

Handbook of Graduate Supervision

The Handbook of Graduate Supervision will help you get the most out of the supervisor-graduate student relationship at UBC.

It provides in-depth advice on roles and responsibilities, communications, learning styles, time management, and many other issues.

The advice offered here does not include details of policies and procedures relating to graduate work. Please refer to the Policies and Procedures section of this web site.

- [Download the handbook as PDF](#) [1]
- [Printer friendly version of the whole handbook](#) [2]

Getting Started

As a graduate student, your relationship with your supervisor is key to the success of your degree program.

It's worthwhile investing time and energy up front before establishing a relationship with a graduate supervisor. This section of the handbook will help you answer the following questions:

- What are your graduate program's specific requirements for supervision?
- Have you chosen a subject for study?
- Have you researched different potential supervisors?
- Have you figured out what different potential supervisors expect from you?
- Have you found a supervisor or has one been assigned to you?
- Do you know if you and your supervisor are a good match?

Choosing a Subject for Study

Deciding on an area of study within a particular discipline can be challenging. But it's important to be clear on your preferences before you make a commitment to a particular area of study. Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you think about subjects for study:

- In your undergraduate classes, what content area interested you the most? What did you want to learn more about?
- Why do you find this area intriguing? Is it personal interest or is it because of someone you admire who does research in this area? While it is valuable to have mentors that you admire, it is equally important to have some personal motivation to learn more about this area that is separate from a professor or other expert.

- Graduate work is self-directed and focuses on discovering new knowledge. Could you see yourself doing graduate work in the area you're interested in?

Most graduate programs have descriptions of ongoing faculty research. Check their web sites to see if any faculty interests match your own. Another way of clarifying your thoughts is to talk to others. Spend some time talking to someone who does research in your areas of interest. Ask them what it's like to do research in this area, and what some of the challenges and rewards are.

Talk to other graduate students about how they decided on a subject for study. Find out what worked and didn't work for them, and how they made their final decisions.

Student Comments: Choosing a Subject

- "First, collect information about individual faculty members whose research areas may be interesting to you. Second, make an appointment with the faculty members you have identified and talk to them to find out if there is a topic or study area that both you and your potential supervisor are interested in."
- "I already knew what areas I was interested in, so I visited several different universities for tours. I was able to meet various faculty members and discuss their areas of research. I found this very helpful in choosing a supervisor."
- "I chose my field of study (Wood Science-Composite Materials) after I had worked in a wood composite research facility."
- "I would recommend that students work before going to graduate school, if their goal is to work in industry."
- "Don't just look at the potential projects that you could be involved in. Look at the bigger picture - what courses will you be required to take? To what extent will you need to complete undergraduate courses to ensure your readiness to complete graduate work? Are you interested in the courses?"
- "I took a course with a professor who was well respected in his field. After getting to know him and liking the course that I was taking, I approached him about possibilities for graduate school."
- "Make sure you REALLY like the subject. I find that a lot of students enter graduate school just to keep going to school until something 'pops' up."
- "Choose something you are interested in. I took some classes to figure out the content area...still not sure if I'm at the right school for it though. Suggestions for grads: talk to lots of people, try to figure out a few thesis ideas beforehand and chat them up with professors and other people to see if your study subject is appropriate for what you want to do."
- "When I came here I had a very broad idea about my subject of study. After contacting a supervisor concerned with this topic we worked together defining a specific subject."
- "Spoke with other graduate students in my faculty; tried to make sure that my interests were in line with opportunities in the program."

Choosing a Supervisor

Choosing a supervisor under FoGS policy is the student's responsibility, and is an extremely important decision that can determine success in graduate school.

There's a lot you can learn about potential supervisors by looking into their publications. Look for their profile on their graduate program's web site; their CV may be there already. Otherwise, ask a program staff person for their list of publications. Here's what to look for:

- What topics does this person publish papers on? This will give you a sense of the type of research you would be doing.
- How active are they in publishing research?
- Where is their name in the list of authors? If the supervisor's name is usually first then they may be more involved in writing manuscripts and may not want graduate students to be involved in this process. If graduate students' names are usually first then you can count on having first authorships as well.
- How successful are this supervisor's former students? This may give you some indication of the capability of the supervisor.

Talk to some current graduate students who are working under this supervisor:

- What has been their experience working with this supervisor?
- What is expected of them as graduate students working under this supervisor?
- What did they expect of this supervisor coming into the program?
- Has he/she met those expectations? Why or why not?
- What do they feel this supervisor's strengths are in terms of graduate supervision?
- What do they feel are his/her weaknesses in terms of graduate supervision?

