

# Graduate Supervision Guidelines for Faculty and Students

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## Preamble

The relationship between the graduate student and supervisor/advisor is unique and provides a remarkable opportunity to guide and mentor the student engaged in advanced academic learning.

What is considered ‘good’ supervision will vary from discipline to discipline, and it naturally evolves as the student advances through a graduate program. This document provides suggestions to initiate, promote, and sustain successful student-supervisor/advisor relationships.

## Guidelines for the Graduate Student

- 1) Commitment to scholarly activity is a pre-requisite for graduate success.
- 2) To support mentorship and guidance, the student must engage in effective, timely and on-going communication with the supervisor/advisor regarding the status of their project.
- 3) The student should discuss expectations with the supervisor/advisor to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of research goals and related activities, coursework, timelines and deadlines.
- 4) The student must manage their time, meet deadlines, and prepare for regularly scheduled meetings (e.g. with the supervisor/advisor and supervisory committee). Students should recognize that graduate program academic expectations will not be modified if they choose to engage in other activities, such as working outside of his/her graduate studies, studying for professional program entrance exams or applying for jobs or postdoctoral fellowships. Student-supervisor meetings for thesis work typically occur at least monthly, although meeting regularity will vary amongst disciplines and at various

stages. Students are encouraged to discuss concerns about the type and amount of supervision needed for their work with their supervisor. Students are expected to inform the academic head of the graduate program if they are concerned about inadequate or inappropriate supervision.

5) The student is expected to develop effective communication and collaborative skills and to demonstrate respect for others. The student should carefully and earnestly consider advice, suggestions, comments and criticisms received from the graduate supervisor/advisor. The student should expect timely, but not immediate, responses (regarding meetings, feedback on written work, etc.) from the supervisor/advisor and supervisory committee.

6) The student is obliged to act ethically in conducting graduate work. This includes, but is not limited to, following McMaster University policies on the ethical conduct of research and academic integrity. The student is required to document and honestly report research data, to conscientiously cite information and data sources, and to seek guidance on any data exclusions.

They must acknowledge contributions of the supervisor/advisor, committee members and others, in accordance with the norms of their academic discipline.

7) It is the student's responsibility to carry out all work safely and in accordance with standard operating procedures. Potentially dangerous tasks should not be done while impaired and should not be done until properly trained. It is the student's duty to learn about safe practices, ask questions, and seek appropriate help and guidance on safety matters.

8) It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all the requirements, regulations, and guidelines outlined in the Graduate Calendar as well as all [University policies](#) pertaining to graduate work.

## Guidelines for Supervisors and Advisors of Graduate Students

1) The supervisor/advisor must be aware of the inherent power imbalance in the relationship with students, behave professionally, and communicate appropriately. They must provide a healthy environment that fosters productive scholarly work, curiosity, and freedom of expression. The environment must be free from harassment, discrimination, and intimidation.

2) The supervisor/advisor is expected to have sufficient time and resources (as appropriate for the field) to support the student's work effectively. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that students have appropriate safety training, and that they carry out all work safely, and in accordance with standard operating procedures, once properly trained.

3) The supervisor/advisor should help the student develop a realistic thesis/research plan with reasonable plans, that balance exploration with achievable, manageable and focused goals, and allow completion of scholarly work "in time."

4) The supervisory committee must approve thesis project plans, including those that are part of a larger collaborative project led by others (e.g. research team members or collaborators).

5) The supervisor/advisor may encourage the student to undertake some research that is not formally part of their scholarly paper project or thesis project, provided that it will not negatively impact the student's academic progress. If appropriate, the additional work can be supported by a research assistant stipend.

6) The supervisor/advisor should be aware that a student might experience changes in motivation and productivity. The supervisor/advisor should be prepared to adapt his/her mentorship approach to promote success in a range of different situations.

7) The supervisor/advisor is expected to be aware of accommodation policies, procedures and support services, and to support students with disabilities in designing and organizing accommodations. They are expected to be respectful of graduate students who are dealing with stressful situations and personal difficulties. When appropriate, the supervisor/advisor should direct the student to campus resources and other supports. The supervisor/advisor is responsible for promoting a culture of respect and collaboration and encouraging timely conflict resolution when disputes arise, which may require consultation with the supervisory committee or others (e.g. head of the graduate program).

8) The supervisor must regularly communicate and have face-to-face meetings with the student to provide feedback on the student's progress, strengths, weaknesses, gaps in knowledge, and how well the student is addressing deficiencies. Written summaries of feedback should be prepared when there are significant deficiencies. When a student is struggling with meeting graduate program/thesis work expectations, a supervisory committee meeting should be scheduled early to assess progress and plans, and to provide a clear statement of requirements to meet expectations.

9) The supervisor/advisor and supervisory committee are required to provide students with timely, but not instantaneous, feedback. As an example, corrections to a thesis chapter,

major research project, or a manuscript optimally should occur within a few weeks. Faculty should be aware that they must respond to a draft of the thesis within the timelines outlined in the graduate calendar.

10) Supervisors/advisors who undertake a research leave or other leaves must communicate to their graduate students, and graduate student applicants, the plans to provide supervision during the leave. Supervisors/advisors who will be away from campus for extended periods of time must name an alternate faculty member, with graduate supervisory privileges, who will have day-to-day responsibility and signing-authority for students.

11) The supervisor/advisor is expected to encourage increasing independence as the student progresses through graduate work. Although the supervisor/advisor is not expected to be a copy editor for the student's written work, they should review and provide feedback on materials that the student produces prior to external review or defence.

12) Students' contributions to research must be acknowledged in accordance with the University policies and the norms of the academic discipline.

13) When feasible and appropriate, supervisors/advisors are expected to encourage students to submit their graduate work for presentation at conferences and workshops, and for publication.

14) The supervisor/advisor should recognize that there are multiple career paths available to different students, and should be respectful of the student's choice of career path, providing advice, where appropriate, on the best way for the student to reach their career goals. The supervisor also should be aware of professional development opportunities for the student offered through the Department/Program, Faculty, or University, and should encourage the student to take advantage of such opportunities.

15) It is the supervisor/advisor's responsibility to be aware of all the requirements, regulations, and guidelines outlined in the Graduate Calendar and [University policies](#).