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Editors: Anita O'Connell and Michael Huxtable

***Review of Gordon Rugg and Marian Petre,
The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research
(Maidenhead: Open University Press,
2004). xiii + 224 pp. ISBN 0-33521-344-8.
£17.99 pbk, £55.00 hbk.***

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Gordon Rugg and Marian Petre introduce this book as a supplement to the already existing library of suggestions and strategies. Their end goal is the same: to help us attain that beautiful piece of parchment at the end of three (or four) exhausting years. Rugg and Petre open the book by explaining its structure and justifying omissions of subjects, (such as statistical analysis, which we all agree would do little to aid literary criticism) and outlining what they hope will be gained by their student audience spending time with this book. Its style is colloquial, which makes for easier reading as well as keeping the readers interest. The authors open each chapter with what they feel is a witty quote, and offer readers the chance to track down their sources using the skills they've acquired from research. This exercise seems rather tedious, but it's nice to see the authors make an effort to be jovial with their readership.

The main question to be asked of this book is simple: how useful are the topics addressed, and what new information can be learned from it? I have recently finished my first year of Ph.D. research, and so many of the topics of the book I have not yet encountered, such as the viva, and job interviews. However, those chapters offer logical advice that seems useful for anyone preparing for these situations. They are also of interest to beginning researchers, because they take some of the fear and guesswork out of those seemingly far away hoops we will all jump through. Other chapters such as procedures, the university system, supervision, and presentations, are useful for all disciplines and levels of research. Most of us will hear the information in these chapters from our supervisors, but

this book is meant for those of us who, for one reason or another, do not. As a researcher in the humanities I found the chapters concerning writing and reading of little use. This fault lies with the vast differences between writing in the disciplines rather than with the authors. They are conscious of such problems, as seen in their introductory disclaimer. Despite some of the references to topics wholly unrelated to research in the humanities, this book is a useful introduction to the unique position of Ph.D. student. An anonymous student is quoted on the back cover as saying: "I wish someone had told me this beforehand." I think most of us can survive the agony and the ecstasy that is Ph.D. research without this book, but this book might make it a little less agony.