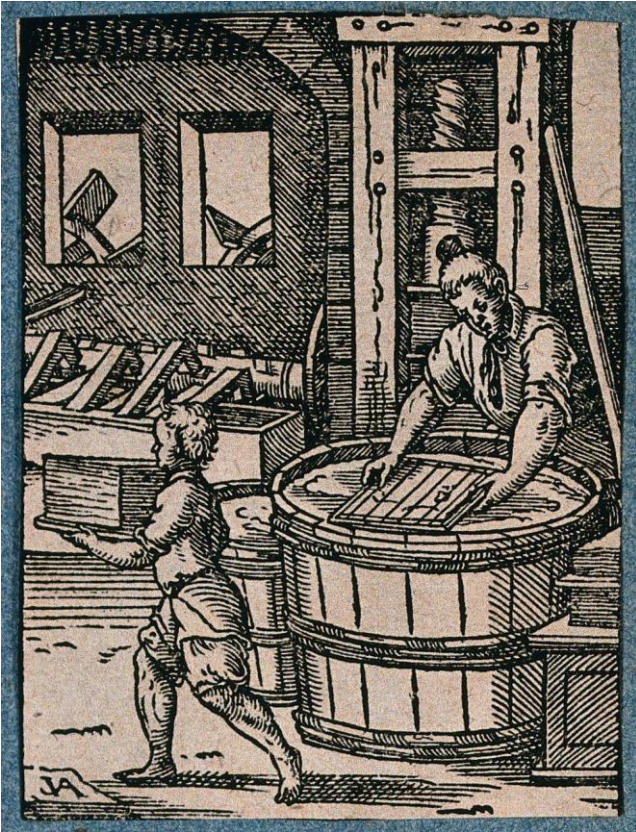


Managing the Relationship with your Supervisor(s)

Lucas Zinner





Credit: A man making paper; his apprentice carrying away the finished sheets. Woodcut by Amman, Jost, 1539-1591, [Collection.Public Domain Mark](#)

Supervisor can be defined as a person who **directs and oversees** the work of a junior (e.g. doctoral student/candidate, early stage researcher).

Supervisory process is supported by many others in various aspects of learning e.g. school coordinators librarians, IT personnel, mentors, sponsors, career advisors ...

The role of the supervisors is to guide the PhD candidates, the learning and research is entirely in their, **in your hands**.

What kind of relationship?



*“The relationship between student and supervisor is about **as close as many marriages**, and lasts as long as many marriages. It’s fairly a good analogy in several ways. On important issue is **compatibility**. Nobody in their right mind would expect a happy marriage if they married the first single person they met; similarly you can’t expect that your relationship will be equally straightforward with every potential supervisor you might meet.” (p.30)*

What do you want from your supervisor

Assess yourself in relation to your personality and needs

- Be clear for yourself what you want from your supervisor and how to obtain those things so that it suits both.
- Factors to consider are
 - your need for technical support ,
 - your need for emotional support,
 - your need for guidance and structure in planning the work,
 - your ability to deal with criticism and
 - your ability to deliver on time and to agreed standards.

What do you want from your supervisor

Assess yourself in relation to your personality and needs

- Think about your own personality:
 - what might make it difficult or awkward for a supervisor to supervise you, or
 - what problems can you anticipate that are related to a particular style of supervision?
- What can you possibly change about yourself?
- What implications does that when you approach a potential supervisor and discuss your relationship with him/her?

What PhD candidates in general value

based on research across every discipline

- Accessible: meeting with candidates frequently in both individual and group settings.
- Approachable: creating a comfortable environment where candidates could discuss concerns.
- Encouraging: providing research support, guidance, and motivation.
- Interested: in the candidates, in their research and in them as individuals.
- Open and flexible: discussing expectations and conflicts openly and honestly and adjusting to candidates' needs over time.
- Professional: facilitating the candidate's socialization into the school, the programme and discipline
- Supportive: providing professional and career development support

What should a supervisor do?

Recognize your new role as an early stage researcher

- To make sure you are on track and reaching important milestones
- To offer intellectual and academic advice and feedback on the literature, data and your choice of methodology
- To read through and comment on draft chapters
- To direct you to relevant training and courses (for example, methods training)
- To point you in the direction of relevant funding streams or conferences
- To a certain extent, they often provide emotional and pastoral support
- To provide time and space for your own professional and personal development
- To connect you to your peers and the scientific community

To get the most out of supervision you should know what you want and what you can expect.

