. You don't have to set them out in the order below, but we encourage you to include all of these points and back them up with supporting documents:

1. **A brief explanation of why you are being asked to Show Good Cause.** This is to demonstrate that you understand the process you are undertaking.
2. **A clear explanation of the reasons you have not made satisfactory progress.** Include an explanation of each circumstance and why it has impacted your ability to meet your research requirements.
3. **An outline of strategies you have implemented to overcome these issues.** These could be strategies for managing your personal matters, or they might be areas for improvement in your research skills.
4. **An outline of your academic history and progress reports.** Highlight reasons why you feel you made satisfactory progress previously, to demonstrate that you are capable of achieving required academic standards.
5. **A reasonable explanation** of why and how you can complete your candidature successfully if allowed to continue.
6. **Emphasise the strength of your ongoing interest in your research topic.** Keep this point concise. You can briefly mention the value you think your research will bring to the University's research output and reputation.
7. **Include a list of attached documents.** Give each attachment a number and short title and keep the titles consistent. Remember to refer to the relevant supporting document at the appropriate points in your letter. Don't simply write a letter and hand in some supporting documents without an explanation of how they relate.

Possible outcomes

The faculty will consider your letter and supporting documents, progress reports, and reports by your supervisors or other senior academics, such as a postgraduate coordinator. A decision will be made by your associate dean (research education). The possible decisions outlined in University policy are that your faculty could decide:

- you have shown good cause, and permit you to continue your candidature
- you have not shown good cause and, in the letter outlining their decision, they must explain the reasons why they have made this decision.

If they decide you have not shown good cause to be allowed to continue in your degree, your faculty associate dean could:

- decide to terminate your candidature
- impose conditions or restrictions on the continuation of your candidature, or

- offer you the opportunity to transfer to another course within the faculty (they may impose conditions or restrictions on that offer).

If your candidature is terminated, you may be excluded from applying for admission to a research degree at the University of Sydney for up to 2 academic years. While excluded from the University of Sydney, you cannot receive an award like an RTP stipend scholarship.

What to do if you're unhappy with the outcome

You have the option to appeal the outcome. We explain the 2 different levels of appeal below.

Faculty-level appeal

You can submit an appeal to your faculty dean if you disagree with all or parts of the outcome. The letter that informs you of the faculty's decision should outline your entitlement to appeal. **You have 20 working days from the date on this letter to submit your faculty appeal.**

PhD students may bypass this level of appeal if they choose, and submit an appeal straight to the Student Appeals Body (SAB). **The timeframe to submit an appeal to the SAB is 15 working days from the date on the decision letter.**

[Contact us for assistance](#) with your appeal.

Appeal to the Student Appeals Body (SAB)

If you are dissatisfied with the result of your faculty level appeal you have a final option of an appeal to the SAB. The timeframe for an SAB appeal is 15 working days from the date on the faculty decision letter. Your application for appeal to the SAB must demonstrate that your faculty breached due academic process. For advice on this, [contact us](#).

If you appeal to the SAB, your case will be assessed by the Registrar's nominee who determines if the appeal meets the eligibility criteria for consideration by the SAB. If the appeal is eligible, your case will be referred to a panel hearing. You can take a representative or support person to the hearing with you, such as a SUPRA caseworker. Please [contact us in advance of your hearing date](#) to ensure availability. Your faculty will also be invited to send a representative, usually a senior academic.

For more information, read our article [Academic Appeals for Coursework Students](#) – the information about appealing to the SAB also applies to HDR students.

What to do if you're unhappy with the outcome of the University appeals process

The Student Appeals Body is the final level of appeal at the University. If you are still not satisfied with the way the SAB or University handled your appeal, you can consider submitting a complaint to the [NSW Ombudsman](#). For domestic students, recommendations made by the NSW Ombudsman are non-binding for the University. For international students, legislation requires the University to implement any decision or corrective action the NSW Ombudsman recommends.

Policies

- [Progress Planning and Review for HDR Students Policy 2015](#)
- [University of Sydney \(Higher Degree by Research\) Rule 2011](#)
- You can also discuss the show cause procedures in your school or faculty with your lead supervisor or the University's [Higher Degree Research Administration Centre](#) (HDRAC).

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