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GUIDE FOR NEW SUPERVISORS OF HONOURS AND COURSEWORK DISSERTATION STUDENTS

Lynne D. Roberts



Australian Government



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GUIDE FOR NEW SUPERVISORS OF HONOURS AND COURSEWORK DISSERTATION STUDENTS

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Introduction

Supervising dissertation students can be one of the most rewarding aspects of working in academia. Supervision provides the opportunity to work with individuals or small groups of students over an extended period of time, facilitating their learning and guiding their development as researchers. If you are about to supervise a student for the first time, this guide is designed for you.

The guide provides *generic* information for new supervisors of Undergraduate, Honours and Masters by coursework programs. The guide is structured to provide information that supervisors may find useful at various stages of the dissertation supervision process. For each stage of the dissertation supervision process an introductory overview is provided, and this is supplemented (where available) with checklists, best practice advice and possible tools. The information provided in this guide may need to be modified or extended to suit the requirements of your discipline or level of dissertation.

If you are a *new supervisor*, you can complete sections within this guide by adding information that relates specifically to supervision within your school/faculty/university.

If you are a *dissertation coordinator*, prior to providing this guide to new supervisors you can adapt the material to meet the requirements for supervision within your program.

This guide was prepared as part of the activities of a National Teaching Fellowship awarded to Associate Professor Lynne Roberts by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The material presented in this guide was developed based on interviews and workshops with students, supervisors and dissertation coordinators; materials submitted by Honours coordinators; a review of the supervision literature; and modification and development of supervisory tools. I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the many students, supervisors and dissertation coordinators who provided their insights and materials. You can find further information and resources on supervising Undergraduate, Honours and Masters by coursework dissertations on the website: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org>

This guide continues to be a work-in-progress. Please email any feedback to Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Wishing you every success in your supervision!

Lynne Roberts

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Good Supervision: Student and Supervisor Perspectives

Before commencing supervision, it is useful to think about what a good supervisory relationship might look like. I interviewed undergraduate, honours and masters students, supervisors and dissertation coordinators about their conceptions of good supervision, and provide a brief summary of the results below (you can find further details on the project website:

<http://www.dissertationsupervision.org>)

Student Perspective

Students described positive supervisory relationships as based on a shared passion for the topic, clear expectations and open communication. 'Good' supervision meetings occurred within a relaxed space where the student felt they were listened to, their concerns were not dismissed and they received support, guidance and reassurance. In some circumstances, the synergy of ideas resulted in better research. Students described supervisors' contribution to positive supervisory experiences in terms of their approachability and availability, support, interest in the student as a person and sensitivity to the student's emotions. Students described their own contributions as coming to meetings prepared, taking ownership of the research project, and in some cases managing the supervision process. Where supervision meetings went well, students reported feeling re-motivated, with increased focus and clarity about the project. They knew what they had to go on and do next, and felt less stressed.

Supervisor Perspective

Supervisors described positive supervisory relationships in terms of shared passion for the topic, clear expectations and a positive group dynamic or dyadic relationship. Good supervision meetings were characterised by discussion, guidance, clarification and positive feedback. Supervisors described their own contribution to good supervision in terms of providing structure and research knowledge, being about to explain concepts in everyday terms the students could understand and being supportive. Students were viewed by supervisors as contributing to positive supervisory experiences through being interested in the topic and taking ownership of the project. The outcomes of good supervisory meetings were described in terms of seeing the personal growth and skill development of students, and student satisfaction.

Supervision as a Negotiated Practice

While there may be some differences in perceptions of good supervision by supervisors and students, both acknowledge that each party contributes to good supervision. That is, good supervision is a negotiated practice between supervisor and student. The basis for this negotiated practice is an understanding of the expectations of each other and discussion of how supervision will work within the constraints of the program and resources. You will find more on the initial process of clarifying expectations in the section '*The First Supervision Meeting*'. You may find that expectations need to be revisited across the course of the research project.

Preparing for Supervision

Introduction

So, you've just found out that you will be supervising one or more Undergraduate/Honours or Masters by coursework students this year. Where do you start?

Good supervision starts with preparation. Before your first formal supervision meeting it is important that you acquaint yourself with the formal requirements for supervision within your program and discipline, obtain a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities as a supervisor, and are familiar with what a poor, average and good dissertation looks like at the level you are supervising.

The following checklist provides a range of activities you can undertake to prepare for supervision. After meeting with your dissertation coordinator you may find there are other recommended activities and these can be added to the checklist.

Checklist

1. Locate available documentation. This might include:
 - Handbooks
 - Unit outlines
 - Guides for students or supervisors specific to the program
 - Learning Management System sites (e.g. Blackboard) for the program

2. Contact the dissertation coordinator to find out:
 - How students are assigned to supervisors/projects
 - How many students you are expected to supervise
 - Number of hours allocated in your workload for supervision
 - Recommended frequency of supervision meetings
 - Key dates throughout the period of supervision (e.g., dates when research proposal, literature review, final dissertation are due; dates for any presentations)
 - Responsibilities of supervisors and students
 - Restrictions on what assistance you can provide as a supervisor (you may like to work through the '*Boundaries of Supervision*' tool together)
 - Possibility of co-supervision or being assigned a supervision mentor
 - 'Rules' surrounding authorship on papers from student research projects within your school/department

3. Look at a range of previous dissertations (there may be a central repository for these - if not ask to borrow marked dissertations from the dissertation coordinator or other supervisors) in order to familiarise yourself with:

- Types of projects undertaken
- Structure and format of dissertations
- Expected quality of work (compare dissertations with differing grades)

4. Find out the resources available within your university for students who are having difficulties. Write the details in the spaces below so that the information is readily available when needed:

- Counselling services: -----
- Health services: -----
- Assistance with writing: -----
- Statistical assistance: -----

Tools

1. Boundaries of Supervision worksheet

TOOL



BOUNDARIES OF SUPERVISION WORKSHEET

Instructions for use

This worksheet is designed for use by dissertation coordinators in conjunction with new supervisors to promote discussion on the desirable level of supervisor involvement in students' dissertation projects. It is expected that the acceptable boundaries of supervision will vary according to the level of the project (e.g., Undergraduate students may require higher levels of supervisor involvement than Masters students).

The tool can be used by dissertation coordinators in meetings with groups of new supervisors (to ensure consistency across supervisors) or with individual supervisors.

Tool Creator: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>



BOUNDARIES OF SUPERVISION WORKSHEET

Where are the appropriate boundaries for supervision of students in this program?

Process	"Hands off" approach	Low Involvement	Medium Involvement	High Involvement
Selecting Topic	Sole responsibility of student	Student provides ideas which supervisor helps assess for suitability	Negotiated by supervisor and student	Provided by supervisor
Literature Searching	Sole responsibility of student	Supervisor provides starting papers only	Supervisor provides starting papers and ongoing suggestions when needed	Supervisor provides papers to review
Literature Reviewing	Sole responsibility of student	Supervisor comments on X draft(s) of literature review	Supervisor provides training/advice/examples and comments on X draft(s) of literature review	Supervisor co-writes with student
Research Question and Hypotheses	Sole responsibility of student	Student has 'first go' and then supervisor helps shape	Supervisor and student develop together	Supervisor provides hypotheses
Selecting Methodological Approach	Sole responsibility of student	Student researches possible approaches and discusses recommended approach with supervisor	Supervisor and student decide together	Supervisor advises correct approach to use
Collecting Data	Sole responsibility of student	Supervisor provides training/advice on collecting data	Supervisor provides training/advice on collecting data and assists with recruitment	Supervisor actively involved in recruitment and data collection with student
Analysing Data	Sole responsibility of student	Supervisor provides training/advice but does not work directly on student's data	Supervisor sits with student while they conduct analyses	Supervisor conducts part/all of analysis
Interpreting results	Sole responsibility of student	Student provides supervisor with an interpretation of the results, which the supervisor then comments on	Student and supervisor discuss together possible interpretations of results	Supervisor tells student what results mean
Writing the Dissertation	Sole responsibility of student	Supervisor comments on X draft(s) of dissertation	Supervisor provides training/advice/examples of writing and comments on X draft(s) of dissertation	Supervisor co-writes with student

Working with a Co-Supervisor

Introduction

Co-supervision (also known as joint or team supervision) is where two or more supervisors share supervisory responsibility for a student. It is an increasingly common form of supervision for PhD students, and the practice is now spreading to the supervision of other types of dissertation students, including Honours and Masters by coursework students.

As a new supervisor, a major advantage of co-supervising is the opportunity for training, mentoring and support from an experienced supervisor. Other advantages of co-supervision include supervisory coverage when one supervisor needs to be away (e.g., conference or leave), the wider range of expertise available to the student, and the division of supervisory roles (Guerin & Green, 2013; Lahenius & Ikavalko, 2012; Spooner-Lane, Henderson, Price, & Hill, 2007).

However, there is also the potential for problems to arise during co-supervision. Co-supervisors need to recognise that differing opinions and feedback may be threatening to the student, result in disagreements, and leave the student trying to satisfy multiple, conflicting demands (Guerin & Green, 2013; Taylor & Beasley, 2005). Misunderstanding and miscommunication may arise where students have difficulties in ascertaining to whom comments are addressed (the student or co-supervisor?), or when supervisors are perceived as aligning against the student (Manathunga, 2012). Some projects involve co-supervision with an industry partner and issues can arise when academic and industry supervisors hold differing expectations of the supervisory role or project. Problems may be compounded by gender, personality and status differences between co-supervisors (Manathunga, 2012; Pole, 1998). To avoid these potential problems it is important that supervisors express their views, but then reach consensus on the way forward for the student (Guerin & Green, 2013).

