

Setting Expectations:

A Resource Guidebook for
Graduate Students and
Supervisors

Setting Expectations: A Resource Guidebook

Productive supervisory relationships promote a thriving university research culture where graduate students are supported to make meaningful contributions to their field of specialization. Setting clear, explicit expectations at the beginning of the relationship, and revisiting throughout, is helpful in establishing open communication, ensuring progress, and avoiding conflict. The School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (SGSPA) has created this document to support the process of expectation setting among graduate students and supervisors across foundational aspects of the supervisory relationship.

How to Use This Guide?

This guidebook is intended to be completed by both the graduate student and the supervisor at the beginning of the graduate student's program and revised when needed.

This guidebook is divided into key sections that are related to different aspects of the supervisory relationship. In each section, you will be guided through questions and prompts to help you set expectations for students' academic and professional growth. After each question, there is space to record your discussion.

This guidebook may contain content that is not relevant to all programs or degree types, in which case, sections can be skipped. At the end of the document, there is an opportunity to identify additional topics and questions not covered in this guidebook but that might be relevant to students' unique learning goals.

The final section of this guidebook contains a Goal Setting Guide and a Program Planning Guide. Graduate students can use the Goal Setting Guide to record and plan their learning, research, and professional/career goals. Graduate students are encouraged to discuss these goals with their supervisor, so that their supervisor can provide support and indicate relevant campus resources. The Program Planning Guide can be used to list graduate students' core milestones and requirements and plan the related timelines/dates for completion.

The topics covered in this document are based on the [Graduate Supervision Policy](#), the [School of Graduate Studies Academic Calendar](#), and other relevant Queen's University policies, regulations, and procedures.

This guidebook does not replace official policies and procedures. It is an aid for supporting discussions and is not a legal document; the results recorded in this document are not binding.

Setting Expectations for Communication

Open communication is a foundation for effective graduate supervision. Early and ongoing communication between graduate students and supervisors is essential to direct and re-direct graduate student work and respond to changes in planned activities.

1. How structured/formal should communication be between the graduate student and supervisor?

2. What are the preferred forms of communication and the contexts for which they are appropriate (e.g., email, Teams message, phone call, knock on office door, etc.)?

3. How frequently should the graduate student and supervisor communicate and meet?

4. Who is primarily responsible for organizing meetings? Should meetings have an agenda?

5. Are there any other meetings that the graduate student is expected to attend (e.g., group meetings, project meetings, journal clubs, etc.)?

Key Resources:

- [SGSPA Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)
- [Graduate Supervision Policy](#)

Tip:

- Think about if there are any circumstances that might change your answers to these questions.

Setting Expectations for Feedback

The supervisor serves as a primary academic mentor to the graduate student by providing oversight on their progress and research. The supervisor is expected to provide descriptive, actionable, and timely feedback following program expectations, and the graduate student is expected to respond to feedback in a timely manner.

1. What type of work will the supervisor provide feedback on? (e.g. conference abstracts, posters, and/or presentations, scholarship applications, research proposals, qualifying/comprehensive examination documents, thesis/dissertation, etc.)

2. How often should the graduate student submit work to the supervisor for review?

3. What is the expected turnaround time for written feedback?

4. How is the graduate student expected to respond to feedback?

Key Resources:

- [SGSPA Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)
- [Graduate Supervision Policy](#)
- [University of Waterloo: Receiving and Giving Effective Feedback](#)

Tip:

- Communicate clearly about when turnaround time for feedback may take longer than normal or when submission of work will be delayed.

Setting Expectations for Program Progression

To assist in planning the graduate student's progression through the program, it may be useful to discuss expectations and recommendations for the graduate student's work. The graduate student may hold additional positions, such as a teaching assistant or research assistant, which could affect research hours and timelines.¹ This guidebook focuses on the supervisory relationship in an academic, non-employment capacity (i.e., it does not pertain to the graduate student's possible employment as a research assistant for the supervisor).

A table has been provided at the end of this booklet to record and plan program-specific requirements, milestones, and timelines.

1. What strategies will be used to ensure the graduate student meets program milestones on-time? (e.g., annual progress monitoring and reporting, program planning guide (see end of guidebook), etc.)?

2. What is the expected balance between program work and employment work per week (i.e., RAships, TAs/TFs, or other employment opportunities)?

3. Are there expectations for the graduate student to be present in the office/lab/ on campus?

4. What will happen if the supervisor identifies that the graduate student is not making adequate progress towards degree milestones?