A PhD supervisor may take the role of a master, director, a facilitator, an adviser, a teacher, a guide, a critic, a freedom giver, a supporter, a friend, an expert, a guru, a door-opener, a boss, a project manager, a career counsellor...

- Which of these roles and related relationships do you think is most desirable?
- Can you identify the advantages and disadvantages of the different roles and the relationships associated with them?

Roles of supervisors are changing over time

To get the most out of supervision you should take control of the process.

At the start

- Helping in identifying a good question
- Knowing what has already been done
- Anticipating when a proposed research project is overly ambitious or too easy
- Agreeing on a timeline and first milestones

In the middle

- Watching over the “bigger” picture
- Nudging you in good directions
- Identifying common pitfalls
- Encouraging to write
- Connecting with the community
- Keeping an eye on the clock

At the end

- Telling you when to stop
- Knowing what a thesis looks like
- Providing support for the publication and presentation of the results
- Helping to find proper reviewers
- Preparing for your defence



Code of Good Practice for Doctoral Schools

Code of Good Practice for Doctoral Schools (14 April 2017)

This document provides guidelines for good practice that are binding at the University of Vienna. Schools can propose additional responsibilities ("Addendum") that go beyond those listed below.

1. Responsibilities of the director of doctoral school

The director of the school is an internationally renowned scholar. S/he is elected by the Rectorate for a period of 2 years, the Deans of the involved Faculties support. Directors can apply for a teaching reduction.

The director of the school:

- applies for the (continuation of) the school and proposes the other elements of the governance (e.g. advisory board)
- represents the school to the Rectorate, its members and the other doctoral schools
- assumes the responsibilities of the DSPL (to be appointed in consultation with the Rectorate, some of them can be delegated according to the governance to a vice-DSPL).
- oversees compliance with the University's general rules, the school's statutes and with additional guidelines of the school (if any, named in the school's statutes)
- negotiates the budget with the Rectorate;
- oversees spending decisions, including those made by the school concerning travel grants or grants for workshops organized by the school
- provides an annual report to the Rectorate and the general assembly of the school, including key performance indicators;
- ensures that the programme and especially the relevant jobs are advertised internationally and transparently;
- organises the admission process;
- ensures that each doctoral candidate is assigned to at least one supervisor and has access to other researchers in the school for advice and feedback
- organises and oversees the teaching program (e.g. seminars, workshops, etc.)
- organises the recurrent public (e.g. faculty-wide) presentations of the school
- ensures that doctoral candidates have sufficient time to study and research according to the employment contract and the general conditions of the school
- approves the dissertation agreement as well as the annual progress reports;
- oversees the progress of the doctoral candidates;
- initiates the dissertation examination process in line with the school's statutes (including the selection of reviewers and the composition of the examination committee)
- organizes measures of career planning (e.g. coaching, mentoring, etc.)
- provides measures and procedures for conflict resolution with other relevant bodies of the university).

2. Responsibilities of supervisors

Every doctoral candidate has one main supervisor and access to at least one other member of the school (including advanced post docs) who provide complementary advice and feedback. Each school defines the role and range of activities for additional supervisors. Main supervisors are research-active members of the school and are assigned to the candidate (in agreement with the supervisor) by the director.

The main supervisor:

- promotes the scientific development of the doctoral candidate to become an independent researcher;
- commits her-/himself to supervise the doctoral candidate for the duration of the PhD project and provides regular comments on the candidate's progress and her/his manuscripts and doctoral thesis draft;
- clarifies the expectations for supervision using the available forms: for admission, the doctoral candidate and all supervisors sign the indication of willingness to supervise the doctoral candidate and a doctoral thesis agreement, which is amended through annual progress reports once a year;
- supports the doctoral candidate to prepare the public presentation at the end of the first study year;
- clarifies ownership of the data generated during the thesis research with the doctoral candidate;
- ensures together with the director of the school that the candidate can devote sufficient time for her/his own research, her/his personal and professional development and the activities offered by the school;
- ensures together with the director of the school that the candidate has access to relevant infrastructure;
- keeps her-/himself updated about the latest progress in the doctoral candidate's research field;
- encourages that the results are presented and published in relevant outlets;
- verifies that the final thesis complies with the criteria set by the university (e.g. affiliations policy);
- helps to enforce compliance with the Code of Good Scientific Practice of the University of Vienna;
- helps the candidate to apply for complementary funding;
- assists the doctoral candidate in career planning;
- contributes to the reputation and the success of the doctoral school.