Difficulties can also arise when supervisors provide conflicting advice on drafts of written work. To avoid this, Guerin, Green & Baastalich (2011) recommend three strategies:

- *simultaneous multiple feedback* provided verbally at a joint meeting
- *serial feedback* where the draft with tracked changes is sent to each supervisor in turn
- *selective feedback* where feedback is sought only from the supervisor with the most relevant experience.

A further potential problem experienced by some supervisors is that the workload allocation may be halved for co-supervision, while the actual time spent supervising may not reduce to the same extent. This is likely to be the case where both supervisors attend each supervisory meeting and both comment on all drafts. If workload allocation is an issue, strategies to reduce the time commitment of each supervisor while maintaining a high standard of supervision may need to be considered. These might include:

- joint supervisory meetings at key stages only, with supervisor attendance at other supervision meetings based on expertise
- allocating supervisors to read alternate drafts

If these time-reducing strategies are implemented, it is essential that co-supervisors keep each other informed of key decisions and progress. This will enable a coordinated, consistent approach to supervision and reduce the potential for the student to play one supervisor off against the other. Watts (2010) further recommends setting a ground rule that the supervisor who does not attend a meeting supports the feedback provided at that meeting.

Checklist

1. Meet with your co-supervisor before the first meeting
 - Identify each supervisor's areas of expertise
 - Work through 'Co-supervision Expectations' tool
 - Reach agreement on style of co-supervision
 - Reach agreement on the approach for handling differing opinions and feedback

Tools

1. Co-supervision Expectations
2. Co-supervision Issues and Good Practices

CO-SUPERVISION EXPECTATIONS: ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AND AGREEMENT

- 1) If our views differ should we each advise the student separately and let them work it out for themselves, or should we try to reach a consensus first?
- 2) Should all members of the team attend every meeting, or have independent meetings with the student?
- 3) Communication. Shall we cc all emails to every member of the team? Shall we ask the student to send emails to all of us, or just to one supervisor? Which one?
- 4) Roles and contribution of each supervisor in the team?
 - Who takes final responsibility?
 - Can different members of the team be responsible for different aspects of supervision, if so, how does that get recognised?
 - What happens if one supervisor goes on Study Leave or is away for more than a few weeks?
- 5) Supervisory style
 - How do you like to supervise: hands-on, hands-off, by the book, as it comes?
- 6) Reading of drafts of written work
 - What is a reasonable turnaround time on drafts?
 - How many drafts is it reasonable for a member of a supervisory team to read?
- 7) University requirements and policies
 - Who is responsible for ensuring the student achieves milestones?
 - Whose role is it to ensure that the student knows, and follows, policies related to research ethics, plagiarism etc?
 - Whose role is it to take the student through the ethics application process and sign off?
- 8) Meetings
 - Who will organise meetings? How often? Where?
 - Will meetings be noted, if so by whom and to what level of detail and will the notes be copied to all panel members or only those who were at the meeting?
 - What will be the best way to access one another, especially if off-campus?
- 9) Who provides the funds for the student's project?
- 10) Publishing
 - What are your expectations with regard to the student publishing?
 - How much do you think is reasonable to help without being a co-author/alternatively how much should be contributed to be named as a co-author?
 - How will you determine the order of authors?

TOOL



- 11) What is the process for discussing concerns?
 - About the student?
 - About each another?
 - What if the student goes to one of you with a problem about the other?
- 12) What research strengths do you consider you bring to the supervisory team?
 - Knowledge of the process, the topic, the methodology?
- 13) What personal skills do you bring to the team? What cultural attributes do you have that you could bring to the team?
- 14) Are there specific aspects of supervision that you think are critical and need to be understood by the other members of the team?

Tool Creator: Oxford Learning Institute, adapted from Kiley, Australian National University

Original Source:

<http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/overview/rsv/ClarifyingCoSupervisionArrangements.pdf>

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>



TOOL



CO-SUPERVISION ISSUES AND GOOD PRACTICES

Putting good practices into place early can prevent many of the problematic situations that reduce the effectiveness of co-supervision for coursework degree dissertation students.

Issues	Practices that contribute to making supervisory teams work effectively
<p>Workload:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload not fairly shared/someone not pulling weight • Co-supervisors not reading drafts or investing enough time/effort to address student needs • Other workload issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to commencing co-supervision reach agreement on roles and contributions of each supervisor (see Co-supervision expectations tool) • Where issues arise revisit roles and contributions
<p>Differing Perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differing perspectives and inability to compromise, status/ego and power plays between supervisors (e.g. shared supervision as a competition) • Differences in supervisory philosophy, lack of understanding or respect for each other's expertise • Methodological conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select co-supervisors with complementary skills to your own • Identify differing strengths and areas of expertise in relation to the research topic and methodology • Build trust and respect in the co-supervisory relationship (e.g. the ability to have joint conversations regarding student progress can allow co-supervisors to suggest and debate a series of alternative approaches to issues as they arise)
<p>Limited Meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties organizing meetings because either too busy (time) or cross-campus (place) • Supervisory teams who do not meet to review their performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold regular joint meetings with the student(s) • Book out a regular meeting time and place for the duration of the research project • Arrange pre-meetings (supervisors only) to assess what might be needed
<p>Unclear Roles and Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of role definition or token inclusion of a co-supervisor • Expectations not clearly spelt out to student and other supervisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to commencing co-supervision reach agreement on roles and contributions of each supervisor (see Co-supervision expectations tool) • Discuss expectations with student at first meeting and revisit as necessary

TOOL



<p>Group Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student is receiving conflicting individual rather than group feedback• Manipulative student playing supervisors off one against the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide feedback in group meeting• Serial commenting on drafts• Clear agreements negotiated with student as to a course of action agreed between all parties
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Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/rst-ebook> (B3.2 Considering supervisory team issues and good practices)

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Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>



The First Supervision Meeting

Introduction

The main tasks of the first supervision meeting are to establish the basis for a professional working relationship, clarify expectations and reach agreement on the parameters of supervision, and begin work on planning the research project.

You will be working closely with your student(s) for an extended period of time. At the first meeting it is important to work towards establishing a professional working relationship with the student(s). While it is not necessary to like each other (although it certainly helps!), it is essential to develop an effective working relationship.

The first supervision meeting provides the opportunity to establish *how* supervision will operate for the duration of the dissertation project. During this meeting it is important to discuss the roles and expectations of both student(s) and supervisor(s). Previous research indicates that there are some common student and supervisor expectations of supervisors across all levels of course-work dissertations. Students' expectations of supervisors include expertise in the dissertation topic, academic guidance, mentoring, constructive and time feedback, encouragement and motivation, support and pastoral care and access to resources (McMicheal, 1992, Todd, Bannister & Clegg, 2004, Wisker, 2012). Supervisors' expectation of students include the development of student agency (moving from dependence towards independence) and taking responsibility for completion of the dissertation, interest in the topic and commitment to the research, punctuality, bringing ideas and materials to meetings and keeping the supervisor informed (Anderson, Day & McLaughlin, 2006; McMicheal, 1992, Todd et al, 2006). There are a number of tools available designed to help students and supervisors identify their expectations and these can be useful to work through in the first meeting.

Following discussion of expectations, you will need to reach agreement on the nuts and bolts of how supervision and meetings will be conducted. It is important that agreements reached fit within the constraints imposed by the program (e.g., time allocation in workload; any rules regarding frequency of meeting and number of drafts that can be read) and that you don't promise more than you can deliver. Some supervisors like to formalise this process through a supervision agreement.

A further area to reach agreement on in the first meeting is authorship of publications resulting from the research. The potential for publication resulting from the research should be discussed, and the 'rules' determining authorship outlined.

The first meeting is also the time to begin planning the research project in conjunction with the student. At this early stage it is useful to find out the student's ideas, progress (if any) and concerns, and also conduct a 'research audit'. This information can be used to guide a discussion on what will need to be achieved over the course of the project, and the amount of time that might need to be allocated to each of the stages. The student's ideas are likely to need to be shaped into a project that is achievable within the time period. See the section on 'Guiding the development of the research proposal' for further information on this process.

For many students, this will be the first time they have undertaken an independent research project. Used to highly structured course-work assignments, students may need support and encouragement to take ownership of the research project and its management.

Ensure the meeting ends with arrangements made for the next meeting and a clear understanding of what needs to be done in the interim. Tasks that you may like to set for your student for completion before the next meeting include:

- Drawing up a timeline for the duration of the project with key milestones (e.g., submission of literature review, research proposal and dissertation) marked
- Learning to use Endnote or other referencing software
- Setting up documents (styles and headings) for literature review, research proposal and dissertation
- Look at two or three dissertations from previous years, paying particular attention to
 - Structure
 - Development of rationale
 - Format
 - Referencing
- Write a one page document to bring to the next meeting that includes
 - Paragraph on current ideas for the study
 - Paragraph on why the study is important
 - Any questions

I strongly recommend asking the student to prepare a summary of key points from each meeting, including any agreements reached and details of what each student and supervisor need to do before the next meeting (see [Meeting Summary Template](#) as one possible framework). If you are supervising a group project, the responsibility for preparing a meeting summary can be rotated. The summary should be emailed to all supervisors and students within a specific timeframe (recommend 24 or 48 hours). This document serves to remind each party of their obligations before the next meeting, and can also serve as the starting point for the next meeting.

