

# GETTING THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP OFF TO A GOOD START



## A Template to Address Expectations for Graduate Students and their Supervisors

The School of Graduate Studies encourages open communication between the Supervisor and Student and has created this document to facilitate a discussion of expectations and responsibilities to help avoid conflicts. This document is designed to be completed by both the Student and the Supervisor at the beginning of the Student's graduate program. It can be jointly revised at any time, particularly when there are relevant changes to the Student's program, such as a new industry partnership or a change in scope, direction, or project funding.

### NOTES

- This document was modeled after policies and guidelines in use at other Canadian universities and based upon McMaster's Graduate Calendar, particularly section 2.7.1, Graduate Work Supervision Guidelines for Faculty and Students, which provides an important framework for understanding Supervisor and Student expectations and responsibilities.
- If the Student is co-supervised, all three parties should complete this document.

**For further resources, visit the School of Graduate Studies website: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/current-students/resources/graduate-supervision/>**

## Meetings and Communication

There are many types of meetings that Students and Supervisors might attend together (e.g., one-on-one, group, committee, etc.) and various modes of communication they might utilize (e.g., email, phone, face-to-face). This section refers specifically to one-on-one meetings focused on the Student's research and/or progress within their graduate program.

### The Supervisor and Student will arrange and attend regular meetings.

- The frequency and format of the meetings may vary, but typically meetings will be held:

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*(e.g., once a week, twice a month, etc.)*

- Generally, the length of meetings can be expected to be approximately \_\_\_\_\_  minutes /  hours.
- The  Student /  Supervisor /  both will be primarily responsible for recording notes (aka. meeting minutes) on topics and timelines discussed, as well as feedback given, at each meeting.<sup>1</sup>

Typically, the Supervisor's preferred method of regular communication is:

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*(e.g., face-to-face, email, etc.)*

- The Student can typically expect a response from the Supervisor within:

\_\_\_\_\_ (time period, e.g., 1 week) **for** \_\_\_\_\_ (type of work, e.g., emailed question)

\_\_\_\_\_ (time period, e.g., 2 weeks) **for** \_\_\_\_\_ (type of work, e.g., feedback on findings)

\_\_\_\_\_ (time period, e.g., 1 month) **for** \_\_\_\_\_ (type of work, e.g., edits to manuscript)

- On average, the Supervisor is in their office, lab, or otherwise available to the Student

daily /  weekly /  monthly /  by appointment /  other: \_\_\_\_\_



## Time Management, Employment, and Training

Please use the SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE GRADUATE STUDENT chart to discuss and record program-specific (and other) expectations, with respective timelines, for the Student.

Although the relationship between a Supervisor and Student is not an employment relationship, Supervisors may have expectations in regard to the average number of hours per week that the Student should be in the office/lab/on campus etc., in order to complete his/her research within the required timelines, keeping in mind that these expectations may differ at different times throughout the program. Similarly, Students may have commitments, including teaching duties, which may impact their schedule. Bearing this in mind:

- What are the expectations of the Supervisor and the Student regarding the Student's office/lab/on campus attendance?

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- How will vacation time for the Student be negotiated?<sup>2</sup>

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- If the Student does not complete his/her PhD within 4 years, or their Masters within \_\_\_\_\_ year(s),  **funding will** /  **will not** /  **could potentially** be provided.
- What efforts will the Supervisor and Student make to ensure "on time" program completion?

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Does the Student have a contract to hold Teaching/Research Assistantships during the course of their program?

**Yes** /  **No** /  **Unsure**

## Supervisory Relationship

### FOR THE SUPERVISOR:

**How would you describe your typical supervisory style?**

*(e.g., hands-on /hands-off, mentor/manager/colleague/etc.)*

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### FOR THE STUDENT:

**How would you describe your learning style?**

*(e.g., mostly independent, does well with structure, needs feedback/encouragement etc.)*

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If the student is paid as a Research Assistant (RA) for the Supervisor, how might this arrangement affect the Student's own research program *(e.g., competing RA vs. program demands on Student's time, authorship on publications, etc.)*

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Additional opportunities for the Student to teach/supervise others might include:<sup>3</sup>

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Are there voluntary courses, certificates, or other training opportunities the Student may wish to take?