3. Responsibilities of the doctoral candidate

Admission ("Zulassung") as a Doctoral student to the University of Vienna and admission ("Aufnahme") to the school are prerequisites to be a member of the school. The school can define particular offers and services (e.g. travel grants) that are restricted to its members and other offers and services that are open to all admitted ("zugelassen") doctoral candidates of the field. Membership in the school can be made dependent on fulfilment of particular obligations (e.g. participation in seminars, presentation of preliminary results etc.).

The doctoral candidate:

- clarifies the expectations for supervision and agrees upon the practical aspects of supervision using the available forms (Doctoral thesis agreement and annual progress reports);
- fulfils the requirements of the doctoral school, the curriculum and the doctoral thesis agreement agreed upon at the time of admission, especially the public presentation at the end of the first study year (FÖP);
- presents her/his progress at least once a year to the faculty of the school;
- takes the supervisor(s) guidance and feedback into due consideration;
- participates actively in courses, workshops, symposia and other respective events which promote integration into the scientific community;
- is committed to the doctoral project and understands that the research work and completion of the doctoral degree studies are ultimately her/his own responsibility;
- ensures that the thesis is her/his own work and that the final version has been read and commented upon by the supervisor(s) prior to submission for examination;
- adopts and understands the protocol of good scientific practice, the general principles of ethical aspects in science and the ethical regulations of the research field;
- becomes familiar with the relevant high-quality outlets (journals, proceedings, series, etc.) suitable for publishing the results;
- includes the University of Vienna as an affiliation on publications resulting from the doctoral project;
- alerts the supervisor and the director of the doctoral school of any difficulties or delays at an early stage and address these issues honestly in the annual progress reports;
- provides a regular (at least annual) progress report.

What does a supervisor not do?

Recognize your new role as an early stage researcher

- Your supervisor is not there to design your research for you, or to plan, structure or write your thesis. Remember, they advise and you decide.
- Their job isn't to teach you in the traditional sense, and you aren't a student in the traditional sense either.
- Their job isn't to nanny you. It is not your supervisor's job to chase you for chapter drafts or to motivate you to work.
- It's also not their job to proofread or edit your work or check the language.
- It's also not your supervisor's role to find you a job after your PhD.

Influences of time on the supervisory relationship

Concepts of doctoral research supervision.

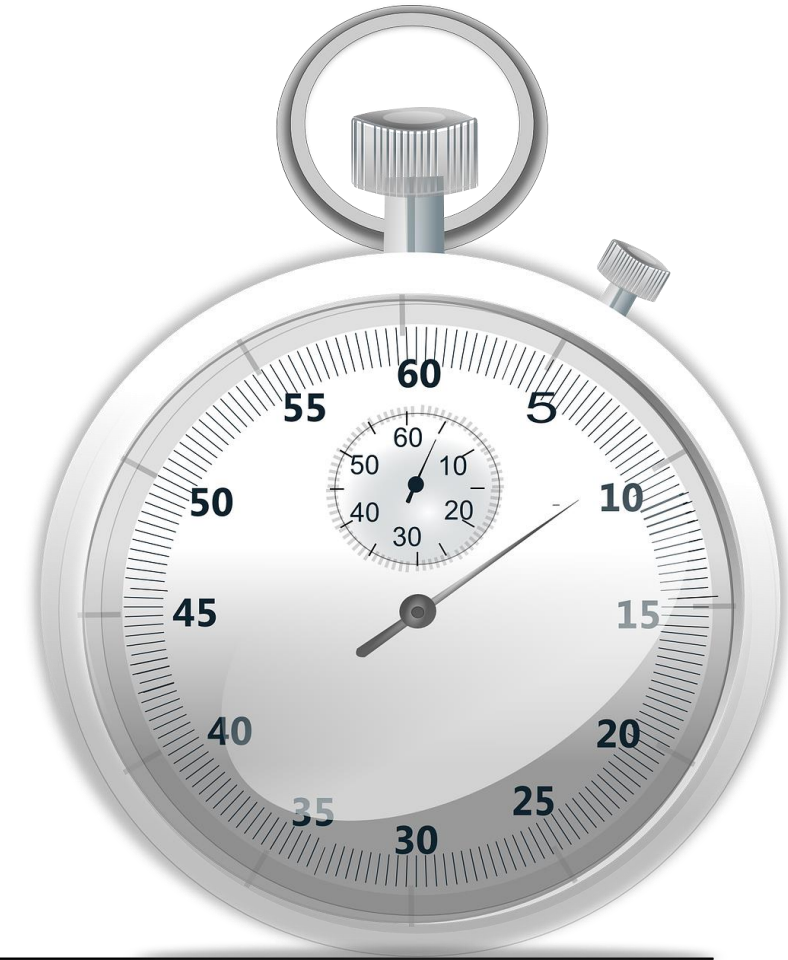
Time on the doctoral programme, time for supervisory meetings, time allocations, time for drafts to be sent, time taken for and to incorporate feedback, time to fail and restart, time and money, time to read, time to think, time to understand, time to reflect, time to prepare for other duties, time to complete