Checklist

1. By the end of the first meeting, agreement should have been reached in the following areas on the *how* of supervision:
 - Meeting frequency
 - Boundaries of supervision
 - Feedback on drafts
 - i. Timing?
 - ii. Written or verbal?
 - Organising meetings
 - iii. Who initiates?
 - iv. Who sets the agenda?
 - v. Style of meeting?
 - vi. Who takes notes?
 - Contact arrangements between meetings

-
2. Students should leave the meeting knowing:
 - Arrangements for the next meeting
 - What they need to do before the next meeting

Tools

1. [Clarifying Expectations \(student perspective\)](#)
2. [Clarifying Expectations \(supervisor perspective\)](#)
3. [Clarifying Expectations \(version to be used by student and supervisor\)](#)
4. [Documenting Student-Supervisor Agreements](#)
5. [Author tool for determining authorship of publications](#)
6. Example: [Meeting Summary Template](#)
7. Example: [Authorship Agreement](#)



CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS (SUPERVISOR PERSPECTIVE)

1. Frequency of meetings. How often does the student expect to meet with you? Do meetings/tutorials always have to take place face to face or can they be by phone, Skype or email? Who will call the meeting? On what basis can meetings be cancelled?
2. Pre-work before meetings. What does the supervisor expect the student to do in terms of pre-work prior to a meeting/tutorial? What does the student expect from the supervisor? What timeframes are required to make this happen (e.g. if the student expects the supervisor to read work then agree length of work to be submitted regularly and how many days prior to the meeting it needs to be submitted)?
3. Agenda for meetings. Who sets the agenda? How far in advance is the agenda circulated or is it agreed at the meeting? Does a meeting get cancelled if neither party has any agenda items?
4. Note-taking and reflections. Will the meeting be recorded for the student? Who will take notes? Will the student be expected to write a summary of the meeting for the supervisors? How will reflections on the meeting be captured and shared?
5. Working with the supervisory team. How will the other supervisors on the team contribute to the process? Who selects the other team members? Will you all meet together or separately?
6. Establish the means by which you give feedback. Do you mark the text electronically or by hand? Do you podcast your comments?
7. Expectations around authorship on publications. Clarify your position on the circumstances under which you wish to be given joint authorship on papers that are published by the student.
8. Expectations about availability. Clarify how the student should get hold of you in between meetings should they need to and how long you normally take to respond.
9. Check if there are any other issues the student wishes to record as part of your working agreement.



DOCUMENTING STUDENT-SUPERVISOR AGREEMENTS

Effective and successful supervision requires students and their supervisors to:

- reach agreement on key issues,
- document that agreement, and
- renegotiate that agreement as appropriate.

This tool canvasses key issues which student and their supervisors should discuss, reach an agreement on and document their agreement. The list of issues can be extended or amended as appropriate and used as the basis for discussion and negotiation. Once an agreement has been formalised, it can be revisited and renegotiated to address changing needs, views and circumstances.

Step 1. Consider the expectations regarding supervision that need to be negotiated.

Step 2. Document the negotiated agreement and have it signed by the student and supervisor(s)

Step 3. Revisit and renegotiate the agreement as appropriate.

Supervisor/Student Agreement

Issue	Agreed Practice
Project resources	
Timetable	
Availability (of both student and supervisors)	
Frequency of contact	
Response times	
Mode of contact (email/phone)	
Format of drafts (paper/electronic)	
Feedback modes	
Supervision during periods of leave	
Data storage	

Student: _____ Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/rst-ebook> (B4.4 Documenting student/candidate-supervisor agreements)

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Between Supervision Meetings

Introduction

At the first meeting, agreement should have been reached on if, and how, contact will be maintained between meetings (e.g., acceptability of phone calls and emails). Students will vary in their need for assistance between meetings. Students who make contact frequently may need guidance as to when it is appropriate to make contact, or encouragement to make small decisions for themselves as part of taking ownership of the research project. Conversely, other students may need to be encouraged to make contact between meetings if a pattern emerges of the student spending periods between meetings 'stuck' because they are unsure how to proceed.

When supervising group projects, it is important to copy all students into replies to email queries about the project. Students should also be encouraged to copy in all group members to their emails about the project. This will reduce the number of repeated questions received and ensure all group members have the same information.

Meeting summaries outline the actions that need to be completed before the next meeting. If you have not received a meeting summary within the specified timeframe, it is important to follow-up with the student(s). When the meeting summary is received, check it for accuracy and send back any corrections if necessary. The summary provides a useful reminder of anything you may need to do before the next meeting.

Encourage students to send you key readings that are influencing the shape of their research projects. Quickly skimming these articles between meetings will help you keep abreast of your students' thinking and evaluate their plans.

Checklist

1. Before the next meeting, ensure that
 - The meeting summary from the previous meeting has been received
 - Your required actions (as detailed in the meeting summary) have been completed
 - Key articles or other materials sent to you by the student have been skimmed

Future Supervision Meetings

Introduction

Supervision meetings provide the opportunity to review current progress, discuss issues and determine future directions of the research project. Unless alternative arrangements have been made for setting meeting agendas, the meeting summary sheet from the previous meeting provides a good starting point for each meeting. After reviewing progress on each of the items requiring action outlined in the meeting summary sheet, an update can be provided by the student(s) of any additional activities undertaken. The student(s) should be invited to ask any questions or express any concerns they may have about the project or their progress. An assessment of the current state of the project can then be made, leading to discussion of what needs to be done next in order to keep the project on track.

Rather than providing direct instructions, consider asking questions that allow the student(s) to work out what they need to do next and ways in which it may be done. Helping the student to evaluate their ideas and providing guidance, rather than explicit instructions, may take longer, but it will help the student(s) develop their research skills and take ownership of the project.

If you are supervising multiple research projects, it can be difficult to hold the details for all of them separately in your mind. Confusing projects can send a message to students that their project is not important to you. Students resent continually having to remind supervisors of their projects and where they are up to each time they meet. Successful strategies to avoid this include:

- Reading the previous meeting summary immediately before meeting
- Keeping information on projects prominently displayed (e.g., allocate a proportion of your white board to each project, where students draw/update their research model)
- Keeping a spreadsheet that contains details of progress on each projects so that you can see at a glance where the project is 'at'

At the end of each meeting, agreement should be reached on what each student and supervisor needs to do prior to the next meeting, and a meeting summary requested.

Checklist

1. At the end of each meeting, check the following have been achieved:

- Joint understanding of current status of project
- Concerns and issues discussed
- Agreement reached on next steps to be undertaken
- Activities to be completed by next meeting assigned
- Meeting summary requested

Providing Feedback

Introduction

Providing feedback to students on their work and progress is a core component of supervision. Feedback may be written or verbal and incorporates both formal feedback on drafts and verbal feedback during or between meetings. Common complaints from students are that they do not obtain any feedback from supervisors, they obtain insufficient feedback from supervisors, that feedback from supervisors is not timely or that they do not understand the feedback.

Informal feedback can be provided during every supervision meeting. The current status of the project can be assessed against the timeline. Feedback should recognise what has been achieved as well as identifying areas that are behind schedule or require improvement. Importantly, agreement on a way forward to address areas of concern needs to be reached.

Cadman and Cargill (2007) recommend supervisors and students clarify expectations surrounding feedback on drafts early in the supervisory relationship. Key areas to be negotiated regarding obtaining feedback on drafts are:

- Turnaround time
- Type of feedback
- Subsequent action following feedback
- Parameters for change
- Ownership of words

Students prefer feedback that is direct and actionable (Bitchener, Basturkmen, East & Meyer, 2011). Cardman and Cargill (2007) recommend that feedback provided is:

- Clear
- Specific
- Detailed
- Couched in descriptive rather judgemental language
- Addresses the work rather than the individual

Across disciplines, written feedback on dissertation drafts covers four key areas (Basturkmen, East & Bitchener, 2012; Bitchener, Basturkmen & East, 2010):

- content (e.g. gaps in theoretical understanding and content coverage; argument construction);
- requirements (e.g., formatting and referencing)
- cohesion/coherence (e.g. structure); and
- linguistic accuracy (e.g., construction of sentences and paragraphs).

It can be helpful to follow-up written feedback with a meeting in order to provide any necessary clarification or advice (Bitchener, Basturkmen, East & Meyer, 2011). Providing feedback, or discussing written feedback, in supervision meetings provides the opportunity for two-way feedback dialogue. The students most satisfied with their supervision report feedback is positive, evaluates current progress and is oriented towards what needs to be done next (de Kleijn, Mainhard, Meijer, Brekelmans, & Pilot; 2013).

To help ensure that the feedback you provide matches the stage of the draft, you can ask students to attach a cover sheet that indicates whether the draft is a planning draft, review draft or near final draft and specifying what type of feedback is required. On early drafts, feedback should focus on structure, content, coverage and relevance, not writing style. In later drafts, the emphasis may be on language, flow and grammar. If writing style appears to be a major issue, the student should be referred for assistance (see section on preparing for supervision).

