

Effective Communication with your Supervisor

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Questions for this workshop...

- **What are my experiences relating to student supervisor communication?**
- **What are my concerns and questions relating to effective communication with supervisors?**
- **What are some of the key issues?**
- **What are some barriers to communication with supervisors?**

- “Managing your supervisor(s) well and developing and maintaining a supportive, positive, constructively critical relationship over time is essential to help you produce a good quality thesis” – Wisker , 2001.



Question to ask yourself...

- What kind of relationship do I value or imagine?
- Is there a difference in expectations that I and my supervisor have?
- Is there a cultural difference in values and expectations between my supervisor and myself?



Effective Communication

- Establish good lines of communication right from the beginning
- Work on continued and open communication
- Focus on your own relationship, do not compare
- Avoid the pitfall of “overthinking” what the supervisor may be thinking



Effective Communication

- Schedule regular meetings (meeting minutes)
- Keep your scheduled meetings even if you don't have the perfect draft, results etc. (bring an idea)
- Express your needs, roadblocks, and intentions in writing - assists you to process and clarify your intentions which, in turn, allows your supervisor to give more thorough feedback.
- Do not avoid your supervisor
- Communicate about factors (family, illness, etc.) that may take you from your work to some degree

Be clear about your responsibilities

- Meet deadlines and follow regulations
- Conducting research with the highest standard of ethical and scientific practice
- Providing reasonable evidence of satisfactory research progress
- Prepare a research plan and timeline in consultation with the supervisor
- Give serious consideration to supervisor's (and committee) advice and criticisms
- Inform the supervisor of any changes that might affect progress.

What not to Expect

- Detailed direction on daily research (independent work is expected)
- Your supervisor to be instantly available and able to review your work instantly
- Friendship rather than collegiality

Case A

- Andy has been working with her supervisor for one year. Initially they had a pleasant and friendly relationship. In the past months, however, they have been having some difficulties. After reading the first part of his work, the supervisor wrote comments saying that it was poor and did not contain original ideas. Andy made revisions and submitted another draft. Again the supervisor said that the work is poor and added that if this continues, he may not be able to supervise Andy.

Case Nina

- Nina feels that her relationship with her supervisor may not be the best. It seems to her that other students have more of a friendly relationship with their supervisors, whereas hers is more “just professional” in that they talk about once a month.

Case Z

- Zain is feeling a little worried about his relationship with his supervisor. He feels that she “favours” her other students. She seems to be more interested in their work, often speaks to them about possible job leads etc.
- Zain is beginning to feel that she sees him as less competent than his lab mates.

Case J

“My supervisor never listens to me about what should be done and how to run my project...in fact sometimes it does not even feel like my project...I constantly work on his projects...I feel like a working machine.”

CASE M

- Mark is having difficulty eliciting feedback and support from his supervisor as he writes his first chapter. He hasn't seen his supervisor for months because he doesn't have a chapter to show for all the time that has passed, but meanwhile, he's stuck and doesn't know how best to organize the thesis. He has approached committee members for help and they've made suggestions but how does he get his supervisor's help in moving forward?

Managing Expectations

- Supervisory-Student Expectations Scale, p. 22 of the *SGS Graduate Supervision Handbook*

Some advice when you run into problems

- Act early
- Act locally/informally first
- Seek confidential advice and support (SGPS, SGS, HCDS)
- Keep records
- Keep an academic goal oriented, constructive, problem solving attitude – tap into your resilience

Support

- Graduate Coordinator/ Head of Department
- Associate Deans SGS (Kim McAuley, Sandra den Otter)
- Cross Cultural Advisor – [Dr Arunima Khanna](#)
- SGS Embedded Counsellor [Ashley Vanstone](#)
- HCDS Counsellors
- SGPS Peer Advisors: <http://www.sgps.ca/>

SGS Regulations

- [Appeal](#) Against an Academic Decision

SGS/HCDS Resources

[Graduate Supervisor Handbook](#)

[Health, Counselling and Disability Service Guide on How to Make the Most out of Your Supervisory Relationship: Advice from Supervisors & Graduate Students](#)

[Handbook for International Students](#)