Research supervision: Supervisor - Student Relationships, Supervision Styles and a Little Impulse Towards Self-Reflection

- Based on a workshop with Franciska Krings and Melanie Bosson (Academic Development Service UNIL)

Why is it important to do reflections on research supervision?

- **Supervisors can make or break a PhD student**

  (and a master thesis is often the entry level to a PhD thesis)
- **Communication between supervisor and student is key to project and thesis success**
- **'Concept' of research supervision and own experience as doctoral student are key influences on supervisors' approaches to supervision**
- **Not all students need the same supervision style**

Predominant problems of PhD (and master) students with supervision

- **Learning experience very little organized**
- **Confusion in the messages transmitted by the supervisor**
- **Expactations often not explicitly verbalized**
- **Limited feedback from supervisor**
- **Difficult relation with supervisor, not enough interaction to discuss progress and competences to be developed**
- **Feelings of isolation and stress**

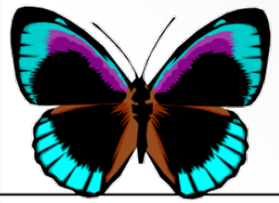
Austin 2009; Hermann et al. 2014

Which factors favor progress of PhD candidates

- **Feeling of being integrated in research environment**
- **Good relation with supervisor (i.e. constructive feedback, respect, being recognized/ acknowledged, frequent meetings**
- **Discipline/ Rigor**
- **Stable financial support**

Hermann et al. 2014

A framework for concepts of research supervision

					
	Functional	***Enculturation***	***Critical Thinking***	***Emancipation***	***Relationship Development***
Supervisors Activity	Rational progression through tasks Negotiated order	Gatekeeping Master to apprentice	Evaluation Challenge	Mentoring, supporting constructivism	Supervising by experience, developing a relationship
Supervisor's knowledge & skills	Directing, Project management	Diagnosis of deficiencies, coaching	Argument, analysis	Facilitation, Reflection	Managing conflict Emotional intelligence
Possible student reaction	Organised Obedience Negotiation skills	Role modelling, Apprentice-ship	Constant inquiry, fight or flight	Personal growth, reframing	A good team member. Emotional intelligence

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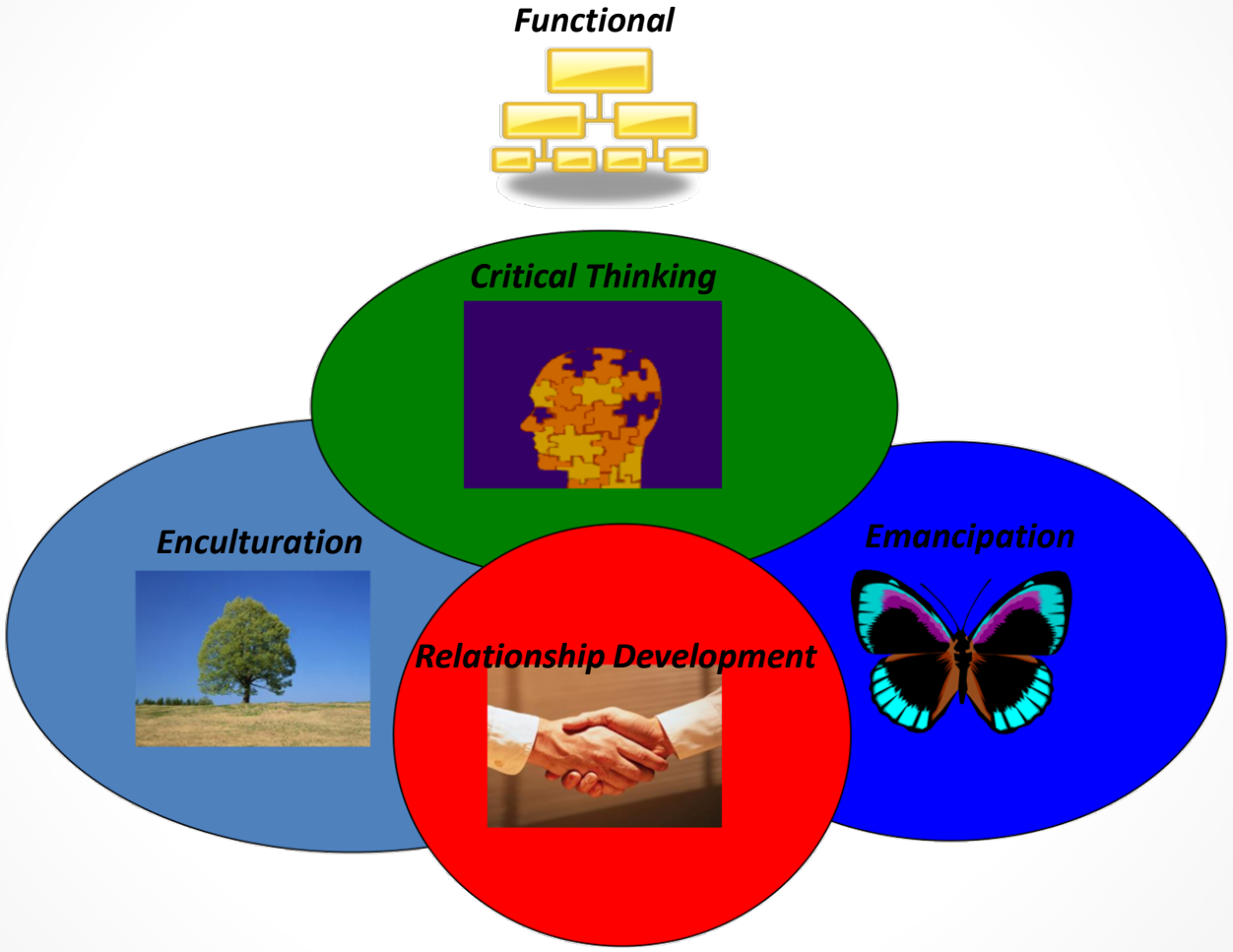
A map of the framework demonstrating interrelationships of research supervision styles (Lee 2012)