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## Supervisory Committee

Who will set up the Supervisory Committee?

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What time of year is the annual Supervisory Committee meeting likely to occur?

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What should the Student do to prepare for meetings?

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Other expectations of the Supervisor and Student in regard to forming and interacting with the Student's supervisory committee are:

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## Health and Safety

If relevant, where would I find information on health and safety policies and procedures?

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*(e.g., name of the appointed safety officer, operating procedures, etc.).*

## Conferences and Scholarships

Are there opportunities for the Student to attend conferences and/or to present scholarly work?

**Yes** /  **No** /  **It depends**. If so,

- who will be primarily responsible for searching out such opportunities?  
 **Student** /  **Supervisor** /  **both**
- the Student  **will receive** /  **will not receive** /  **will apply to receive** funding from the Supervisor and/or department for travel related to conference presentations.

Is the Student planning or required to apply for scholarships appropriate to his/her program of study?  
 **Yes** /  **No** /  **Maybe**. If so, what role if any might the Supervisor play in the application process?

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## Research Leave (i.e., Sabbatical)

The Supervisor  **does** /  **does not** plan to take a research leave during the Student's study period. If so,

- The research leave is expected to start \_\_\_\_\_ (date), and last approximately \_\_\_\_\_ (length).
- How will the Supervisor ensure adequate supervision of the Student?

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## Authorship

As early as possible in the program, and after having requested input from those affected as appropriate, the authorship order for anticipated journal articles will be determined by the Supervisor assuming he/she is the lead researcher. The Student is normally first author on an article based on the Student's thesis, particularly when it forms part of a Sandwich Thesis.<sup>4</sup> The Supervisor will communicate determinations around authorship to the Student in writing. A Student who has concerns about authorship issues may seek the assistance of the program Chair, and, if necessary, avail her/himself of dispute resolution processes within the University.

- Authorship order will be determined based on the following criteria/process:

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- Will the Student have an opportunity to obtain first author publications?  
 **Yes** /  **No** /  **It depends**. Please elaborate if necessary:

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- Is the Student considering doing a Sandwich Thesis?  
 **Yes** /  **No** /  **It depends**. Please elaborate if necessary:

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## Publication

Who will be primarily responsible for preparing and submitting for publication the results of research completed by the Student as part of the Student's degree requirements?

**Supervisor** /  **Student** /  **both**.

Is the Student required to obtain permission from the Supervisor prior to submitting an article for publication based on the Student's research?

**Yes** /  **No** /  **It depends**.

Is the Student's research funded by the one of the Tri-Agencies (i.e., NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR)?

**Yes** /  **No** /  **Unsure**.

If so, what are the relevant publication restrictions (if any) and implications for the Student?

*(E.g., must publish in Open Access Journals etc.)*

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## Research Ethics

Will the Student be conducting research on human or non-human animals (including human tissues or records)?

**Yes** /  **No** /  **Uncertain**.

If so, is the Student required to complete an ethics approval form before data collection can begin?

**Yes** /  **No** /  **It depends**.

Please elaborate for the Student if necessary

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# Ownership Rights and Intellectual Property

Will the Student be involved in research governed by an Industry Sponsored Research Agreement? <sup>5</sup>

Yes /  No /  It depends. If so,

- Where does funding come from?

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- Are there relevant publication restrictions on the Student's research such as a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)? <sup>6</sup>

Yes /  No /  Unsure.

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- Bearing in mind the graduate thesis regulation that states: *No research for the Master's or PhD degrees at McMaster may be secret or classified,* <sup>7</sup> how might this agreement impact the student's thesis (e.g., right of Industry partner to review Student's thesis, or other proposed disclosure, prior to any public presentation of results; embargoed/withheld thesis)? <sup>8</sup>

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Note: If concerns exist regarding this topic, consultation with the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and the McMaster Industry Liaison Office (MILO) is advised.

Is there a possibility that an invention arising from the Student's research could be patentable?  Yes /  No /  It depends.

Is the Student and/or Supervisor interested in commercializing the results of the Student's research now or in the future?

Yes /  No /  It depends.