Checklist

1. Reached agreement on
 - Turn-around time for drafts
 - Format of drafts submitted (printed or electronic)
 - Mode of feedback (hand-written comments, track changes and electronic comments, verbal feedback)

2. Feedback provided includes
 - Praise for what has been done well
 - Identification of areas requiring improvement
 - Suggested strategies for addressing areas requiring improvement

Tools

1. Providing Feedback on Drafts



PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS

When	Actions to Take
Always	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on drafts that is constructively critical and honest Provide key points of feedback in writing, so the student can reflect on it further over time • Always give positive feedback as well as criticisms • Keep a record of your feedback (in case there is a dispute down the track). • Ask the student to give you back key feedback on what they need to improve – this tests comprehension of your feedback
If a lot of material needs work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't overdo the detail • Don't focus on all deficiencies at once. • Prioritise what it is best to work on first (while pointing out the other areas that you can work on together later)
If there are errors in expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the problems through detailed annotation of a small section, but expect that the student will take on the responsibility for reviewing and revising the whole draft
At the following session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the revised draft with the original (containing your feedback) to gauge how well and how the student has engaged with and developed from your feedback
If the improvement is superficial or limited on future drafts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't shy away from expressing concerns about progress • Consider whether there are underlying factors impeding the student's capacity to improve (e.g. gaps in conceptual understanding, lack of academic discourse knowledge, English comprehension) • Suggest the student consider adopting a more strategic approach making good use of any support available to assist the student to better address these factors

Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/rst-ebook> (C3.4 Providing feedback on drafts) with additional material from <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/pre-candidature-supervision>

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>



Assisting Your Student to Develop a Research Question

Introduction

As a supervisor, you may have provided your student with a research topic, your student may have approached you with a research topic, or together you may have negotiated a research topic. Regardless of the source of the topic, the student will be required to develop a research question for their dissertation research. Developing a research question is a key stage of the research process as it drives decisions about research design and methods (Agee, 2009). To encourage student ownership of the research project, ensure that the student is involved as much as possible in making decisions about the research question. Even if you have strong ideas of what the research question should be, it is important that the student works through the process of developing a research question as part of their research training. Your role as supervisor is to guide this process in order to ensure that the final version of the research question provides the basis for a research project that is achievable within the constraints of the program.

Many Undergraduate students struggle with the task of developing a research question (Todd et al., 2004), especially “a ‘researchable’ research question” (p. 345). A good starting point is to encourage your students to look at what has already been done in their topic area, with the view to identifying gaps in the literature. You can direct them towards previous dissertations, review articles and recent key articles on the topic, encouraging them to focus on the ‘future directions’ sections.

Once agreement has been reached on a general research idea within the topic of interest, you can help your student formulate the idea into a researchable research question. Research questions may be descriptive, relational or causal (Meadows, 2003). The specific process for writing the research question, and the resultant questions, varies between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms.

The PICO model (see Stone, 2002) is widely used for developing questions for quantitative research (especially in the health sciences). It can be used to help the student identify the key components necessary to specify a research question for experimental/quasi-experimental research:

- **P**articipant, **P**opulation or **P**roblem
- **I**ntervention or **I**ndependent Variable
- **C**omparison/control
- **O**utcomes of interest (DVs)

A well-specified quantitative research question guides the development of research hypotheses.

Research questions in qualitative research tend to be less specific, are frequently seen as a starting point or ‘provisional’ research question, and may be exploratory in nature. A qualitative research question provides an initial focus for the research and may be modified during the research process (Agee, 2009; Frankel & Devers, 2000).

In both quantitative and qualitative research projects, difficulties can arise when either a) a student decides on a research question too early, without sufficient knowledge of what research has previously been conducted, or b) when a student is indecisive and take too long to decide on a research question. To avoid these problems, establish a timeframe for development of the research

question and ask the student to provide you with a brief summary of the literature they have consulted in developing the research question.

Checklist

1. The research question developed by the student can be checked for the following characteristics (adapted from Beckman & Earthman, 2010)
 - Importance/relevance
 - Specificity (for quantitative research contains relevant PICO elements)
 - Measurability
 - Derived from previous research, literature or observations
 - Interest to student

Tools

1. [Example of use of PICO for developing quantitative and qualitative research questions within an Honours unit \(includes PICO worksheet\)](#)
2. [Worksheet for students to develop and start to evaluate possible research questions](#)

Guiding the Literature Review

Introduction

All dissertations include a literature review. Depending upon your discipline, students may have anywhere from no to considerable experience in writing literature reviews or essays. Bruce (1994) cautions that it cannot be assumed that students share a common understanding of literature reviews upon commencing a dissertation, highlighting the need to discuss with your students exactly what is required.

As a supervisor, your responsibility is to guide your students in conducting the literature search, evaluating the literature and writing the review, but not doing it for them! Instead, focus on teaching the students the skills they need to complete this task, and providing feedback.

The first step in the process of preparing a literature review is identifying the relevant literature. While you might want to start by directing your students to a few key publications within their topic area, you will need to check if your students have the knowledge and skills required to effectively search for relevant literature themselves. This includes:

- Knowledge of relevant library databases
- How to use search strategies and Boolean expressions within databases
- How to cite forward and backwards from key articles
- How to generate a list of topic-specific search terms (and variations of these)

Many university libraries now provide guides for students on literature searching (see, for example, Curtin University's Libguide '[Search the Literature](#)') and these provide a good starting point for students who are inexperienced in conducting thorough literature searches. If your student is experiencing difficulties finding literature directly relevant to their topic, s/he may need to be assisted to increase the level of abstraction of search terms in their literature search.

Once a student has completed their initial literature searching, encourage them to set up a series of 'alerts' for databases, journals and articles so that s/he can be directly notified when new relevant research is published. Information on how to set up alerts is provided [here](#).

The second step in the process of preparing a literature review is reading, evaluating and organising the literature. Share with your students your preferred way of taking notes and organising material, while being sensitive to preferences for electronic or manual methods (e.g., use of index cards versus data extraction spreadsheets and/or referencing software).

Encourage your students to self-reflect on the literature they have found. Bruce (1994) suggests the following questions:

- *What is the present state of my list of references? Is it up to date in my areas of present interest? Is it adequate?
- *What literature searching have I done this fortnight? Are there any new areas that I have become interested in which I may need to search on?
- * What have I read recently? Have I found time to read recently?
- * What have I learned from the literature this fortnight? Have I changed, in any way, my understanding of the area in which I am working?

* Is what I have read going to influence my research in any way? Has it given me any ideas which I need to consider and incorporate?

* Have I been writing about what I have read? Do I need to reconsider how what I have been reading fits into my research? (pp. 227-228)

Prior to commencing writing, ask the student to bring an outline of the proposed literature review to a meeting. Work together to workshop the outline, ensuring that the outline funnels from the broad area to the specific research topic, covers all essential areas and has a logical sequencing. The outline agreed upon at this point should not be seen as the final outline, but rather as the starting point of a 'living' document (Denney & Tewksbury, 2013) that is likely to change as the student begins to write.

A useful strategy for working with students who are finding the thought of writing a literature review overwhelming is to identify one area of the literature review from the agreed outline to work on first, without worrying about how it fits with other sections. This process can be repeated until a first draft of each section has been written. The sections can then be merged into one document, with the focus switching to the overall 'story', identifying redundancies, linking sections and improving sequencing and flow.

Regardless of previous experience, one area in which students commonly experience difficulties is in critically evaluating literature for the literature review, both at the level of the individual publication and in synthesising across publications. Students need to decide which publications are worth including in the literature review and which are not. Wakefield (2014, Table 3) provides a useful list of questions that students can use to assess each publication in terms of relevance and quality. The [Template Strategy for Dealing with the Literature](#) provides a template for recording information about publications and a methodology for thinking about how each publication relates to the research question. If more specific guidance is needed, a series of worksheets for evaluating differing types of research can be downloaded from the [Critical Appraisal Skills Program](#) website.

Ideally, literature reviews provide a well written, comprehensive, critical, integrated review of previous literature. This requires comparing and contrasting theories and concepts, analysing merits and limitations of previous findings, identifying theoretical and methodological issues, synthesising and reformulating arguments and strategic and selective referencing to support underpinning arguments (Ridley, 2008). Typically, first drafts of literature reviews from students are far from this ideal, instead adopting a descriptive approach. This frequently takes the form of one paragraph per article reviewed with limited, if any, synthesis across studies. [Randolph \(2009\)](#) provides a useful review article on writing a dissertation literature review. You might like to share this article with your student(s), and use the rubric (Table 3) when providing feedback. Granello (2001) maps stages of literature reviews to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, providing a useful exercise that students can use to first identify the current stage of their literature review, and then use outlined strategies to 'move' the literature review up to the next level.

While you can provide feedback to your student on drafts of the literature review, it is important that you do not write or heavily edit sections of the literature review. Where there are repeated errors, point out what is wrong and how it can be corrected the first time it occurs in the document and ask the student to check throughout for further instances and make changes. This works well for spelling, grammar, and referencing errors in particular. Be wary of using 'track changes' in Word and

editing the document. It is preferable to use the comment function of Word to describe the problem and how to address it rather than making the changes yourself. While it is easier for students to 'accept' changes, they will learn more from identifying and correcting further occurrences themselves. If on a final reading of the document, it reads more like your work than the students, you have probably gone too far.

Checklist

1. Prior to commencing literature searching, ensure the student knows
 - Relevant library databases
 - How to use search strategies and Boolean expressions within databases
 - How to cite forward and backwards from key articles
 - How to generate a list of topic-specific search terms
 - How to set up alerts

2. Check that your student has
 - A method for organising material
 - Prepared an outline for the literature review prior to writing

Tools

1. Template Strategy for Dealing with the Literature
2. Worksheets for Evaluating Research

TOOL



Step 4: What is the significance of my new knowledge, in terms of issue, scope, methodology, theory or findings?