Advantages and Disadvantages

	Functional	Enculturation	Critical Thinking	Emancipation	Relationship Development
Advantages	Clarity Consistency Progress can be monitored Records are available	Encourages standards, participation, identity, community formation	Rational inquiry, fallacy exposed	Personal growth, ability to cope with change	Lifelong working partnerships Enhanced self esteem
Disadvantages	Rigidity when confronted with the creation of original knowledge	Low tolerance of internal difference, sexist, ethnicised regulation (Cousin & Deepwell 2005)	Denial of creativity, can belittle or depersonalise student	Lack of focus Toxic mentoring (Darling 1985) where tutor abuses power	Potential for harassment, abandonment or rejection

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Dependence and independence

	Functional	Enculturation	Critical Thinking	Emancipation	Relationship Development
Dependence	Student needs explanation of stages to be followed and direction through them	Student needs to be shown what to do	Student learns the questions to ask, the frameworks to apply	Student seeks affirmation of self-worth	Student depends on supervisor's approval
Independ-ence	Student can programme own work, follow own timetables competently	Student can follow discipline's epistemolog-ical demands independen-ly	Student can critique own work	Student autonomous. Can decide how to be, where to go, what to do, where to find information	Student demonstrates appropriate reciprocity and has power to withdraw

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What do students want? Identifying student motivation, objectives and needs

	Functional	**Enculturation**	**Critical Thinking**	**Emancipation**	**Relationship Development**
What students might be seeking	Certainty Clear signposts Evidence of progress	Belonging Direction, Career opportunities, Role models	Ability to think in new ways Ability to analyse, to recognise flaws in arguments	Self awareness Autonomy Self actualisation	Friendship Nurturing Equality

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How do I know what kind of supervisor I am?

Table 8.15a Academic's version – a questionnaire to enable greater understanding of the framework of approaches to research supervision (adapted from Lee 2008b)

Place a tick in one box on each line to indicate the level of importance you attach to that item	*Unimportant ... Important*				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I always allocate time well ahead for preparation, teaching and marking work for my postgraduate students.					
2. My postgraduate students learn quickly to embody the ethical principles and practices of this discipline.					
3. I want my postgraduate students to think critically, always to recognise flaws in articles, arguments or work that they see.					
4. It is important that my postgraduate students question themselves and understand why they are doing this research.					
5. My postgraduate students can manage their own and others' emotions appropriately.					
6. I consciously plan my teaching and supervision sessions so that my students will reach the appropriate level.					
7. I feel disappointed if good postgraduate students do not want to continue studying or working in the discipline.					
8. I want my postgraduate students to demonstrate an independence of mind.					
9. My postgraduate students are frequently transformed personally by the work they are doing.					
10. I enjoy being with my postgraduate students.					
11. A research student has to send me something they have written, to demonstrate they are making progress, before I will meet with them.					
12. It is important that my students understand the work of key researchers in my field.					
13. It is important to me that students can put forward counter-arguments.					
14. My students often go through a 'dark night of the soul' whilst doing their research, but emerge stronger for it.					
15. It is important that my students maintain positive working relationships with colleagues and help them as required.					
16. I note in my diary key dates for tutorials, annual reports etc, so I can monitor progress.					
17. I frequently show examples of interesting and excellent work in my field to my postgraduate students.					
18. Successful postgraduate students are able to validate or evaluate their arguments in a broad or interdisciplinary way.					
19. My postgraduate students learn to reframe the important questions.					
20. My postgraduate students enthuse others with their interest in their work.					

