

GOOD SUPERVISION PRACTISE

(MAINLY FOR MASTER STUDENTS)



Before the project starts

- Go to the "student coffees" or lunch-breaks and let yourself be seen
- Talk to/get to know bachelor students even before they finish. For example by talking to their lecturers
- Map the student's skills in computing/mathematics/ ... whatever subject is needed. The best way to do this is to talk with the student and remember to listen!
- Talk about expectations: both from the advisor and from the student's point of view (the role perception chart can be a very useful tool here)
- Prepare a reading list of key review papers about the topic, so the student can start doing something immediately
- Give the student an overview of the field, maybe as a seminar

During the project

- Remember the 5Rs:
 - Respect – ALWAYS treat the student respectfully
 - Reachable – Communicate with your student
 - Reliable – Stick to your promises and accept that students take time
 - Relaxed atmosphere – Most students work a lot better when not scared
 - Re-motivating – During a challenging project there will be "down-time". Let your enthusiasm for the project and results show!
- Clear communication/talk straight from the beginning
- Regular meetings. Either group meetings or one-to-one. Depends on the needs of the student/s involved. Between meetings: continuous communication by email
- Have expandable projects, i.e. projects that can be adapted/tailored to each individual student. If the student is slow then the project would be shrunk and if the student is fast more things could be added
- Have a backup plan or backup data set. Particularly for observational projects, the advisor should have a data set ready to be analysed in case no suitable data is obtained during the project
- Ask the student to write notes of each procedure he/she learns: is a good to practice scientific writing early on
- Ask the student to maintain a logbook in order to document everything, from lab experiments to new computer routines. Writing the thesis will be much easier with the logbook at hand
- Results: advisors should check/test intermediate results in order to avoid unpleasant surprises at the end (like for example discovering that X result was wrong and nobody has realised until now)
- Give the students the opportunity to have out-of-the-institute experiences: going to conferences, field work, introduce him/her to visitors or big shots... This is very motivating for the student and makes them feel appreciated and part of the group. Remember early planning!
- Keep students up to date on recent advances in the field. Encourage them to go to seminars and internal talks

GOOD SUPERVISION PRACTISE – IF THINGS GET OFF-TRACK

What's the Problem?

Missing deadlines/slow progress

Doing something different/diverting from the agreed plan

Frequent non-constructive arguments/disagreements

Major errors/lack of competence

Personal tension between student and supervisor

Plagiarism/attempted fraud

Possible Reasons

Personal or family situation (student or supervisor)

Lack of ambition/motivation; easily distracted; insufficient work ethic

Lack of time/poor time management

Inability to work in a structured/goal-oriented way

Lack of (effective) communication

Overwhelmed by pressure/supervisor too demanding

Student's skills are lesser than expected/worse than was specified at the beginning (overconfidence in abilities)

Lack of basic scientific background/knowledge

Misunderstanding of the defined project goals/milestones

Possible Solutions

Identify the problem/cause and taking specific action to resolve it

Regular meetings

Regular handing-in of assignments

Start writing early-on in project (notes/thesis chapters)

Adjust project plan/goals

Communication; listening to each other

Constructive feedback

Motivation; show student his/her work is relevant

(In severe cases) Discuss problems with an objective mediator

Define smaller/more frequent milestones

Set aside sufficient supervision time for student/assign a co-supervisor

Ask colleagues for advice (informally)