As simply saying something is different from what's already in the literature is not sufficient, students and supervisors can together explore further questions, such as:

- Why do we need this new information?
- How will it be significant? ,
- How might this new knowledge change the way we think about what we can read in the existing literature?
- Will the project provide new theoretical or methodological insights?
- Will it have practical as well as intellectual outcomes?
- Will it cause people to think about the issue in a new way?

Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/rst-ebook> (C3.2 Template strategy for dealing with the literature)

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>



Guiding the Development of the Research Proposal

Introduction

Many students begin a dissertation project with little understanding of research proposals (Emmanuel & Gray, 2003). As a supervisor, it is your responsibility to help the student shape their research ideas into a research project that is achievable within the program constraints (e.g., time and resource availability). The research proposal is of key importance as it provides a detailed plan of what the student will be doing for the rest of the project. Where research proposals are submitted for assessment, it also provides the means for an independent assessment of the feasibility of the research project.

A well-specified research question provides a sound basis for fleshing out a research proposal. For quantitative (but not qualitative) projects, one or more hypotheses will need to be developed for testing. Students should make the first attempt to write the hypotheses, and if they have used the PICO model to develop their research question this should be relatively straight-forward as decisions regarding participants, independent and dependent variables (where applicable) control or comparison groups will already have been made. However, the resulting hypotheses may need to be workshopped to ensure they met the requirements for good hypotheses (clearly stated, derived from theory, identify relationships between variables, testable and understandable; Dunn, 1999).

Most research proposals will begin with a short introduction/literature review component. This should include theoretical literature that provides the theoretical underpinning to the study and research literature that provides the essential empirical background to the study. If your student has already written a literature review, they may be able to cut and paste key segments to rework for the introduction to the research proposal.

The introduction should lead into a rationale for the proposed research. This is often one of the weakest/neglected sections in student dissertations. Encourage your student to articulate why the proposed research is important, identify the gap in the research literature the research is designed to address and highlight the significance of the proposed research.

The method section of the research proposal should detail exactly how the research will be conducted. For quantitative research projects, the previously completed PICO analysis will guide the decisions to be made about participants and variables to be measured. In order to develop the research competency of students, it is important that students are encouraged to think through the options available and research possible methodologies, measures and analyses. As a supervisor, you may need to help guide them towards relevant options and materials, ask them to justify their choices and discuss the feasibility of their ideas, while supporting their ownership of the project.

In jointly deciding upon a suitable methodology and analysis for the project, it will be important to take into account your student(s)' research capabilities. Discuss with your students their skills and confidence in conducting research and analysing data and how they have gone with previous research methods and (where relevant) statistics units. Many students will learn new methods and analysis techniques as part of their dissertation research, but ensure that what is proposed is not too big a leap from their current skill levels. It is also important to reflect on your own experience in the methodologies and analysis under consideration. Unless external research/statistical support is available for the students, be wary of supervising projects with methodologies or analyses with which you have no previous experience, as you may find it difficult to provide the guidance needed.

Some programs require research proposals to include an anticipated difficulties section. Whether or not this is a requirement, it is useful to discuss with the student the potential problems that might arise and develop back-up plans for dealing with these. Common difficulties in dissertation projects include difficulties in recruiting participants, high participant drop-out rates, difficulties in obtaining access to desired measures or apparatus, and time delays when working with external organisations or waiting for ethics approval.

Your student may be required to provide a timeline and budget as part of the research project. Unless your student has completed research previously, you will need to provide guidance on how much time each of the specified activities will require. For example, when calculating the time required per interview, include time required for making interview arrangements, travel and transcribing, in addition to the actual interview. Projects will need to be kept within a minimal budget unless funding has been secured. Research proposals for dissertation research are always limited by time and financial constraints, and frequently compromises have to be made. Remind your student that *“there is no such thing as a perfect research proposal (or dissertation)”* (Punch, 2006: p. 85) and that your shared goal is the development of a research proposal that sets out a program of research that is achievable within the program constraints.

While you will be guiding each student towards appropriate literature on methodologies, methods and analysis, and helping them shape their ideas into a feasible research project, it is the student’s responsibility to write the research proposal, and you should not write any part of the proposal yourself. Encourage your student to take ownership of the project. You might want to start by asking them to prepare a one-page overview of the research proposal for discussion. You can provide feedback in meetings and on draft(s) of the research proposal. The final version of the research proposal should provide a detailed plan of the activities through to project completion.

Checklist

1. Check the feasibility of the project outlined in the research proposal
 - Achievable within the time frame
 - Resources required are available
 - Student has (or can develop) the skill set required
 - Back-up plans developed for anticipated difficulties

Tools

1. One Page Research Proposal Summary

TOOL



ONE PAGE RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Once students have developed a research question, they are ready to start preparing a research proposal. The first step in this process is to draft out the possible shape of the study. This often occurs while the student is reviewing associated literature and reading about the available approaches and methods that may suit the planned research. An over-emphasis on literature review at this stage can often, however, be to the detriment of:

- crafting the practical dimensions of the study,
- clarifying what it focuses on, and
- clarifying how it will be done.

The following format for a One-page Research Proposal Summary helps students to focus by gaining a clear idea of the proposed direction of the study on one page. The aim is to capture the essence of the project, rather than produce many pages that often obscure the structure of the study. This format can be modified for diverse disciplines, so that students can:

- make a short statement to supervisors about their intended study, or
- compare the options that are confronting them at that time.

One-page Research Proposal Summary	
Title An exploration of...	Focus, location, participants, processes, goals.
Purpose of Study This study will...do what and produce what	
Justification Why spend the time – what is the need and value? Why I can complete it – my knowledge and network.	
Academic Objective The study will contribute to what field of study? What are key theories and concepts in the field?	
Practical Objective This study will contribute to...What problem	
Research Questions/Hypotheses What is happening? What is the impact? What is working?	
Research Design What research approach - why? What sample? What is the unit of analysis?	
Research Method Collect what from who how when and where?	Case study – survey – record scan – observation – focus groups – interviews- secondary data



TOOL



Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/rst-ebook> (C2.2 Outlining a possible shape for the study)

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>

Project Issues

Introduction

For most students, the dissertation research will be the largest project they have been required to manage. This may be their first experience with independent, self-directed study and many will have little idea of what will be expected (Harrison & Whalley, 2008; Todd et al., 2004). Undergraduate students, in particular, may struggle with the aspects of managing a research project. Based on interviews with Undergraduate students, Todd et al. (2004) noted a particular area of difficulty for Undergraduate students was completing the project within the required time frame. Students may have difficulty in balancing the time required for their dissertation research with time required for other coursework units (Harrison & Whalley, 2008; Todd et al., 2004). This can result in students neglecting other coursework in order to focus on the dissertation research. Conversely, some students delay their dissertation research in order to focus on their course work. Completing on time can be particularly an issue for students who have developed the habit of working on assessments only when a deadline is looming.

As a supervisor, there are things you can do to help new students with their time management. First, when developing timelines for projects, ask students to include the dates of assessments due for coursework units (note: this information should not be included on the timeline submitted with the research proposal). At this stage, discuss with students their preferred way of working. Would they rather work on the dissertation project and coursework assessments each week, or allocate blocks of time to different activities? The method selected does not matter so much as deciding how time will be managed in order to meet the requirements of both the dissertation and coursework. Second, check with the student at each meeting their progress against the timeline for dissertation tasks. If the student is falling behind, discuss with the students the reasons for the delay, and assist them to work out a strategy for getting back on track.

There are a number of possible causes for a student to fall behind on dissertation project tasks. Check first whether the issue is to do with the design of the project. Sometimes new (and experienced!) supervisors allow a student to undertake a research project that is either too complex for the level of the student/program, or too large to be completed on time. If this becomes apparent when checking progress, it needs to be addressed immediately. Discuss with your student the issues they are facing and possible alternatives, and then seek the advice of your dissertation coordinator. Possible solutions include modifying the project or arranging an extension.

Sometimes a student falls behind because of project issues outside their control. This may include delays in obtaining ethics approval, difficulty in obtaining needed resources or participants, or key organisations withdrawing from the project. Often issues that arise may have previously been foreseen as 'anticipated difficulties' when preparing the research proposal and back-up plans established. If not, seek the advice of the dissertation coordinator and consider modifying the project and/or arranging an extension.

If the project design is fine and there are no issues outside the student's control impeding progress, focus on the student's time management skills. If the issue appears to be a lack of student motivation, see the section on maintaining student progress.

Checklist

1. Work with the student to identify the source of the project issue
 - Time management
 - Motivation
 - Complexity/size of project
 - Issue outside their control
 - Other
2. Work with your student to identify and evaluate possible solutions (see tool below)
3. Develop a strategy to address the issue
4. Monitor project progress

Tools

1. [Structured Problem Solving Worksheet](#)

Guiding Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

Your responsibility as a supervisor is to guide your students in data collection, analysis and interpretation, but not to do it for them. For research that includes human or animal participants, it is your responsibility as a supervisor to ensure that data collection does not begin until ethics approval has been obtained. Further, it is your responsibility to ensure that data collection is completed in accordance with ethical requirements.

While it is the student's responsibility to collect data, it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the student is adequately equipped to do so. As a supervisor you may need to provide training for your student (e.g., in performing required lab tasks or conducting interviews) and may facilitate access to research participants. This might include providing introductions to relevant organisations, making suggestions regarding recruitment, or sending out survey links through one of your networks.

