Successful supervision
A two-way process

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Successful in terms of doctoral candidates’...?

1. learning and well-being

2. writing productivity

3. (timely) completion
1. Candidates’ learning and well-being...

... are significantly associated with a **positive supervision relationship**

• A positive supervision relationship is characterized by:
  ✓ **Trust, respect, interest**
  ✓ **Availability**
Why is trust and respect so important?

Because supervision is an asymmetrical power relationship

• Supervisors have more knowledge and experience regarding research

• They validate candidates’ work

• They can influence candidates’ career opportunities
How to establish trust?

**Candidates**
- Act professionally
- Be honest!

**Supervisors**
- Act professionally
- Encourage candidates to take contact if they face difficulties
- Consider to tell the candidates that there is no such thing as ‘stupid’ questions in your supervision
- Talk with candidates about emotional ups and downs as inherent parts of all research processes
1. Candidates’ learning and well-being

- Establishing and maintaining positive relationships can be difficult because candidates and supervisors often have different expectations (Kiley n.p., Murphy et al 2007, Deuchar 2008, Pyhältö et al. 2015)

TOOLS for **EARLY** clarification of expectations

**Supervisor letter**
- The supervisor’s personal description of what he expects from students - and what candidates may expect from him (2-3 pages)
- **Online example** (The Australian National University)

**Contract**
- A joint, negociated, and signed document
- **Example** (Oxford University, UK)
- **Example (Learning agreement)** (The University of Salford, UK)

**Questioning Guide**
- Inspiration sheets – informal and oral
- **Example (‘Expectation questionnaire’)** (Oxford University, UK)
- **Example (‘A Dialogue Facilitator)** (Karolinska University, Sweden)
Tools for **REGULAR** clarification of expectations
(Parner & Wichmann-Hansen, 2015)

What can candidates do?
- Outline meeting agendas
- Use cover letters when sending drafts
- Take notes (write down feedback)
- Write a brief summary – and share it with your supervisor
- Agree on a date for the next meeting
- Keep a log-diary and send mini-progress reports

Minimum 3 items:
1. What am I working on at the moment?
2. What would I like to discuss?
3. How well am I keeping to the time plan?

Advice

Minimum 3 items:
1. What kind of text have I send you?
2. How finished is the text?
3. What would I like to get feedback on?
A tool for **REGULAR** clarification of expectations

**METACOMMUNICATION**  
(Handal & Lauvås 2006, Baltzersen 2013)

Communication about what goes on in supervision and how those involved experience and understand it.
Examples of metacommunication

**Supervisor:** It’s my impression that you would like me to give you some advice. I will give you some along the way, but first I need to know more about how you perceive the problem and how you have tried to solve it yourself. Your question is so important that it deserves more than a hasty answer.”

**Candidate:** “I know that I am supposed to make all the crucial choices in the project. However, at this specific stage I find it really difficult. I am facing some problems and I need some input from you to move on”


Supervisors encourage candidates to write early and they closely follow candidates’ writing progress (Dinham & Scott 2001, Robins & Kanowski 2008, Lindsay 2015)

Supervisors guide candidates towards writing resources, e.g. courses, webpages, examples of ‘good’ papers (McGrail et al 2006, Murray & Newton 2009)
What is your opinion?

Supervisors should to be more appreciative and less critical when providing text feedback to candidates.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

Totally agree |  |  |  |  | Totally disagree
What is **constructive feedback**?

**Specific**

Applies to both *praise* and *criticism*!
3. Candidates’ (timely) completion

What is the most reliable predictor of candidates’ (timely) completion?

• Hands-on supervision

• Integration into the research environment
What is hands-on supervision

- Open-door policy (frequent meetings)
- Performance-oriented
- Direct, demonstrate and give advice
- Assist in structuring the process (plan and prioritize)
- Closely follow up on candidates’ progress: react quickly on ‘warning-signs’

Be mindful of hands-on supervision!

A high degree of hands-on supervision (*deciding, controlling, dictating*):

1. **Reduces** candidates’ feelings of **independence** and **self-efficacy** (Herrmann, Wichmann-Hansen, & Jensen 2014)
2. **Increases** their level of **stress** (Wichmann & Herrmann 2018)
3. Is positively correlated with **external funding** (Wichmann & Herrmann 2017)
Adjust hands-on supervision to the content
(Rienecker, Wichmann-Hansen & Jørgensen 2019)

• Form: formalities, academic standards, genre criteria, etc.
  ✓ A high degree of hands-on very legitimate

• Substans: project idea, research question, choice of theories, methods, analysis, etc.
  ✓ A high degree of hands-on is less legitimate. An open dialogue is more appropriate

• Process: project management, time estimation, planning, etc.
  ✓ The degree of hands-on must be negotiated
Key take home messages (I)

• A successful supervisor is a flexible supervisor with a broad repertoire of strategies

• Different success-indicators require different supervision strategies
  • To promote candidates’ learning and well-being: Invest in the supervisory relationship (e.g. early and regular match of expectations)
  • To promote candidates’ writing skills: Focus on the writing process & provide constructive text feedback
  • To promote candidates’ timely completion: Support integration into the research environment and provide hands-on supervision (e.g. frequent meetings, clear standards and directions/advice)
Key take home messages (II)

• Candidates can contribute to building a good supervisory relationship by being professional, proactive, and honest

• The supervisory relationship is a two-way process: It is a living thing! You may talk about it, negotiate it, evaluate it, and change it - TOGETHER
References (I)

References (II)


• Lindsay, D. (2015) Scientific writing=thinking in words. Australia: CSIRO PUBLISHING


References (III)


References (IV)


Thank you!

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