Please elaborate for the Student on any other relevant information about the following:

- Copyrights and trademark protection:

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- Commercialization grants:

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- Confidentiality, inter-institutional, and license agreements:

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# Student's Academic and Professional Development

The Student's **immediate goals** include:

- Academic goals:

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- Professional/career goals:

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The Student's **long-term goals** include:

- Academic goals:

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- Professional/career goals:

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Which of the Student's goals does the Supervisor feel that he/she could help the Student achieve?  
How might the Supervisor help?

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## Additional Comments

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### What to do with this form?

**It is recommended and encouraged that both the student and supervisor keep a copy of this form in their records.** The discussion recorded on this form can be reviewed by both parties and revised together again in the future if deemed appropriate.

## Endnotes:

1. Recording “meeting minutes,” and ideally emailing them to the attendees after the meeting, is an effective way to help ensure the message(s) communicated is/are mutually understood.
2. The General Regulation of the Graduate School for Vacations (section 2.5.8 of the School of Graduate Studies Calendar) states that: Full-time graduate students are expected to be on campus for all three terms of the university year, as specified in Section 1.3. In addition to statutory holidays (see Sessional Dates) and the weeklong Holiday closing of the University from late December until early January, normal vacation entitlement is two weeks of vacation during the year, to be scheduled by mutual agreement with the research supervisor and the employment supervisor. Exception to this allotment requires approval from the supervisory committee.
3. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching offers Teaching and Learning Certificates of Completion for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. **For more information, visit MacPherson Institute: <https://mi.mcmaster.ca>**.
4. Students may consider completing a Sandwich Thesis if some of the research undertaken expressly for the degree has previously been published or prepared by the Student as one or more journal articles, or parts of books. To determine eligibility for completing a Sandwich Thesis, the Student should discuss and obtain permission from the Supervisory Committee.
5. If you are working on an industry-sponsored project, whether it is funded by an industry partner alone or co-funded by a funding agency, there will be an agreement between the University and the industry partner that covers ownership of the project results, confidentiality considerations and will detail how publications arising from the results must be handled. It is important for the Supervisor and Student to discuss the agreement to determine if there are any obligations that could impact the Student’s thesis or use of the results. **More information is available through the McMaster Industry Liaison Office (MILO): [milo.mcmaster.ca](http://milo.mcmaster.ca)**. Relevant McMaster Policies (as of March 2016) include: Ownership of Student Work; Joint Intellectual Property Policy
6. A Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) is an agreement that sets out the ways in which your information (e.g., data/results) can be used by the person or organization that you are providing it to (and the kind of protection that it should receive). **For more information, visit the McMaster Industry Liaison Office (MILO) with <https://research.mcmaster.ca>**.
7. The General Regulation of the Graduate School for Theses (section 3.2 of the School of Graduate Studies Calendar) states that: “No research for the Master’s or PhD degrees at McMaster may be secret or classified. All e-theses will be available to readers through MacSphere”.
8. “Embargoed” (i.e., withheld) status of one’s thesis is intended to protect rights for immediate commercial publication, to obtain a patent which may rise from the research, or as a result of any contract made with a third party. The student may request a postponement of digital publication for up to one year at the time of **thesis submission to MacSphere: <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca>** – all such requests are automatically granted. No delay of publication more than 2 years from the initial submission will be permitted. Please note that you and your supervisor must both sign the delay of publication area on your Final Thesis Submission Sheet. For more information, consult the School of Graduate Studies Calendar.

# Specific requirements of the graduate student

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The following are program (or other) requirements specific to the Student with accompanying timelines and/or dates for completion (suggested items: progress reports, committee meetings, comprehensive exams, technical or safety training, etc.).

ITEM(s)	FREQUENCY (e.g., once a year)	DUE DATE(S)/ TIMELINE (if applicable)	NOTES/ LINKS/ RELEVANT RESOURCES
<b>SGS #101:</b> <i>Academic Research Integrity and Ethics</i>	<b>One time only</b> <i>(or until "Pass")</i>	Within first month of first term of study	See the School of Graduate Studies Calendar for current course information
<b>SGS #201:</b> <i>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)</i>	<b>One time only</b> <i>(or until "Pass")</i>	Within first month of first term of study	See the School of Graduate Studies Calendar for current course information