> Score sheet will give some idea of your priorities as a supervisor

How do I know what approaches my student will find most helpful?

Table 8.16a Student's version – a questionnaire to enable greater understanding of the framework of approaches to research as a student (adapted from Lee 2008b)

Place a tick in one box on each line to indicate the level of importance you attach to that item	*Unimportant ... Important*				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I always like to have a date arranged for the next meeting before I leave the current session.					
2. I want to understand and be able to **replicate** the ethical principles and practices of this discipline.					
3. It is important to be able to think critically, always to recognise flaws in articles, arguments or work that I see.					
4. It is important that I understand myself and question why I am **doing** this research.					
5. I think I manage my own and others' emotions appropriately.					
6. I keep copies of records of each meeting with my supervisor.					
7. I want to continue **working** in this discipline when I have finished my studies.					
8. I want to demonstrate an **independence** of mind.					
9. I expect to become a different person, to be **changed** or transformed **by** the research work I am doing.					
10. I enjoy being with my research supervisor and other students.					
11. I like to send **my** supervisor something to read before I meet with them, to demonstrate I am making progress.					
12. It is important that I understand the work of key researchers in my field.					
13. It is important that I am able to **put** forward counter-arguments to propositions.					
14. I may go through periods of self doubt, a 'dark night of the soul' whilst doing my research, but I will **emerge** the stronger for it.					
15. It is important that I maintain positive working relationships with other departmental staff and help them as required.					
16. I note in my diary key dates for annual reports etc, so I can monitor my progress.					
17. I look for **examples** of interesting and excellent work in my field to emulate.					
18. I believe that successful researchers are able to think in a broad or **interdisciplinary** way.					
19. I think it is important to learn to reframe the important questions.					
20. I can enthuse others by my interest in my work.					

> Score sheet will give some idea of your priorities as a doctoral (but also as a master) student

Maybe useful #1

Let the student define expectations on the role of the supervisor in the beginning of the common project

To download go to http://researchsuper.cedam.anu.edu.au/stages-candidature/clarifying-expectations

SUPERVISION EXPECTATIONS

Read each pair of statements below and then estimate your position on each. For example with statement 1 if you believe very strongly that it is the supervisor's responsibility to select a good topic you would put a ring around '1'. If you think that both the supervisor and student should equally be involved you should put a ring round '3' and if you think it is definitely the student's responsibility to select a topic, put a ring round '5'.

1.	It is the supervisor's responsibility to select a research topic	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for selecting her/his own topic
2.	The supervisor should insist on regular meetings with the student	1 2 3 4 5	The student should decide when she/he wants to meet with the supervisor
3.	It is the supervisor who decides which theoretical framework is most appropriate	1 2 3 4 5	Students should decide which theoretical framework they wish to use
4.	The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task	1 2 3 4 5	The student should not have to account for how and where they spend their time
5.	The supervisor should develop an appropriate program and timetable of research and study for the student	1 2 3 4 5	The supervisor should leave the development of the program of study to the student
6.	The supervisor is responsible for providing emotional support & encouragement to the student	1 2 3 4 5	Students should have their own support networks and this is not the responsibility of the supervisor
7.	The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is introduced to the appropriate services and facilities of the department and University	1 2 3 4 5	It is the student's responsibility to ensure that she/he has located and accessed all relevant services and facilities for research
8.	The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track	1 2 3 4 5	Students should submit drafts of work only when they want constructive criticism from the supervisor
9.	Supervisors should only accept students when they have specific knowledge of the student's chosen topic	1 2 3 4 5	Supervisors should feel free to accept students, even if they do not have specific knowledge of the student's topic
10.	The supervisor should take over the final writing-up of the thesis if the student is having difficulty	1 2 3 4 5	The writing of the thesis should only ever be the student's own work
11.	A warm, friendly relationship between supervisor and student is critical for successful candidature	1 2 3 4 5	A warm, friendly relationship is inadvisable because it may obstruct objectivity for both student and supervisor during candidature
12.	The supervisor is responsible for decisions regarding the standard of the thesis	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for decisions concerning the standard of the thesis

Adapted by Margaret Kiley & Kate Cadman (1997) from work by Brown, G. & Atkins, M. (1988). *Effective teaching in higher education.* Methuen, London. pp. 146-147

Maybe useful #2

Work with a «Memorandum of Understanding between student and supervisor» (to be updated in case of changes in the project content and aims)

Oxford Learning Institute
University of Oxford

Template for a
Memorandum of Understanding between Students and Supervisors

The following template Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is just that: a template. While it has been developed to include the experimental aspects of science and biomedical science research projects, please feel free to add items or to delete inappropriate or not applicable items.

