

TUTORS & DEMONSTRATORS

Quick Tips and Resources for Supervising Projects & Dissertations

Supervisory roles

ROLE PERCEPTION

Supervisors can take many roles, from director to freedom giver, and critic to friend. The role of the supervisor will vary depending on what subject you are supervising, your personal supervisory style, but will also depend on the students and their individual needs and stage of the project. The role therefore changes over time. Students expectations of the supervisory role may be very different to yours, and they may be wanting different support than you were expecting. It is therefore important to understand any differences in role perceptions early on to avoid misunderstandings. Consider using a [role perception rating exercise](#) with students to compare your expectations.



STYLES OF SUPERVISION

Supervisors will have different styles of supervision, such as the friendly supervisor who asks about your pets vs. the more sincere supervisor who avoids personal questions, or the supervisor who gives them almost complete freedom to decide their projects vs those that give very directed and structured advice. Whatever the style it is important to think about what you feel comfortable with and where your boundaries are. Knowing the boundaries allows you to determine how flexible you can be to adapt your style to the students needs, and avoid overstepping those boundaries.



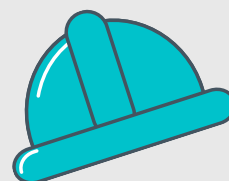
KNOW THEIR LIMITS

When supervising projects and dissertations it is important that you understand what the criteria are for your students, and what the expectations and guidelines are for their projects or dissertations. Read any information they have been given, and make sure you know what structure is expected, what are the timescales, and what standards or criteria they will be assessed against. Remember that students will have other commitments, and this may affect how much time they will be able to spend on their projects. If working with Tier 4 visa students, be aware that they may require a certain number of contact hours as check-in points.



KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Make sure you are aware of what the guidelines and conventions are for your discipline or School. Conventions in disciplines will often dictate the minimum and maximum levels of supervision. Some disciplines will have very structured projects with set topics and methods while others have a more free approach where students decide their own topics. You may be limited to a set number of contact hours with students, or be limited in how many times you can provide feedback. You will also need to be aware of any legal, ethical and health and safety requirements for the project, and ensure the student is aware of these and seeks approval where necessary.



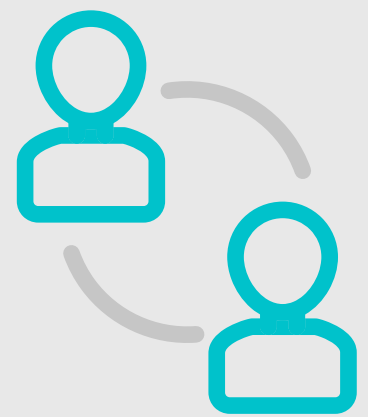
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Supervisory Meetings

STRUCTURE

When meeting with the student it is important to consider how you will structure the meeting to make the best use out of the time. This is especially important if students have limited contact time with you. Every meeting should include time for questioning, listening, responding and explaining. To help with this you can use this [suggested structure](#) to ensure you cover all of the necessary elements. Consider also the format and the tone of the meeting. Will it be online or in person? Will you include time for personal chat or not? Include this in your planning to ensure the time is well spent and effective.



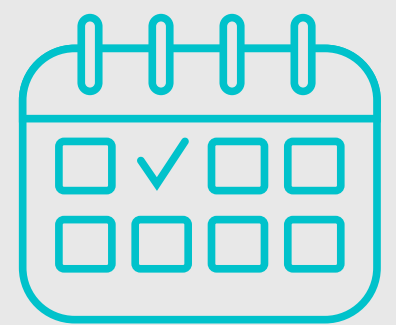
AGENDA, NOTES & ACTIONS

In addition to structure, an effective supervisory meeting should have an agenda, notes or records should be taken and actions agreed. This may be something that you initiate at the start, but asking the student to set an agenda for each meeting will help the student to take ownership and help them to identify what they need from you before you meet. In addition to your own notes, encourage the student to take ownership of keeping notes and agreed next steps, and sharing these with you at the end as a way to get the student to lead on their own projects as well. Always read any notes and action points provided to ensure you are in agreement. You can use these in the following meeting to check in on progress.



FREQUENCY

How often you meet will vary depending on the norms and parameters set by your School and/or discipline. Some Schools will have very strict limits on how many meetings or contact hours you can have with a student. The frequency of your meetings will also depend on the stage of the project and the individual students needs. Discuss this with the student and agree on when and how often meetings would be useful. Consider including this as an ongoing agenda item to ensure you are not meeting too often or too little as the project and students needs change. Be honest about your own availability and set clear expectations at the start.



Resources

[IAD Worksheet: Role perception rating exercise](#)

[IAD Handout: A structure for a supervisory meeting](#)

[Teaching Matters blogs on supervision](#)

[AdvanceHE toolkit for supervising social science dissertations](#)

[A journal article on "Good undergraduate dissertation supervision"](#)

[Further resources are available on Learn](#)

For PhD supervision see:

- [Code of Practice on Supervision](#)
- [IAD training and resources for PhD supervisors](#)