Influences of time on the supervisory relationship

Concepts of doctoral research supervision.

- Set a schedule with your supervisor(s) and try to stick to it or explicitly adjust it if needed.
- Be transparent regarding an interruption of study and discuss possible implications.
- Give notice of holidays or when you are away or occupied with other duties
- Discuss current and anticipated obstacles to progress
- Have a regular, e.g. 3 monthly review of how things are going
- Time is one of the most powerful disruptors of trust in the relationship.
- Make sure you get your expectations right.



What motivates your supervisor?

Be aware that supervision is demanding and only one of many duties

- Originality, brilliant work and being intellectually challenged
- Reliability, commitment and enthusiasm
- Growing independency
- Good research results for (joint) publications
- Good team-fit
- Testing new ideas they haven't the time to test themselves
- Avoiding troubles with failing students
- Positive relationships with current and future co-workers

To get the most out of supervision you should take control of the process.

- **Discuss and agree key issues**, e.g. authorship of papers, research ethics and intellectual property, at the start of the project
- **Agree on communication channels and communicate regularly**
- **Be proactive and arrange** formal supervisory meetings
- **Prepare an agenda** and send it to your supervisor in advance
- **Prepare some work before each meeting** to provide some focus to the meeting (e.g. reading list, data, drafts)
- **During the meeting share your ideas, thoughts, views, concerns**
- **Summarise meetings and keep a copy** for your own record and send one to your supervisor (for follow-up and highlight any misunderstandings)

To get the most out of supervision you should take control of the process.


- **Expect to receive feedback and criticism** and use this to improve your work
- **Deal with problems as they arise** be it technical, resource, supervision ...
- Demonstrate **maturity and independence**
- Say what you mean and be **explicit**
- Behave **professionally and respectful**
- **Respect** the supervisor's time pressures
- Do not come with last minute demands or requests
- Maintain **regular contact**
- **Share your plans** with your supervisor(s)

Ways to undermine the relationship

It is easier to destroy a relationship than to restore it.

- **Ignoring advice**, be it because you don't understand or you don't like
- **Gossiping** about your supervisor, your colleagues and peers
- **Bypassing** your supervisor and making decisions without due consultation
- **Denigrating** the supervisor, the institute or the university
- **Avoiding contact** with the supervisor and making yourself disappear
- **Coming up with new excuses** again and again, e.g. for deadlines not met

Preventing conflicts



Causes of conflict	Overcoming strategies
Lack of communication	<p>Discuss expectations at the beginning and make them explicit</p> <p>Give sufficient notice for requests</p> <p>Draw up an agenda for your meetings</p> <p>Record the outcome of meetings and share</p> <p>Alert supervisor(s) to problems as they arise</p>
Mismatched expectations	<p>Keep expectations realistic</p> <p>Be organised and professional</p> <p>Be open, flexible and honest with concerns</p>
Personality clash	<p>Understand discipline/cultural differences</p> <p>Find mutual ground and make effort to compromise</p> <p>Choose your battles and not war on everything</p>
Competing pressures	<p>Be honest: don't overpromise</p> <p>Give sufficient notice for requests and meetings</p> <p>Remember you are both human beings</p>

If your work is not progressing or you have personal difficulties to work together don't forget there is always a solution.

When problems arise

- Speak with your supervisor.