5. How will the graduate student's vacation time be arranged (typically 10 business days in accordance with SGSPA Vacation Guidelines)?

6. Who is responsible for determining the focus of research?

7. What degree of independence should the Graduate student have while conducting their research?

It is expected that a full-time student will limit paid employment unrelated to the student's research to a total of ten hours per week (average); students wishing to exceed this level should consult their supervisor and graduate coordinator.

Key Resources:

- Program Handbooks
- [Student Academic Success Services](#)
- [Queen's Graduate Individual Development Plan](#)

Tip:

- Communicate clearly about when turnaround time for feedback may take longer than normal or when submission of work will be delayed.

Setting Expectations for Supervisory Committee

The primary role of the supervisory committee is to broaden and deepen the graduate student's experience and range of expertise. The supervisory committee assists the supervisor in providing guidance, consultation, and advice on the graduate student's dissertation, thesis, or major research paper. Please refer to your department or program handbook for further information on when to establish your supervisory committee based on your specific graduate program.

1. When is a supervisory committee assembled?

2. How will members of the supervisory committee be selected?

3. Who will contact the faculty members to establish the supervisory committee?

4. How frequently will supervisory committee meetings occur and who will lead them?

5. What should the graduate student do to prepare for supervisory committee meetings?

6. Are there any other expectations of the graduate student or supervisor related to forming or interacting with the supervisory committee?

Key Resources:

- Program Handbooks (visit your departmental website)
- [Graduate Supervision Policy](#)
- [SGS Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)

Tip:

- When selecting supervisory committee members, consider their availability to provide feedback and attend meetings, and the value they could add to the research or methodology through their area of expertise.

Setting Expectations for Funding and Scholarships

Graduate students enrolled on a full-time basis in a research degree program and who are within the first 4 years of a Ph.D. program, the first 2 years of a two-year Master's program or the first year of a one-year research Master's program are eligible to receive financial support. The financial package offered to students may vary by departments/programs and across disciplines, but in the case of doctoral students cannot be less than the published university minimum guaranteed funding. Financial packages may be composed of funds from the supervisor's research grants or contracts, departmental teaching positions, research assistantships, internal and/or external scholarships or fellowships and from other available sources. The financial package may change from year to year; students should discuss this with their supervisor or graduate coordinator.

1. Is the graduate student planning or required to apply for scholarships (internal or external) or other funding sources? If so, how will the supervisor support them in preparing these applications? Please list scholarships and timelines for submission here (if known):

2. Is the graduate student expected or planning to work as a teaching assistant, research assistant, or teaching fellow throughout their program?

3. If the graduate student exceeds their funding eligible period, how will the graduate student fund the remainder of their graduate degree?

Key Resources:

- [SGS Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)
- [School of Graduate Studies Academic Calendar](#)
- [Queen's Registrar Tuition and Fees](#)
- [Queen's Student Awards](#)

Tip:

- Consider discussing how scholarships and teaching or research positions will contribute or add to the financial package

Setting Expectations for Authorship, Publication & Conferences

The dissemination of research results by publication in scholarly and research journals, by presentation at conferences and seminars and, if appropriate, by protection (patent or copyright) enhances the education and training experience. The norms for research dissemination and the criteria to determine co-authorship and authorship order varies by discipline and should be discussed between the supervisor and the graduate student.

1. What are the disciplinary norms for research dissemination and publication for a graduate student? How frequently should the graduate student attend conferences, publish research, participate in other academic community activities, etc.?

2. Is the graduate student expected to publish independently or with the supervisor? If with the supervisor, how will the authorship order be determined?

3. Will the graduate student be expected to work with other students within the research group, with other faculty or students, or with industry collaborators? If so, how will roles and responsibilities be delegated? How will the authorship order be determined?

4. Is the graduate student required to obtain permission from the supervisor prior to submitting an article for publication or submitting/presenting work at a conference?

5. Are there any publication restrictions or implications for the graduate student's research due to funding sources or other agreements?

6. Who will be responsible for finding opportunities for the graduate student to attend conferences and/or to present research work?

7. How will the costs of the conference participation be funded? If partially funded, which costs will the graduate student be responsible for, and which will the supervisor and/or department be responsible for? Are there any restrictions to receiving funding for conference participation (e.g., location, poster vs oral presentation, etc.)?