The MOU should be regarded as something to help in the planning and conduct of doctoral study. The purpose of an MOU is to make expectations explicit between supervisors and students at an early stage. Clear expectations about the responsibilities of both parties are essential to a successful supervision relationship.

If the project changes substantially, a new MOU should be drawn up. Either way, it is a good idea to revisit and update the MOU every 12 months.

Programme details:

Start date: _____ Expected submission date: _____

Supervisory meetings:

1. How often or when will the student have meetings with the supervisor(s)? Update each year. (Suggestion: a formal meeting, irrespective of the number of informal meetings, at least 3 times per term)
2. Who will take responsibility to arrange a new time for missed meetings?
3. What kind of support or assistance can students expect in meetings?
4. Will the student present a written progress report before supervisory meetings? How many days in advance?
5. Will the student present a written summary of what is agreed to in meetings? How many days after the meeting?
6. How will the student access the supervisor(s) for unscheduled meetings or advice?

Expected progress:

7. When will the student provide a written proposal and give a seminar on the proposal?
8. How many hours per week is the student expected to spend in the lab or field and on the project as a whole? Indicate breakdown into literature searching/reading, draft writing, data collection and data analysis. Update each year.

   Lab/field: Literature: Analysis: Writing: Total:

Resources available:

9. Where will the research be conducted and at what times of the day/week/year is access to space and equipment normally available? Who books the equipment, if necessary?

Adapted from Otago University
Research Supervision @ Oxford

Maybe useful #2

Work with a «Memorandum of Understanding between student and supervisor» (to be updated in case of changes in the project content and aims)

Oxford Learning Institute
University of Oxford

10. Where will the student have personal bench space or a desk?

11. Is the student expected to attend departmental seminars or other departmental activities? (*Give details of the latter*)

12. Can the student expect to attend/present at national or international conferences? (*Give details*)

13. What additional teaching, demonstrating and skills development opportunities will the student have?

14. What additional non-DPhil studies or part-time employment can the student have?

Data collection and analysis:

15. Outline briefly the amount and type of data expected for the thesis (including sample size, tests or analyses).

16. What are the approximate dates for completion of lab/field work or other data collection?

17. What will be the role of the supervisor in obtaining and analysing the data each year? (Examples: initial training; continuing active assistance; passive supervision. Update each year)

18. Who will write the first draft of the application for human or animal ethical approval? When will the application be submitted?

Writing and feedback:

19. Indicate the approximate dates of submission of the first drafts of the Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results and Discussion sections of the thesis or each chapter. Update each year.

20. How many drafts of each section of the thesis will the supervisor(s) review? How quickly can the student expect feedback?

21. When preparing the data for publication, who will write the first draft of the manuscript, who will be corresponding author and what will be the order of the authors?

