



MOTIVATION

Relevant Literature

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 (Manathunga, 2005).

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)

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 student to available courses or resources
 - For identified conceptualising difficulties, supervisor can model thought processes
- **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 task, cognitive reframing, counselling and encouragement
 - For procrastination, after assessing and addressing possible causes (including performance anxiety and cognitive domain difficulties), an ultimatum may be required





- Personality clashes between supervisor and student 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.

References:

- Ahern, K., & Manathunga, C. (2004). Clutch-starting stalled research students. *Innovative Higher Education*, 28, 237-254. doi:10.1023/B:IHIE.0000018908.36113.a5
- Manathunga, C. (2005). Early warning signs in postgraduate research education: A different approach to ensuring timely completions. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10, 219-233. doi:10.1080/1356251042000337963

