

Dealing With Problems

Problem prevention

Before problems arise, discuss with your supervisor the process of resolving problems. Ask your supervisor to discuss their concerns as they arise, so you are given an opportunity to address those concerns prior to the Annual Review of postgraduate research students. Raising concerns about your work sooner, rather than later, is beneficial to everyone. You should also contact postgraduate coordinators if you need advice on how to deal with problems.

To prevent the escalation of problems, take the initiative to raise them early on with your supervisor, no matter how trivial they may seem.

Problem resolution

Supervisory problems can often be sorted out satisfactorily if acted upon quickly. The Annual Review of postgraduate research students aims to identify any problems which may arise (in particular with supervision) in your candidature.

Take the opportunity to voice your concerns. Refer to the problem resolution chapter of the Postgraduate Research Studies Handbook (PRSH) and call SUPRA for advice.

For additional information refer to the University of Sydney PRSH available at your Faculty Office and on the University website: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/publications/pghandbooks/>

SUPRA & You

Consider contacting SUPRA for confidential advice and assistance. SUPRA's Student Advisers can help you effectively work through issues relating to supervision. For assistance please don't hesitate to phone or make an appointment to see a student advisor using the details over page.

Student Advisers are available Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm. It is best to phone ahead to make an appointment (see back page for details).

Useful Contacts & Resources

USYD Postgraduate Research Studies Handbook
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/publications/pghandbooks/>

Research Methods: Guidance for Postgraduates, Ed. Tony Greenfield (J.Wiley, New York, 1996)

Stevens, K. and Asmar, C. *Doing Postgraduate Research in Australia*, (Carlton, : Melbourne University Press, 1999)

Cryer, Pat, *The Research Student's Guide to Success*, (Open University Press, Philadelphia, 1996)

The Postgraduate Survival Manual (in print and on the web)
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/supra/publications>

SUPRA's Student Advisers:
supra@mail.usyd.edu.au

SUPRA

All Postgraduate Students at the University of Sydney are members of SUPRA. SUPRA is a student organisation run by students for students. We act to improve conditions of study for postgrads and we act as your insurance policy at University. All students can look to SUPRA for assistance with most of the common difficulties that confront them both personally and institutionally.

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NEGOTIATING SUPERVISION

of your thesis

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Forging a *Strong Relationship*

One of the most important relationships you have as a postgraduate research student is with your supervisor. A research Masters or PhD is supervised research training.

Your relationship with your supervisor can be complex and intense, and immensely rewarding. It is our hope that the following information will help to make it even better!

To appreciate the full responsibilities and rights of the supervisor and student read the Code of Practice for Research Students in the Postgraduate Research Studies Handbook. This can be obtained from your Faculty Office or on-line at: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/publications/pghandbooks/>

On Good *Communication*

Good communication with your supervisor is essential in forging a strong foundation for the success of your candidature.

Student/supervisor perspectives often differ. Your research may dominate your life while your supervisor may have many students to supervise, in addition to teaching and research responsibilities.

As a result, it is important to clarify expectations of both parties about aspects of your candidature early on, negotiate where expectations differ and review expectations periodically.

Use the checklist below to identify important aspects of your candidature to work through with your supervisor.

Supervision *Checklist*

Access to facilities

There is no common University-wide policy relating to facilities. However, your Department should have a Statement of Facilities to assist you in identifying what is available. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that facilities identified as necessary to your candidature do eventuate.

Facilities may include a study place, computers and office support as well as the availability of specific facilities such as field and lab equipment, vehicles, specialist equipment, conference funding, maintenance allowance and field assistance.

Ask your supervisor or postgraduate coordinator about the availability of such facilities.

Plan contact times with your supervisor

Determine the frequency and duration of formal meetings with your supervisor and associate supervisor. Consider the benefits of preparing written material, setting agendas and documenting outcomes of meetings. Discuss expectations about the type and level of contact and opportunities to meet your research group or colleagues in your department. Recognise the need to review and change meeting arrangements over time.

Determine the style of your supervisor-student relationship. This is likely to change during your candidature. What level of direction do you require? What is your supervisor's role in your acquisition of skills? Do you expect your supervisor to be a mentor, critic, supporter, director, facilitator, provider or teacher? How does your supervisor see their role?

Appoint an associate supervisor

You should expect to have at least one Associate Supervisor. Joint supervision offers a wider source of advice and information, and a better perspective on your work. It provides some continuity when your supervisor is on leave for an extended period. An associate supervisor need not be in your department, faculty or at this University, and can give you independent advice on your candidature.

Feedback and progress

You have a right to feedback that is timely and constructive. Identify how progress will be monitored (written work, seminars, annual progress reviews etc). Negotiate a work program for the entire candidature then break it down into six-monthly work programs. Put it in writing and include critical timelines. Some Faculties now have generic timelines/plans for research degrees that you can alter to your specific circumstances. See your Faculty Office for more details.

Intellectual Property

As a student, you own any original intellectual property that you produce unless you sign a contract to say otherwise. If you are also a staff member of the University, check the Intellectual Property Policy. Clarify expectations with your supervisor about authorship of publications.

Voice your career aspirations

Let your supervisor know your future career aspirations as this may help them to facilitate appropriate opportunities. If you are hoping for an academic or research career then publishing papers may be a priority. However, if you hope to enter managerial, business or government roles, it may be more appropriate to give priority to networking with government, community and/or industry groups.

Plan for supervisor absences

If your supervisor is away for a month or more, your associate supervisor should normally act as your supervisor. If a supervisor is intending to retire or resign, you should be consulted and actively involved in the planning arrangements regarding supervision.