Key Resources:

- Program Handbooks (please visit your departmental website)
- [Student Academic Success Services](#)
- [Queen's University Library](#)
- [SGS Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)

Tip:

- Consider setting goals and timelines for publications and conference participation then make a plan for achieving these goals

Setting Expectations for Intellectual Property and Data Management

Queen's University's policy on intellectual property states that the ownership of all types of intellectual property and for all members of the university should rest with the creators, unless other arrangements have been agreed to in advance for certain categories of employment, for certain types of funding, or by individual contract. The university does, however, retain a royalty-free right to use any intellectual property created by a student in relation to their research activities for educational and research purposes.

1. Are there any intellectual property claims resulting from funding related to the research? If so, how does this affect ownership, confidentiality and/or publication of the research work?

2. If the graduate student's research is a sub-set of the supervisor's research or derived from the lab of the supervisor, where are the boundaries of intellectual property for the work between the student and supervisor?

3. Is there potential for a patentable invention to arise from the graduate student's work?

4. Do the graduate student and/or supervisor have interest in commercializing the results from the student's research?

5. Will the graduate student's thesis need to be restricted? ²

6. Are there any expectations for how the graduate student will organize and store their research records and data? ³

Key Resources:

- [Report of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Intellectual Property](#)
- [Intellectual Property Guidelines at Queen's University](#)
- [SGSPA Restriction of Thesis](#)
- [Queen's Partnerships and Innovation](#)
- [Queen's University Library](#)
- [SGS Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)
- [School of Graduate Studies Academic Calendar](#)

Tip:

- Are you familiar with intellectual property terminology? If not, consider discussing terms like copyright, trademark, patents, non-disclosure agreements, commercialization, etc.; or reach out to the Academic Integrity Office.

² A thesis may be restricted at the time of submitting the thesis for completion of degree requirements if, for example, the rights to commercial publication warrant protection, if there is intent to obtain a patent based on the research, or stipulation for a delay by a commission under which the research was conducted. The intent to publish portions of the thesis or the thesis in its entirety is not typically a reason for restricting access. The graduate student and supervisor are encouraged to discuss the need for restriction and seek advice as appropriate (e.g., from the library, the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs, Queen's Partnerships and Innovation).

³ Research records must normally be retained on site for a minimum of 5 years from the date of publication or other form of presentation or communication. The period may be longer if mandated by a legal requirement or an applicable funding or oversight agency. An exception to this would be when, for anonymity purposes, destruction of data has been approved by a Research Ethics Board at Queen's University.

Setting Expectations for Health and Safety & Research Ethics

Depending on the nature of the graduate student's research activities, the graduate student may need to complete health and safety and/or research ethics training and approval.

1. Are there any health and safety considerations, resources, or training that the graduate student needs to complete in order to conduct their research?

a. When will the graduate student be expected to complete the required training?

1. Will the graduate student be conducting research on humans or non-human animals (including human biological materials)? Does the graduate student need to complete an ethics approval for their research?

a. When will the graduate student be expected to complete ethics requirements?

b. How will the supervisor support the graduate student through this process?

Key Resources:

- [Risk and Safety Services](#)
- [Research Ethics](#)

Tip:

- Contact your departmental safety officer for health and safety information specific to your department or lab

Setting Expectations for Conflict Resolution

Issues or conflict can arise through the course of the graduate student's program, and they should be addressed in a constructive and effective manner. Given the power imbalance in the supervisory relationship, it is important that the graduate student feels comfortable bringing up their concerns with their supervisor.

1. How will issues or conflict be addressed?

2. What strategies will be used to have a constructive conversation about the issue or conflict?

3. If an issue or conflict remains unresolved, who should the graduate student talk to?

Key Resources:

- [SGSPA Graduate Student Handbook](#)
- [Graduate Supervision Policy](#)

Some advisory supports that the graduate student may wish to contact include: [Queen's Student Wellness: Mental Health & Counselling Services](#), [Queen's Ombudsperson](#), [Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre](#), [Ban Righ Centre](#), [Queen's University International Centre](#), [SGPS Peer Academic Advisor Program](#)

Tip:

- When discussing issues or conflict, try to remain calm and objective, separate the person from the problem, and work together to analyze the problem and create a solution. Contact your departmental safety officer for health and safety

Setting Expectations for Accommodations and Academic Consideration

Accommodation for Graduate Students with Disabilities

Queen’s University is committed to providing accommodation for students with disabilities who are enrolled in any of its graduate programs. The academic accommodations process is designed to remove barriers for students who experience disability related impacts. The graduate student should notify the university about the disability and need for accommodation as early as possible, and the graduate student should contact [Queen’s Student Accessibility Services](#) for more information.