As a supervisor, you will generally not be actively involved in the data collection (the exception to this may be where the student is completing their dissertation as part of a larger project you are engaged in). However, you do have responsibility to monitor the progress of data collection. It can be useful to meet with your student shortly after they have begun data collection to assess how it is going and discuss any difficulties experienced. Identifying problems at this stage can avert more serious problems later down the track.

Once data collection is complete, students will be required to enter their data and analyse their data. Data entry is the student's responsibility and as a supervisor you may want to check that this has been completed to the standard required (e.g., check the quality of interview transcription). As part of their research proposal, students will have specified their proposed analysis, but this may need to be revisited once data collection and data entry is complete to examine whether the proposed analysis is still viable. Changes may be required if there were modifications to the project, limitations in the amount or type of data collected, or violations of assumptions underlying statistical tests. Work with your student to identify alternative analyses where required. Where a research/statistical adviser is available as part of the program, you may like to refer your student to discuss possible changes. Where there is no advisor available and you are unsure of the best way to proceed, please seek advice from the dissertation coordinator or an experienced supervisor.

It is the student's responsibility to conduct the analysis. As a supervisor you can provide guidance and training, but must not conduct the actual analysis. Prior to the student beginning the analysis, discuss with your student their approach to the analysis and the steps that will be required. For quantitative research, ensure your student screens and cleans the data and tests assumptions underlying statistical tests prior to commencing analysis. Regardless of the type of analysis, highlight the importance of rigour. If necessary you can demonstrate to students how to conduct analyses, but this should be done on a different dataset (quantitative) or transcripts/materials (qualitative) than the student will be analysing. A suggested guideline is never to touch students' dissertation datasets, to ensure that the analysis represents the student's own work.

Students may struggle with writing up the results from their analyses. If they have not already done so, suggest they find a recent article or dissertation that has used the same type of analysis, and use

this as a model. It will also be important to direct them to disciplinary style manuals. Some statistical manuals also provide information on how to write up the results for specific types of analyses (see, for example, Allen, Bennett & Heritage, 2014).

Upon completion of the analysis, ask the student to explain to you in their own words the findings, and the implications of the findings. Through questioning encourage your student to think about both theoretical and practical implications, the limitations and strengths of the research they have conducted and directions for future research. Encourage them to think about their findings in relation to previous research. Many programs do not allow supervisors to read drafts of the discussion section of dissertations so it is important that you ensure your student knows what is expected from the discussion section.

Some students become distressed when their quantitative analyses produce non-significant results. As a supervisor, while acknowledging how disappointing this must be, it is important to point out that marking of the dissertation is based on the rigour of the analysis, rather than the significance of the findings. It is important that you continue to support the student in their dissertation preparation, regardless of the significance and/or likelihood of being able to publish the results.

Checklist

1. Your responsibilities as a supervisor are to:

- Check that your student has the skills required to collect the data
- Monitor the progress of data collection
- Check that data is being entered correctly
- Identify alternative analyses where required
- Provide guidance on analysis and interpretation

Writing Academically

Introduction

Some coursework dissertation students struggle with writing academically. Writing problems identified in Undergraduate dissertations include poor structure, lack of coherence, work that is more descriptive rather than analytical, and failure to focus on addressing the research questions (Todd, Smith & Bannister, 2006). Students whose first language is not English may face particular difficulties in writing academically to meet the required standard for dissertations.

Universities (and academics) vary in whether they consider the teaching of academic writing to be the responsibility of disciplinary academic staff or writing specialists (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Zhu, 2004). Supervisors may feel more equipped to provide feedback on content than writing, and can struggle to articulate how to improve writing to reach academic standards (Pare, 2011). As part of preparing for supervision you may have identified the resources available to support student writing at your university. Where they exist, referring students to writing groups and workshops is recommended (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Pare, 2011).

As a supervisor, encourage your students to write often throughout the dissertation process (Pare, 2011). In addition to providing content-related feedback on drafts, also provide feedback on writing and technical components such as grammar, spelling and presentation (Todd et al., 2006). Under no circumstances should you rewrite your student's work to bring it up to an acceptable standard.

Checklist

1. If your student is experiencing difficulties in writing academically
 - Refer on to available writing support services within your university
 - Provide feedback on technical component of writing

Tools

1. Some universities offer self-assessment quizzes for students that direct them toward suitable workshops and seminars. You might like to work through this with your student if they are having difficulties with their writing. Here is an [example self-assessment quiz](#) from Curtin University.

Maintaining Student Progress

Introduction

Some students experience difficulties in maintaining motivation or making progress in their dissertation research. Students may not feel able to approach supervisors about difficulties they are facing (Manathunga, 2005), particularly when these relate to personal, research project and supervisory issues. Some supervisors do not pick up on cues that students are experiencing difficulties. Warning signs that a student has stalled progress on dissertation research include:

- Continual alterations in topic and planned activities
- Avoiding communicating and meeting with supervisor
- Isolation from school and peers
- Not submitting work for review (Manathunga, 2005)

Other signs supervisors have reported include:

- Lack of interest in topic
- Not taking ownership of the project
- Not preparing for meetings
- Making no obvious progress

Ahern and Manathunga (2004) recommend where progress has stalled, supervisors help the student to determine the nature of the block; cognitive, social, or emotional; and then decide on a course of action.

- **Cognitive domain** blockages may result from limited academic skills (writing, library skills, IT skills) or difficulties in conceptualisation.
 - For identified skill deficits, refer the student to available courses or resources
 - For identified conceptualising difficulties, model the thought processes involved
- **Affective domain** blockages may result from performance anxiety, procrastination or personality clashes.
 - For performance anxiety, first check for, and address, cognitive domain deficits. If anxiety continues, consider breaking the dissertation down into smaller tasks, provide encouragement and/or refer to counselling
 - For procrastination, after assessing and addressing possible causes (including performance anxiety and cognitive domain difficulties), an ultimatum may be required
 - Personality clashes may result from differences in expectations or differences in conceptions and approaches to research and learning. If discussions of expectations do not result in a satisfactory working relationship a change in supervisor may be advisable.
- **Social domain** blockages result from the student's personal, social and financial circumstances restricting time available to focus on research. Options that may need to be considered include changing to part-time enrolment, deferring or withdrawing.

Being assigned a research topic (rather than choosing a topic) can also be a source of lack of motivation for students. It can be difficult to motivate a student who has been assigned a topic of no

inherent interest to them. As a supervisor, you will need to help your students to understand the importance of the research, encourage them to take ownership of the project and think of the dissertation project as providing transferable skills and a stepping stone towards their futures. Often students who start a project on a topic outside of their areas of interest become engaged over time.

Checklist

1. If your student is not making satisfactory progress and the issue is not outside their control, work with her/him to identify the issue
 - Skill deficits
 - Conceptualising deficits
 - Performance anxiety/perfectionism
 - Procrastination
 - Personality clashes
 - Personal life
2. Work with your student to identify and evaluate possible solutions (the [Structured Problem Solving Worksheet](#) recommended for project issues may also be of use here)
3. Develop a strategy to address the issue
4. Monitor project progress

Tools

1. Managing Students' Negative Emotions During the Supervisory Relationship
2. If Progress is Marginal



MANAGING STUDENTS' NEGATIVE EMOTIONS DURING THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

For the individual supervisor, this tool aims to

- Make you aware of the range of emotions, both positive and negative, a student is likely to experience.
- Enable you to be prepared to discuss these emotions with the student and suggest ways for dealing with them.
- Point the student towards strategies they can use to manage their own emotions.

Emotional States

Research on PhD students (Morrison-Saunders et al., 2005) suggests that

- Emotional states experienced by dissertation students at particular stages of the dissertation process are common.
- The dissertation process can be seen as an 'emotional rollercoaster'.
- In the early phase of the dissertation, the student will potentially experience both positive and negative emotions – elation and enthusiasm, mixed with bewilderment, confusion and anxiety.
- In the middle phase of the dissertation process, the student may feel frustration, boredom, guilt and loneliness/isolation – due to realisation of the size of the project, the rigours of data collection, conflicts with employment and family and the essentially individual nature of the dissertation research.
- Positive emotions also occur in the middle stage – excitement (at data collection and making progress), but this can be tempered by fear, frustration, loneliness and a sense of feeling rushed/running out of time.
- A 'slump in productivity and procrastination' are likely during the middle period.
- At the end stage of the dissertation process, mixed emotions may include frustration, anxiety, boredom and panic, but also elation and satisfaction
- Frustrations and tensions can occur in the relationship between supervisor and student, e.g. due to concerns about receiving timely or critical feedback
- Submission of the dissertation and particularly the long wait for a result is likely to be 'anticlimactic rather than celebratory'.

TOOL



Suggested strategies

These strategies are provided to initiate questions and discussions about the emotional state of the student. This may include asking questions such as:

- How are you feeling about the dissertation?
- Have you had any emotional issues with the dissertation that you would like to talk about?

This will inform what emotional state or phase the student is in and provides an opportunity to implement the following suggested strategies (adapted from Morrison-Saunders et al., 2005). It is important to reassure the student that these emotional responses are normal and are likely to be experienced by many dissertation students.

