

Guidelines for Advising PhD Students

The PhD Student and the Supervisor

A supervisor plays different roles when closely cooperating with a student. These include a professional role, a social role and a role within the subject matter.

It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the student understands the rules and regulations that apply to his or her fellowship.

The PhD student is the central person in the relationship and the counseling must always meet the student's needs at different points in the process.

The division of power between the supervisor and the student is asymmetrical and the student can be extremely vulnerable.

Evaluate:

Does the student have the competence that is needed to complete his or her studies or will more courses be needed to acquire competence?

What type of competence does the supervisor have (within the subject, methods, the writing process, research design)?

Is there a need for a written agreement about counseling?

Remember:

Discuss expectations and limits at the beginning of the cooperation. (What is desirable? What is achievable?)

Discuss how well the counseling process is functioning throughout the PhD studies. These discussions may be initiated by either party.

Reach clear agreements in the beginning of the process and thorough the studies.

Will you create a meeting plan or will meetings occur as needed?

What happens if the student or the supervisor is absent for a period of time?

The student and the supervisor have a joint responsibility to ensure that the plan for research design and the time frame are always up-to-date.

The supervisor must have a constant overview of the advisement process:

- What do we do now?
- What shall we do in the future?

The student and the supervisor must ask for clarification when something is not understood.

The Research Environment

Advising is not a private matter between the student and the supervisor. All people in the same research department have responsibility for the new recruits and should know what each student is working on.

The student must be tied to both the local research environment (institutes, projects and research groups) and the international research community (through courses, conferences and networking)

Discuss within the research group what the goals of advisement process are and what advantages and challenges the student will face

The supervisor must stress the importance of the student establishing reading and writing study groups with other PhD colleagues.

Evaluate:

Is there a possibility to involve the student in the senior researcher/supervisor projects (brainstorming, “two-way counseling”)?

In addition to the supervisor, who in the department could be a good discussion partner for the student?

Can the local environment implement activities that are useful to the student?

Can the student present parts of his/her work at an institute seminar?

How will the supervisor introduce the student into his or her international network of contacts?

Are there international seminars or conferences the student must attend?

Remember:

The whole department must support the supervisor so he or she may be as effective as possible.

When possible, a student should have several supervisors and everyone involved should meet regularly.

The department must make it possible to change supervisors when necessary.

The Writing Process

The writing process is large part of the thought-process in all humanities subjects.

The student should be encouraged to begin to write immediately with emphasis on the central questions.

The student should avoid reading more than necessary in the beginning and instead gather materials throughout the process.

Analysis of gathered materials should begin as soon as possible.

Evaluate:

Does the student need to work more generally with his or her writing?

What type of writing should the student present to the supervisor before an advisement session?

Shall the student

- Estimate how many pages and chapters are in the thesis and develop a preliminary general structure for the content?
- Report progress via email to the supervisor every month?
- Specify what type of guidance they wish to receive, for example feedback on content or structure
- Finish at least one chapter after the first year?

Shall the supervisor send feedback on submitted material via email before the advisement session?

What can be deleted, replaced, clarified, developed or corrected in the submissions?

Remember:

Material must be submitted in plenty of time before an advisement session.

It is important that all parties respect the stated deadlines.

Feedback on writing submissions should be given as agreed upon and always as quickly as possible.

Both parties should be well-prepared for the advisement meeting.

The supervisor must be concrete, specific and precise in his or her feedback.

The supervisor must be sure to point out what is interesting and valuable in a student's work so that it is not lost in a revision.

The supervisor must ask questions that lead to new thoughts, ideas and perspectives.

“Writing” should include revising already written material.

The supervisor must not make the student's work into his or her own.

The purpose of a critical analysis of a student's writing is to make the writing better!

To counter writer's block or a lack of ideas, try explaining difficulties to someone besides the supervisor.

The Thesis

The supervisor and the PhD student shall clarify expectations of the genre of the thesis within the subject area early in the writing process.

Thoughtful reflection over the structure and the various parts of the thesis is necessary throughout the process.

The supervisor may encourage the PhD student to work on the areas of the thesis where curiosity and desire are strongest and recommend working on several sections of the thesis simultaneously.

Evaluate:

Discuss the research design. (What does one wish to find an answer to? What is the goal? How does one reach that goal?)

How can the problem and hypotheses be clarified and how can they be operationalized in relation to the subject matter?

Definitions and discussions of theory: How appropriate are the theories and vocabulary in relation to the material? Are there other possible alternatives?

Is the material too long? Is it detailed enough?

Does the material give new insight or does it verify what was already known at the outset of the project?

Is the student's writing appropriate to the specific reader he/she wishes to communicate with?

When should the student declare his or her thesis finished and abandon what was not completed?

Shall future plans be discussed at the ending of the supervisory relationship when the supervisor becomes the mentor?

Remember:

The student must reference everyone who has had ideas that have contributed to the development of the project.

The thesis must answer the questions that are asked.

The thesis must show continuity on all levels (from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and chapter to chapter)

In order for the research work to be taken seriously, it must show precision and accuracy when referencing and crediting, etc, other sources.

Let the material lead to new insights, not just confirm what was already known at the outset.

Ensure that proper references are given for those whose ideas have developed the project.

Contact Information:

Leader of the Research Training Programme:
Professor Sissel Lie, NTNU, telephone: +47 73 59 65 08
sissel.lie@hf.ntnu.no

Contact persons for NTNU:
John Kamsvåg, telephone +47 73 59 83 77
john.kamsvag@hf.ntnu.no

Hanne Siri Sund, telephone +47 73 59 66 30
hanne.siri.sund@hf.ntnu.no

Contact person for the University of Bergen:
Professor Lars Sætre
Telephone: +47 55 58 23 93
lars.saetre@lil.uib.no

Contact person for the University of Tromsø:
Associate Professor Marie-Theres Federhofer
Telephone: +47 77 64 66 21
marie-theres.federhofer@hum.uit.no

Contact person for the Høgskolen in Agder:
Professor Roy T. Eriksen
Telephone: +47 38 14 20 22
roy.t.eriksen@hia.no