If problems persist

- Speak to your second/other supervisor

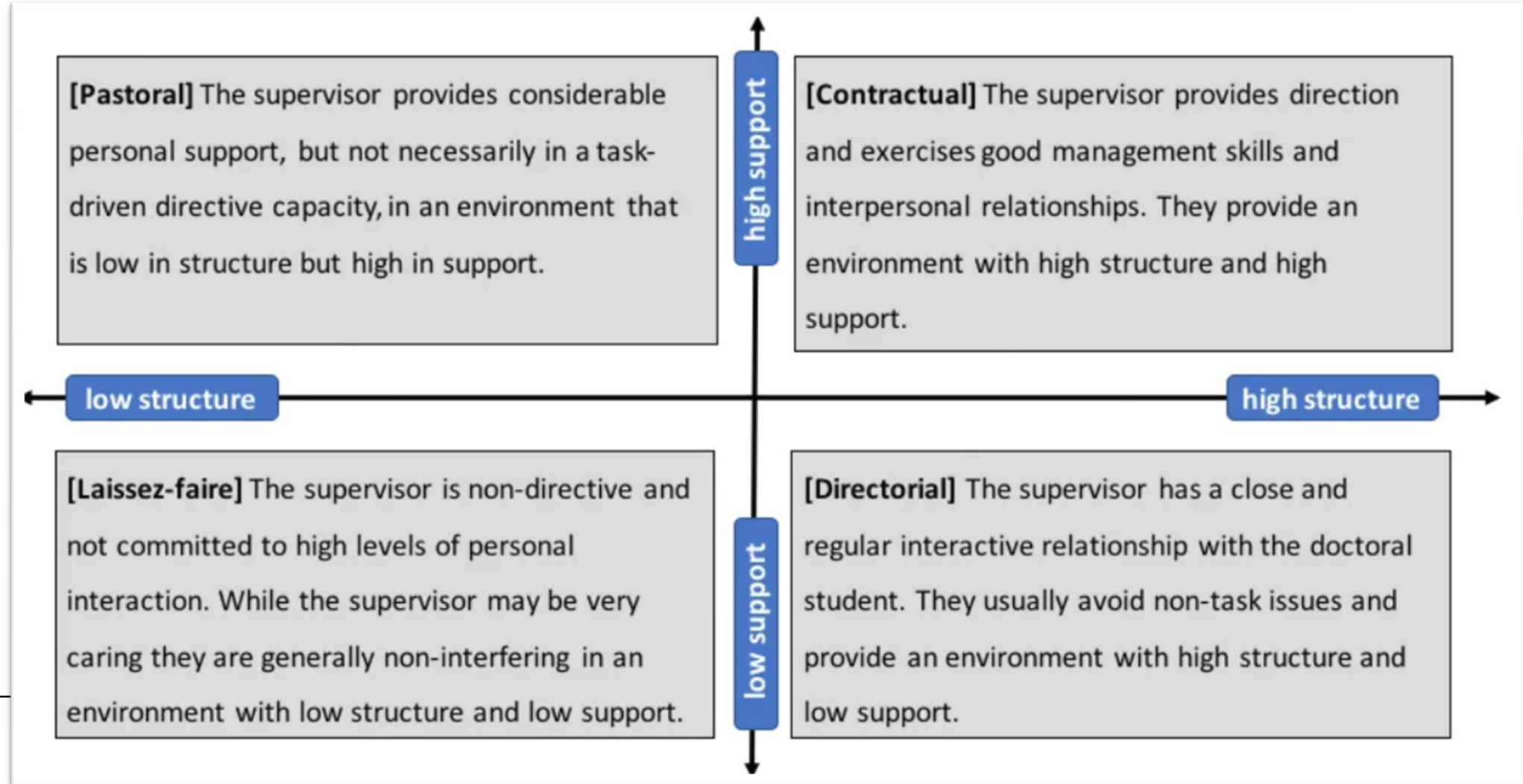
If the issue is still not resolved, approach

- Director of the doctoral study programme resp. director of the doctoral school.
- Coordinator of the doctoral school or someone in the central department/us

If all else fails, remember you can agree and change supervisor

There is no one-size-fits-all model for supervision.

Terry Gatfield proposed a model for supervisory styles ranging from **laissez-faire** to **pastoral** (both of which necessitate greater student independence), to contractual and directorial (which provide greater supervisor direction to students).



How are doctoral students supervised?

Concepts of doctoral research supervision.

Anne Lee tries in her work to come up with a conceptual approach towards research supervision.