Signatures Date

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

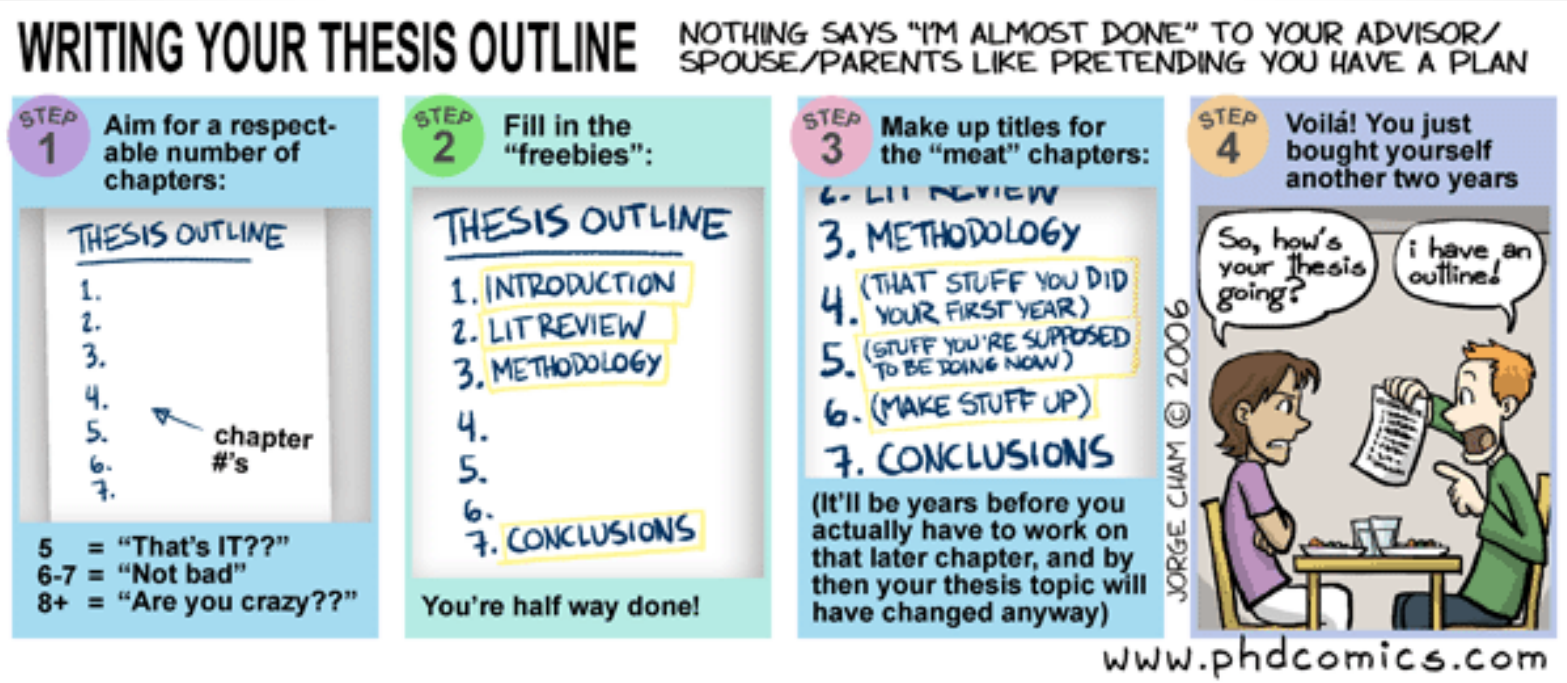
Adapted from Otago University
Research Supervision @ Oxford

Maybe useful #3

Work with a
«Student Profile Proforma»
(to be updated in intervals of ~6months)
detailing student's and supervisor's opinions on

- **Student's Expertise**
- **Administrative matters and work environment**
- **Guidance and interpersonal communication**

Expertise		
1.	The student's current research planning skills are	(1=poor, 10=outstanding) Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2.	The student's current research laboratory skills are	Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3.	The student's current literature review skills are	Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4.	The student's current information literacy skills are	Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5.	The student's current data interpretation skills are	Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6.	The student's current writing skills are	Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7.	The student's current oral presentation skills are	Student response 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Supervisor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Consensus 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10


WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE
NOTHING SAYS "I'M ALMOST DONE" TO YOUR ADVISOR/ SPOUSE/PARENTS LIKE PRETENDING YOU HAVE A PLAN
STEP 1
Aim for a respectable number of chapters:
THESIS OUTLINE
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
chapter #'s
5 = "That's IT??"
6-7 = "Not bad"
8+ = "Are you crazy??"
STEP 2
Fill in the "freebies":
THESIS OUTLINE
1. INTRODUCTION
2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4.
5.
6.
7. CONCLUSIONS
You're half way done!
STEP 3
Make up titles for the "meat" chapters:
3. METHODOLOGY
4. (THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR)
5. (STUFF YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING NOW)
6. (MAKE STUFF UP)
7. CONCLUSIONS
(It'll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)
STEP 4
Voilá! You just bought yourself another two years
So, how's your thesis going?
i have an outline!
JORGE CHAM © 2006
www.phdcomics.com

Source = Workshop: A little reminder for PhD candidates

In an ideal world, your PhD supervisor would

- be an expert in (all of) the area(s) of your research;
- give you as much of his/her time as you need;
- provide detailed and legible feedback on a draft chapter the following day;
- calm your anxieties;
- invite you to co-author papers;
- make sure you know about important conferences in your field;
- care as much about your project as you do.

Reality check:

- It is unlikely that your supervisor is an expert in every aspect of your research.
- Your supervisor has a demanding job and supervising your PhD, while important, is only one (small?) aspect of it.
- Your supervisor is *not* your therapist or your life coach.
- Your supervisor is *not* your publicist.
- No one else will (or should) care as much about your research as you do.

Extrait de: http://100thousandwords.wordpress.com/2012/03/28/phd-supervision-a-reality-checkand-some-good-news/

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