- Encourage your student to participate in informal student networking with their peers (as they often experience similar emotional states and can support each other)
- Suggest the student avoid working at home, if isolation is a problem
- Help the student carefully plan a timetable for work
- Suggest the student builds regular breaks and holidays into their work plan
- Keep the communication pathway open about emotions
- Be aware of the possibility of conflict in the supervisory relationship

Evaluating the Success of Strategies

At the following supervision meeting, reflect with the student on how the strategies worked to address emotional concerns. This can be repeated at subsequent meetings where emotions become apparent/important.

You could suggest the student keep a reflective journal of their emotions so that they can track and respond to them. Outcomes you should observe include:

- Greater commitment to and productivity with the dissertation project
- Student is happier and better able to cope with the dissertation
- Reduced signs of student 'giving up' or 'procrastinating'

Reference: Morrison-Saunders, A., Moore, S., Newsome, D. & Newsome, J. (2005). *Reflecting on the role of emotions in the PhD process*. Paper presented at Teaching and Learning Forum 2005, Murdoch University, WA, Australia.

Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/emotional-management>

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>





IF PROGRESS IS MARGINAL

Introduction:

While completing a dissertation can be an emotional rollercoaster, a supervisory relationship should threaten neither the health of any supervisor, supervised student or other member of the university community, nor their capacity for productive work. This tool focuses on assisting supervisors to recognise when identifying and attending to marginal progress can:

- safeguard health and productivity of that student, of all the members of a supervisory team and other members of the university community
- assist the student to regain the capacity to resume productive work toward completion of candidature.

Any supervisor can encounter a situation, where supervised students:

- appear unable to work productively with the current supervisory team, theoretical framework, or methodology
- appear to have lost (or failed to demonstrate) the required skills, commitment and other capacities necessary for completion of the dissertation
- need feedback and advice regarding the gap between the standards of work they are producing and the agreed measures of satisfactory progress.

The students may have:

- no ability to even identify barriers that need to be reviewed and addressed and identify strategies to resume productive work
- little control over the circumstances (e.g. an illness, financial problems, distressing family circumstances, data collection difficulties or unexpected action by an industry partner) blocking their productivity
- some ability to identify and address their productivity block.

In order to regain their capacity for productive work, some students may need:

- appropriate advice and support from health professionals or other support services on matters such as dealing with normal stress in an acceptable fashion or addressing sudden severe problems relating to their physical and/or mental health



- formal or informal advice on matters such as intermitting studies, applying for loans for emergency overseas travel to attend a funeral or visit sick relatives, lodging formal complaints
- a different supervisory team, theoretical framework, methodology or set of skills, tools and other resources
- a break from study to acquire required skills and perspectives or to address key financial, personal or family matters.

In raising these issues with students, supervisors need to take care to preserve appropriate interpersonal boundaries and provide assistance that:

- is appropriate to their supervisory role
- demonstrates concern for the health and well-being of all parties
- does not overwhelm the student
- does not take over work that properly belongs to the student, and
- does not leave the student unsupported.

Prompt action to discuss whether the progress made by a student is acceptable or marginal can protect the health, well-being and productivity of students, supervisors or other members of the university community. Allowing a student to drift into a prolonged period of minimal productivity can have far worse consequences for the student, supervisor team and university. A period of prolonged frustration, anxiety and depression may trigger behaviour that threatens the health and safety of the student or others, or expands the need for support from health professionals and other support services.

Following any evidence of marginal progress, the student and the supervisory team need to consider and document a plan to assist the student to resume productive work as quickly as possible. Since supervisors are limited in providing support, any exploration of additional support services for the student should be clearly and formally documented, as it is up to the individual student to determine when and whether to accept personal help offered by the university. The student must, however, be left in no doubt that timely and effective action to resume productive work is required and that continued marginal progress is likely to impact on completion of the dissertation.

Original Source: <http://researchsupervisiontoolkit.com/page/marginal-progress>

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>

The Supervisor-Student Relationship

Introduction

The supervisory relationship is a key component of dissertation research. A constructive, supportive relationship will help your student(s) meet the challenges of undertaking a dissertation.

Commencing a dissertation involves multiple transitions simultaneously: from directed to autonomous learning, from knowledge consumer to knowledge generator, from pupil to academic collaborator, and from being one-of-many taught to developing an individual relationship with a supervisor (Day & Bobeva, 2007). Many students have difficulty making the transition from course-taker to independent researcher (Lovitts, 2005) and as a supervisor you can support them through this process.

Goode (2007) argues that the privileged discourse of the 'independent learner' and 'self-directed learning' within higher education renders those are not independent and self-directed learners as 'deficit'. Students who may take longer to transition are seen as 'problematic' and 'hard work' to supervise (p. 592). Expectations that a student may become a self-directed autonomous researcher over the short period of a coursework dissertation may not be realistic. It is expected that over the course of a PhD a student will progress from "relative dependency to competent autonomy" (Gurr, 2001), suggesting that perhaps the more likely outcome for a student completing a coursework dissertation is relative dependency. Gurr (2001) produced the *Supervisor Student Alignment Model* that depicts hands on supervision as providing the appropriate level of support for dependent students. This model can be used by students and supervisors over time to assess the appropriate style of supervision according to the developing autonomy of the student.

The key to establishing a working supervisory relationship is to understand each other's expectations and agree upon roles and responsibilities accordingly. While setting expectations in the first meeting is essential, expectations will need to be discussed throughout the duration of the dissertation (Bui, 2014; Friedrich-Nel & MacKinnon, 2013; Spear, 2000; Wisker, 2009). Supervision needs change over the course of the dissertation and detecting and responding to the changing needs of the student characterises good supervision (Nulty, Kiley & Myers, 2009). Further, picking up on cues that a student is experiencing problems enables issues to be dealt with in a timely manner (Manathunga 2005). Students view supervisor responsiveness, guidance and support when facing issues as central to meeting their needs and advancing learning engagement (Brydon & Flynn, 2014).

Interpersonal relationships can also be the source of problems in a supervisory relationship. Gunnarsson, Jonasson and Billhult (2013) identified interpersonal relationships as one of five categories of disagreements between students and supervisors, noting the role of personality differences, emotions and preconceptions. The dual supervisory roles of supporting the student while demanding work to an acceptable standard can strain interpersonal relationships between supervisor and student. A professional working relationship needs to be maintained. Where difficulties continue you may want to consult with your dissertation coordinator.

Students may disclose health, welfare or other life issues during supervision. Pastoral care for the student is sometimes included within the responsibilities of supervisors, but this may not always be possible within the time constraints of supervision. Instead, once issues have been identified your responsibility lies with referring the student to appropriate support services.

As a supervisor, you will be involved in mentoring students. Even the act of supervising a dissertation is viewed as “essentially mentoring in the professional writing context” (Crawford, 2011). However, your responsibilities as a supervisor do not end with the submission of the dissertation. Either during or following the period of supervision, your students are likely to seek your advice in relation to further studies and/or careers. As a supervisor, you may be asked to provide referee reports or letters of recommendation to support higher degree and job applications.

In addition to these student-driven requests, you may want to actively mentor your students, contributing to their professional and personal development. This may include activities such as encouraging your students to present their research findings at conferences, co-authoring manuscripts for submission to journals and encouraging your student to undertake further studies. Some of the students you supervise and mentor may stay in contact for a number of years.

Tools

1. Effective Supervisor - Student Communication

TOOL



If there are communication difficulties...

Here are some steps you might consider taking, if you and your student have some difficulty understanding what each other says (e.g. if either of you speaks English with an accent that the other isn't used to):

- using the relevant feature of MS Word to annotate soft copies of your student' work to avoid any difficulty regarding interpretation of your handwritten comments,
- agreeing that both of you will try to speak a little more slowly and avoid or explain any unfamiliar different words,
- encouraging your student to record the conversation, so that it can be replayed later,
- asking your student to email some key questions to you before each meeting, and encouraging your student to seek support and advice from relevant support services in your university and other dissertation students in your School, who might have experienced similar difficulties.

Original Source: Improving HDR Supervisor Practice (G1.3 Effective supervisor-student communication (adapted from GRIP Module 3)

Modified for use with coursework dissertation students: Lynne Roberts, Curtin University, Lynne.Roberts@curtin.edu.au

Modified Version Source: <http://www.dissertationsupervision.org/>



Cross-cultural Supervision

International Students

As a supervisor you can expect to supervise students from a wide range of backgrounds. Many of Australia's coursework dissertation students are international students. In 2012, 34,643 international students completed a Masters by Coursework degree in an Australian university, with a further 1,528 completing an Honours degree. This represented more than half (53.7%) of all Masters by Coursework and 13.1% of Honours completions (Department of Industry, 2013).