Short-Term Academic Consideration

Queen’s University recognizes that students may have extenuating circumstances that temporarily affect their ability to fulfill their academic obligations and requirements. Graduate students can request special consideration for extenuating circumstances that will have or have had an impact on an academic requirement or requirements. Such considerations might take the form of one or more of the following: a brief absence, a brief reprieve from coursework, research, or fieldwork requirements, an extended or deferred deadline, a modified schedule for assignments, labs, placements/internships, projects, or comprehensive exams, a deferred exam or project, an alternate assignment, a re-weighting of assigned marks, course withdrawal without penalty, or other consideration deemed appropriate by the instructor, supervisor or Departmental /Program Graduate Coordinator (“Graduate Coordinator”) (or delegate). The graduate student should refer to the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs website for more information, forms, and procedures.

1. Does the graduate student require any accommodations that the supervisor should be aware of?

Key Resources:

- [Queen's Student Accessibility Services](#)
- [SGSPA Accommodation and Academic Consideration](#)
- [SGSPA Graduate Supervision Handbook](#)
- [Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Policy](#)
- [Academic Considerations for Students in Extenuating Circumstances Policy](#)

Tip:

- It is recommended to communicate clearly with your supervisor about any relevant changes to your accommodation or academic consideration needs

Setting Expectations for Leaves

The graduate student may take medical, maternity and/or parental leave from their program of study without prejudice to their academic standing. Information and procedures for these leaves can be found in the School of Graduate Studies Academic Calendar.

Additionally, the supervisor may take academic, medical, maternity, and/or parental leave. While it can be difficult to predict if/when a leave may occur, the supervisor may have plans to take an academic leave (i.e., sabbatical).

1. Is the supervisor planning to take academic leave during the graduate student's program?

2. If so, how will the supervisor ensure the continuation of supervision for the graduate student?

3. If the graduate student needs to take a leave during their studies, how should they communicate this to the supervisor?

Key Resources:

- [School of Graduate Studies Academic Calendar](#)
- [Graduate Supervision Policy](#)

Additional Topics

Please use this space to identify any other questions or comments related to additional aspects of the supervisory relationship not previously covered.

Goal Setting Guide

Discussing and establishing learning and research goals in relation to expectations for advanced research, monitoring goal progress, and mutually revising goals when necessary has been shown to accelerate and encourage graduate student progress. Additionally, supporting the graduate student in their professional and career goals is a way for the supervisor to help the graduate student succeed after graduate school.

The graduate student can complete the following table with their short-term and long-term learning, research, and professional/career goals, then discuss them with the supervisor. The [SMART goal setting method](#) can be used to create clear and reachable goals. The acronym, SMART, stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely.

The graduate student may wish to create an [Individual Development Plan](#) and refer to the [Grad Maps](#) and [Expanding Horizons Professional Development](#) series for more information and resources about goal setting and professional development. Additional resources can be found at [Career Services](#), [Student Academic Success Services](#), and [Centre for Teaching and Learning](#).

Duration

Learning/Academic Goals

Short-Term

Specific

What are the specific goals?

Measurable

How will you measure their success?

Achievable

How will you achieve them?

Relevant

Why are they relevant?

Timely

When will you achieve them and why are they timely?

Long-Term

Specific

What are the specific goals?

Measurable

How will you measure their success?

Achievable

How will you achieve them?

Relevant

Why are they relevant?

Timely

When will you achieve them and why are they timely?

Duration

Research Goals

Short-Term

Specific

What are the specific goals?

Measurable

How will you measure their success?

Achievable

How will you achieve them?

Relevant

Why are they relevant?

Timely

When will you achieve them and why are they timely?

Long-Term

Specific

What are the specific goals?

Measurable

How will you measure their success?

Achievable

How will you achieve them?

Relevant

Why are they relevant?

Timely

When will you achieve them and why are they timely?

Duration

Professional/Career Goals

Short-Term

Specific

What are the specific goals?

Measurable

How will you measure their success?

Achievable

How will you achieve them?

Relevant

Why are they relevant?

Timely

When will you achieve them and why are they timely?

Long-Term

Specific

What are the specific goals?

Measurable

How will you measure their success?

Achievable

How will you achieve them?

Relevant

Why are they relevant?

Timely

When will you achieve them and why are they timely?



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