*The main concepts identified are: **functional** – where the issue is one of project management; **enculturation** – where the student is encouraged to become a member of the disciplinary community; **critical thinking** – where the student is encouraged to question and analyse their work; **emancipation** – where the student is encouraged to question and develop themselves; and **developing a quality relationship** – where the student is enthused, inspired and cared for.*

Lee, Anne. "How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision." *Studies in Higher Education* 33.3 (2008): 267-281.

How are doctoral students supervised?

Concepts of doctoral research supervision.

Table 1. A framework for concepts of research supervision.

	Functional	Enculturation	Critical thinking	Emancipation	Relationship development
Supervisor's activity	Rational progression through tasks	Gatekeeping	Evaluation, challenge	Mentoring, supporting constructivism	Supervising by experience, developing a relationship
Supervisor's knowledge and skills	Directing, project management	Diagnosis of deficiencies, coaching	Argument, analysis	Facilitation, reflection	Emotional intelligence
Possible student reaction	Obedience organised	Role modelling	Constant inquiry, fight or flight	Personal growth, reframing	Emotional intelligence

Lee, Anne. "How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision." *Studies in Higher Education* 33.3 (2008): 267-281.

Nurturing the relationship

It is easier to destroy a relationship than to restore it.

- Explicitly show that you value the knowledge and experience of a supervisor.
- Give credit where credit is due
- Allow your supervisor to be human, tolerate human weaknesses, and make the most of your supervisor's strengths.
- The supervisory relationship is a two-way street.
- As a candidate, you are in the driver's seat.
- **Be honest, be respectful, be adult.**

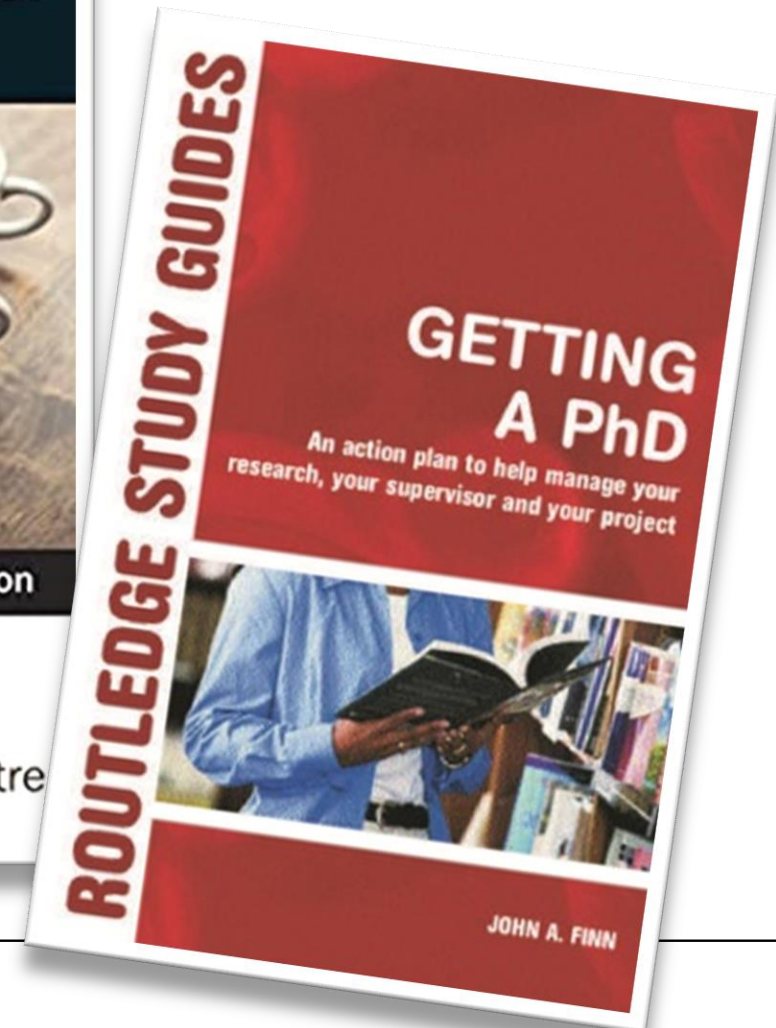


Read more

to learn more about it



Gordon Rugg and Marian Petre





Weitere Informationen & Online Bewerbung:

<https://doktorat.univie.ac.at/>