Difficulties international students enrolled in dissertation programs may experience include:

- Difficulty with written and spoken English: approximately a quarter of international students report difficulties in this area, potentially leading to misunderstandings in supervision and difficulties in writing a dissertation (Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013; Yeoh, Le & Doan, 2013)
- Difficulty with adopting western academic writing conventions (Wang & Li, 2012) and writing critically (Huang, 2007)
- Difficulties in adjusting to a new culture (Brown, 2007) with unfamiliar requirements and processes (Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013)
- Being separated from family and support networks(Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013)
- Differences in learning approaches (dependent versus independent) between the home and host country (Yeoh, Le & Doan, 2013) that can include reluctance to critically engage both in written work and in supervision (Brown, 2007; Wang & Li, 2012)
- Cultural differences in acceptable practices within hierarchical relationships (Winchester-Seeto et al, 2013), including difficulties in asking for help when needed (Brown, 2007)
- Unfamiliarity with plagiarism policies (Yeoh, Le & Doan, 2013)

These difficulties can impact on the supervisory relationship, requiring

- Sensitivity to cultural differences, the student's needs and adjustment (Yeoh, Le & Doan, 2013)
- Development of effective communication(Wang & Li, 2012; Yeoh & Doan, 2013) and intercultural competence (Durkin, 2008)
- Negotiation of western academic norms with student's cultural norms and values to develop a 'middle way' (Durkin, 2008)
- The need to discuss expectations and set boundaries on supervisor time and task involvement (Brown, 2007)
- Providing examples of critical analysis and critical writing (Huang, 2007)

Questions raised in the literature include:

- Is it the individual supervisor or the institution that has responsibility for meeting the additional needs of international students? (Brown, 2007)
- Should additional workload hours be allocated to supervisors of international students? (Brown, 2007)
- To what extent should the supervisor engage in pastoral care? (Brown, 2007)

As a new supervisor of one or more international students, you will need to acquaint yourself with the services provided by the university for international students. While arrangements may vary

between universities and programs, it is unlikely that you will be provided with additional workload hours for supervising international students, so take advantage of any services your university offers. To keep within your workload allocation for supervision, it is probably unrealistic to engage in pastoral care, beyond identifying issues that your student faces and referring on to relevant services.

It is important to note that international students will vary from one another in their supervisory needs. Setting of expectations will be crucial to ensure clear understanding of supervisor and student roles in the dissertation process. While conducting a research skill audit is important for all students, it is especially important for international students who may have had different training in research methods than students who have completed all their studies within your university.

Indigenous Students and Supervisors

You may also supervise Indigenous students in coursework dissertations. The number of Indigenous student completing Honours (2003 38 completions; 2012 62 completions) and Masters by Coursework (2003 104 completions; 2012 188 completions) degrees across Australia has almost doubled in the past decade (Department of Industry, 2013). However, this represent only 1% of Honours and 0.3% of Masters by Coursework degrees completed, substantially less than the 2.2% parity figure recommended in the *Report of the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012).

The limited research to date on supervision of Indigenous dissertation students has mainly focussed on doctoral students. This research indicates that factors contributing to difficulties Indigenous students enrolled in dissertation programs may experience include:

- Cultural insensitivity by students and staff (Schofield, O'Brien & Gilroy, 2013)
- Cultural responsibility and fear of cultural alienation (Henry, 2007; Trudgett, 2011)
- Lack of understanding by supervisors of processes and protocols involved in conducting research within Indigenous communities (Trudgett, 2014)
- A preference for Indigenous epistemological approaches over western research methodologies imposed by supervisors (Foley, 2003)
- Community and family responsibilities (Trudgett, 2014)
- Limited number of Indigenous supervisors available

A strong supervisory relationship between supervisor(s) and the Indigenous student is central to successful completion of the dissertation (Trudgett, 2014). Henry (2007) posits the key principle underlying this as “respect for, and valuing and inclusion of, Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing within Aboriginal candidates’ learning” (p. 155). Culturally appropriate supervision needs to occur in a context of cultural safety that acknowledges the student’s cultural positioning (Trudgett, 2014). With the majority of supervision of Indigenous students provided by non-Indigenous supervisors (Trudgett, 2011), there is the potential for paternalistic relationships.

Indigenous supervisors are in high demand, and if you are an Indigenous supervisor you may experience pressure to supervise increasing numbers of Indigenous students. Supervision takes time, and it will be important not to take on more students than you can effectively supervise. One possibility to lighten the load is to co-supervise students. However, be careful that in co-supervision arrangements your role is not seen solely as a cultural broker, and that you have the opportunity to contribute to all aspects of the research.

Tools

1. The [Cross Cultural Supervision Project](#) provides strategies for maintaining relationships, managing expectations and supervision teams for cross cultural supervision. Whilst written for supervisors of PhD candidates, many of the strategies are relevant for use with coursework students.

Group Projects

Introduction

As the number of coursework dissertation students expands, group projects (several students working on one project under the supervisor of one or more supervisors) are increasingly being adopted in place of one-to-one supervision. Typically, while students share project development and data collection, each will have their own research question, conduct their own analyses and write an individual research proposal and dissertation.

Previous research has suggested that most Undergraduate and Honours dissertation students positively view their group supervision experiences, appreciating peer support, collective problem-solving and the opportunity to compare progress (Akister, Williams & Maynard, 2009; Baker, Cluett, Ireland, Reading, & Rourke, 2013). Further, greater student engagement and higher on-time completion rates have been reported for group-supervised dissertation students (Akister, et al., 2009) and no differences have been reported in outcomes (grades) compared to individually supervised students (Baker et al., 2013).

However, difficulties in group projects have also been noted in previous research. These include group members who do not prepare or actively participate in meetings, concern that supervision provides insufficient focus on individual dissertations, and issues between group members (Kanagasniemi, Ahonen, Liikanen & Utriainen, 2011; Utriainen, Ahonen, Kanagasniemi, & Liikanen, 2011). Experienced supervisors have identified further issues including social loafing; difficulty in meeting the needs of all group members; dealing with dominant, disruptive or manipulative group members; and reforming the group and project activities when members drop out.

Limited information is provided in the literature on how to address supervisory issues associated with managing groups. However, the importance of setting clear expectations (a 'contract') at the beginning of the relationship has been emphasised (Kanagasniemi et al., 2011). Based on a review of the literature on team work for students, Hansen (2006) recommended a number of strategies to improve the performance and satisfaction of student teams. Recommendations that are relevant to supervising groups of dissertation students include emphasising teamwork, setting clear goals, assigning roles, and incorporating peer evaluations. Other strategies recommended by experienced supervisors are developing a group charter and time line, keeping minutes of group meetings, using a Gantt chart to allocate tasks with names of students as resources, and risk planning. Experienced supervisors also stress the importance of the supervisor not doing too much, instead promoting group ownership of the project. Where group dynamic problems develop, it is important to address these straight away, including addressing social loafing.

Checklist

1. As a supervisor of group projects:
 - Set clear expectations for the functioning of the group
 - Develop a group contract
 - Deal with group problems as soon as they arise

Tools

1. The University of Technology Sydney provides an exercise for developing a [Group Charter](#)
2. The University of Technology Sydney also provides a [Template for Group Meetings](#)

Managing Your Supervisory Workload

Introduction

As a new supervisor you may struggle to balance supervision with other academic duties, and insufficient information on the expected workload associated with supervision may contribute to this (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009). Workload allocations for supervision vary across universities and level of dissertation (Melrose, 2002), so it is important that you find out the workload hours allocated for each student you supervise, and the school/department's expectations of the role of supervisors.

Keep the time spent on supervision as close to workload allocation as possible. Once you know how many hours you have been allocated for supervision in total, calculate the appropriate time allocation per student. This time allocation needs to cover both direct contact with the student (e.g., face-to-face or virtual meetings) and time for reading and commenting on drafts. If the time allocation appears insufficient for one-to-one supervision, consider alternative models of supervision. For example, you might consider supervising students in groups (all working on the same research topic) or alternating individual supervision (focusing on the individual's project) with group supervision (focussing on common aspects across student projects such as how to write critically). In addition to protecting your sanity(!), knowing the time you have allocated and adopting a supervision style to fit within the time allocation will help in setting realistic expectations for supervision. Be upfront with your students about the time you will have available and what will be achievable. Working within the time allocation will also assist in reducing supervision inequities across students and supervisors.

The issue of inequitable treatment of students by supervisors has been raised in the postgraduate student literature as a threat to the ethical principle of justice (Lofstrom & Pyhalto, 2012). Students vary in their research preparation, ability, and motivation, and may have differing supervision needs (Lofstrom & Pyhalto, 2012; Sullivan & Ogloff, 1998). Indeed, Pilcher (2011) goes so far as to argue that "equity of guidance is philosophically impossible given different levels of students and projects" (p. 33). However, it is important that, taking individual differences and needs into account, all students are treated fairly, if not uniformly (Sullivan & Ogloff, 1998), although students may perceive *any* differences as inequitable (Lofstrom & Pyhalto, 2012). Where a supervisor privileges, in terms of time and support, one student over other students, the preferred student may benefit in terms of research outcomes and later opportunities. However, the preferred student may also face resentment from other students and negative perceptions of the deservingness of resulting outcomes (Sullivan & Ogloff, 1998).

I recommend setting regular meetings for each student supervised across the semester, rather than meeting on an ad-hoc basis. This will enable you to measure progress and identify any developing problems. Once your students have developed timelines, mark out times in your diary for reading and commenting on drafts.

A range of other strategies can be used to manage the supervision load effectively. First, wherever possible have students complete dissertation projects within your area of expertise. This both reduces the amount of time you might need to spend reading new literature and increases the potential for co-authored publications resulting from student research, effectively meeting both supervisory and research requirements. Similarly, having students

complete related projects in consecutive years increases the potential for publications where one study alone would be insufficient. Second, time savings can be made by having students use types of analysis with which you are familiar. If all students supervised are using the same analyses, there may be potential for group supervision meetings in some weeks. Third, provide firm deadlines for the submission (and return) of drafts. This will allow you to plan ahead and block out time for reviewing, and diminish the likelihood of a last minute 'rush' of drafts that all need to be reviewed immediately.

In order to make supervision work within restricted time allocations, it is important that time spent with your student(s) is focussed on the student's project. If phone calls/visitors are distracting, consider holding supervision meetings at a place other than your office. If you are going to be absent, put in place alternative supervision arrangements.

Final Thoughts

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