The Supervisor-Student Relationship

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What’s different about supervision?

What are the common concerns around supervision?

Is there a power imbalance in the supervision relationship?
What’s different about supervision?

A new type of learning requires a new type of academic relationship

Remember:

• Supervisor is a guide, not a travel companion
• Supervision is academic and professional, not pastoral and personal
• Supervisor is not the expert in your topic: you are!
Let’s build the ideal supervisor
Let’s build the ideal supervisor

- Provides constructive feedback
- Good communicator
- Friendly
- Patient
- Available
- Knowledgeable
Supervisor’s Responsibilities

• Guidance throughout
• Advise on standards & academic quality
• Maintain regular contact and meet regularly
• Find a suitable sabbatical replacement
• Provide constructive feedback on written work
• Guidance on presentation of research
• Guidance on writing and format of thesis
• Read the final thesis
Are you the ideal student?
Are you the ideal student?

- Hard-working
- Conscientious
- Good communicator
- Meets Deadlines
- Knowledgeable
- Innovative
- Independent
Your Responsibilities

• Undertake full responsibility for work submitted
• Undertake training as agreed
• Produce written work as agreed
• Stay in regular communication
• Ensure compliance with regs/ ethics
• Come prepared to meetings
• Ask questions
• Manage time effectively
• Seek support early
But...

These are the high-level guidelines

Structure and quality of supervision varies

So...

How do you ensure that you get the most from your Supervisor?

What do you do if things aren’t going to plan?
Empower yourself
Empower yourself

1. Change your perspective on supervision
2. Be proactive
3. Know your supervisor
4. Know yourself
5. Smarter meetings
6. Communicate needs
7. Project Manage
8. Seek support early
Change your perspective

View the supervisor as a hired consultant
Paid to guide you and answer your queries
Use their expertise
Make the most of their time

The supervisor is not the expert in your field: you are!
Be Proactive

1. find out what to expect from them
2. find out what is expected of you
3. organise and agree process, timelines, diaries
4. tackle academic, interpersonal, personal concerns early on
Know Your Supervisor

Before the first/ your next meeting find out:

- **Research Interests**/
- **Recent publications**
- **Experience supervising**

During the first/ your next meeting find out:

- How much **time** they will have?
- What kind of **role** does your supervisor expect to have?

After your next meeting decide:

- What do **you need to do** to work within this paradigm?
Know Yourself

What are you good at?
What areas need improvement?
  e.g. Communication style?
  Organisation?
  Training?

SWOT analysis:
  Strengths, Weaknesses,
  Opportunities, Threats
Empowered meetings

Set the agenda beforehand

....ask if they have other topics they’d like to agree

Agree the date of next meeting at the meeting

....Put it in both diaries

Send a written recap

....Issues discussed, actions agreed, timelines for delivery

Invite them to comment
Communicate professionally

❖ Remember, this is YOUR degree: be assertive (but not rude!)

❖ You can question/ disagree with your supervisor

❖ Some academics avoid giving ‘harsh’ criticism, so be sure to ask “is there anything else you think I need to know/ do at this stage?”

❖ Remember, some academics take good research/ writing for granted

❖ Try not to be disheartened
Communicate professionally
Things it's ok... and important... to ask:

"I want to make sure I understand you completely, can you repeat that last bit about X again?"

"Can you tell me a little more about what you mean when you say...X"

"I'm not sure I agreee with that, let me tell you why..."

"Is there anything else you think I need to know about the progress in general? Is there anything that I should have asked that I didn't?"

"Thanks again for your time, can we schedule our next meeting now, while I'm here?"
Project-Manage your research

Set realistic goals – What do I want to achieve?
Set deadlines – when will I have it completed?
Set measures – How will I know I have completed it?
Build contingencies – I need ‘just in case’ time
Ask for help when needed – who should I contact?
Talk to others – Who can I talk to?
Read the Calendar (!) – what are the regulations?
Seek support early — you are not alone

Postgraduate Advisory Service – the frontline service
www.tcd.ie/seniortutor/students/postgraduate/

Graduate Student’s Union
www.tcdgsu.ie/

Student Counselling Service
tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/

Student Learning Development
tcd.ie student-learning.tcd.ie/
So, for homework

- Do your research on your supervisor:
  - Research Interests/ recent publications
  - Experience supervising

- Do a SWOT analysis of yourself:
  - What am I good at?
  - What do I need to work on?
  - What’s coming up that can help me in this project?
  - What’s coming up that I need to be aware of?

Further reading: Rowena Murray, How to Write a Thesis
Postgraduate Advisory Service

Contact us at pgsupp@tcd.ie

Or phone us on (01) 896 1417

See our website on tcd.ie
Thank You