

Common Challenges

Throughout your artistic doctorate, you may encounter the following challenges:

- **Finding the shape of the practice (a doable one).** The exploration of practice entails an element of not-knowing as part of the creative process. Your practice is also likely to shift as you explore appropriate research methodologies, which might involve mixing methods from artistic practice, social sciences, and humanities. Throughout your doctoral journey, you will refine your practice experiments, and you may discard some methods as you try them out and learn about them. The normal constraints of time, logistics, materials, funding, venues, and equipment will also shift your ideas towards a project which is doable both practically and conceptually.
- **Articulating and capturing data from the artistic practice.** In Artistic Research, your data can take many forms: the performance, audience surveys, recordings of rehearsals in audio and/or video, your notebooks, scores, interviews with participants, discussions with collaborators, artifacts that you produce throughout the research, video sequences, video-essays, recordings of improvisations, films, etc. Identifying and selecting what is important and relevant for the research is challenging. Ask yourself: can this item help me answer my research question? If the answer is yes, there is potential for it to be ‘research data’. For example, if you are investigating a process of making, you need to capture data which highlights that process, such as written reflections on work in progress in a creative practice notebook, and/or audio-visual recordings of your process. Running an experiment will allow you to test out which strategies or combination of strategies might be most appropriate for your research.

I think it's really complicated to articulate and capture the data from the artistic practice. I think that can be a bit more nebulous, harder to contain than, when you're doing what might be a little more traditional in your research methods. They are kind of the same thing but operate in different ways. (...) And it may be very difficult to identify what's key in this that I need to extract and maybe look at. (staff member, 2020)

- **Knowing the context of your practice and who your audience is.** Artistic Research has different methodology clusters, paradigms, lines of thought, and audiences. Learning about what Artistic Research is and positioning yourself in the field will strengthen your ground and ensure you are speaking to your audience. For more on this, see the section [What is Artistic Research](#), and review the [Visioning the Future seminars](#) for insights in specific topics. The following case study shows why awareness of your Artistic Research context is important:

Student Case Study: Developing Awareness of Your Artistic Research Context

This is why I was so interested in attending the Visioning the Future seminars. (...) it has given me a vocabulary and a survey of common approaches. Had I had those earlier in the PhD it would have really helped me to understand. They always say, know your audience – who are you writing to when you are writing your thesis? And I really didn't know how Artistic Research was supposed to be, look. So without knowing that, I wrote a whole lot of this, and whole of lot of that, and I did the whole lot of this production documentation, and I did participant interviews. You know, did I need to use grounded theory to understand those interviews or second-person phenomenology? It turns out the interviews were only important in getting feedback as an experience designer; as an interactive dramaturgy. (...) Had I known more about Artistic Research and how to piggyback my work on the already existing foundation for embodied knowledge that comes from Artistic Research methodologies – had I had that vocabulary, I could have skipped a whole lot of work. (PhD student, 2020)

- **Placing an exploratory creative practice process into a linear written form.** When you write up your dissertation, you are articulating in words experiences which might be felt, perceived, visual or auditory; and bringing a creative and organic process into a highly structured context – sentences, paragraphs, sections, and chapters. However, writing is often not linear at all: your texts will be re-written, and things will move from one chapter to another. Some supervisors even recommend starting to write in the middle of the thesis (such as a chapter which describes your experiments / creative process / performances) as a way in. And like the creative process in the studio, you are constantly making choices on what is important and what is secondary. See [Forms of Writing](#) for more on this.

I have to try and make a structure to put into the thesis and it's really hard to make a structure for a creative practice. But that's where you are able to draw important things out of your artistic practice. For me it has been really necessary to do the writing. (...) The whole Artistic Research process that grows and evolves, it's not linear. You don't start here and follow these steps and end up here. You start here, you have an idea of what some of it might be, but you have no idea what the end result is going to be. That means it ends up all over the place. And people read it in a linear way. So how do you represent that process in a linear way when the process was not linear. (PhD student, 2020)

- **Navigating the space between Writing and Practice.** If you are doing or thinking about doing an Artistic Research PhD, you are likely a creative thinker. Faced with presenting a space in which critical / reflective writing sits beside or is tangled with practice, think of strategies for weaving these two (or more) forms together. Some theses include strands of autoethnography in counterpoint to more traditional critical writing, others use poetic text, others still propose non-linear forms. You can explore new ways of entwining both critical / historical thinking into your practice, and creative practice into your writing. Don't underestimate the importance of playfulness as a serious making / composing strategy when doing this.
- **Creating a map of your journey.** As Artistic Research projects are distinctive and may take many forms, getting an overview of how the process may develop over three to four years can be really challenging. See [Road Mapping](#) for how to create a structure for your degree.
- **Isolation.** See [Building Community](#) for strategies on creating networks and mitigating against isolation.
- **Negotiating the institutional landscape.** Universities / Colleges have their own idiosyncrasies, protocols, and policies, with different departments / offices for specific purposes. Learning to navigate this can be very challenging: ask your supervisor to talk you through the different research support services that your programme offers, and who and where you can go for different types of support. Try to be positive and proactive about this and think of it as a unique puzzle that you may need help with. Whilst these forms of PhDs are distinctive in an academic context, they have also been proven to drive new thinking in changing protocols, policy and ways of doing research ([Middelow, 2019](#)).