Student Comments: Choosing a Supervisor

- "Find out how a supervisor works by doing an assistantship or volunteering with him or her."
- "Pick a supervisor who works the same way you do or approaches work the same way you do."
- "Don't pick a supervisor who has too many students already."
- "Take a course or courses taught by the supervisor before beginning your research, so you can find out their methodological biases."
- "Choose someone you feel comfortable with. It's important to maintain an open and honest relationship as you work through your thesis research. Don't hook up with someone who is known to be difficult; it's not worth the effort. Understanding what your prospective supervisor expects of you as graduate student can be essential."

Individual Faculty Requirements for Supervision

At UBC, some graduate programs require that you have your supervisor selected before you start your studies, while others do not. Please check with your graduate program for specific requirements and procedures.

Supervisor Chosen After Admission

In programs that do not require selection of a graduate supervisor initially, you may be asked to write a proposal defining your interests and goals. After you have done this, the graduate advisor for your program will suggest some possible supervisors. Then follow the suggestions in this section to help you choose the best supervisor for you.

Graduate Programs That Don't Require a Supervisor

Some professional programs and non-thesis master's programs may not require assignment of a graduate supervisor. If this is the case, you still need to find out what sort of supervision you will have.

Your program may require that you be supervised by:

- A committee
- An advisor

Find out what you can expect of these individuals, including, if applicable:

- guidance on your program of study
- assistance with funding
- input regarding professional development

Supervisor Expectations

Understanding what your prospective supervisor expects of you as graduate student is essential to a successful graduate student-supervisor relationship. Here are some questions to ask a potential supervisor so you know what is expected of you:

- What level of independence does the potential supervisor expect in his or her graduate students?
- Is the potential supervisor actively involved in research or does he or she rely on graduate students to conduct the research and report findings? If a supervisor is actively involved in research you can expect him or her to be available for constant supervision. If a supervisor is busy doing other things you will not be able to count on him or her for constant supervision. Think about how much supervision you like to have and whether you match up with this supervisor or not.
- What does the potential supervisor expect of you in terms of background knowledge and skills? Is there any specific knowledge you need to have before starting to work with this supervisor? Consider your own skills and abilities, along with how willing you are to acquire new skills or knowledge.
- Is there a specific project that the potential supervisor wants graduate students to take on? This happens frequently at the master's level, and you should be aware of any work the supervisor already has in mind for you.
- What is the potential supervisor's expectations regarding funding of graduate students? Does he or she require students to have scholarships? Is there a Research Assistantship available? What is the program's policy regarding Teaching Assistant support?

Student Comments: Supervisor Expectations

- "I think working with your supervisor to establish the right distribution of your time among course work and lab work and other activities is very important. Your supervisor may want you to concentrate on research or may want you to complete your course work first. "
- "Find out how often your supervisor likes to meet, and decide whether that's appropriate for you."
- "Ask your potential supervisor what will be required in terms of hours spent per day in the lab. Also, determine whether you will need to provide daily updates."
- "Find out whether your potential supervisor prefers to communicate by e-mail, telephone, or in person, and ask how frequently you will hold formal meetings."

- "The best advice I would give to any graduate student is to find a supervisor that is actually interested in your ideas, or whose ideas interest you."
- "Find out things like how many papers you will be expected to publish and how many conferences you will be expected to attend."
- "Do not be too quick in setting up a committee. Take your time and try to get it right."
- "I would recommend developing some general guidelines for working together that you design and write-up together, and agree to - like a contract)."

Learning Styles

As with any other relationship, there are no absolute right or wrong arrangements in a graduate student - supervisor relationship. The important thing is for you and your supervisor to be well matched. You have to know yourself well first; then you have to learn about your potential supervisor and decide how well your styles and preferences match each other.

People learn differently depending on their personality, learning experience, and individual development. Some people learn better by thinking about things while others prefer to experience and experiment. Some people are more visual, while others are more verbal. Some prefer to learn in sequence, while others like to learn "the big picture" first. A learning environment that is not effective for one person may work very well for another. The graduate school learning environment may or may not be familiar to you, and it's important that you are aware of this environment. Ask yourself these questions:

- Have you ever been in an environment where you are responsible for your own learning and the number of hours you spend working?
- Do you prefer to handle things on your own and ask for help when you need it, or are you more productive when you have someone to report to regularly who offers considerable guidance?
- Are you accustomed to getting regular feedback on your work or are you happier receiving feedback only once in a while when a large piece of work has been completed?
- Do you like to have an assignment pretty much complete and edited before receiving feedback on it or would you like feedback from the early stages through to completion?

The answers to these questions may help you understand why some learning techniques work for you while others are frustrating. Every supervisor has a preference for one or more teaching/supervision styles, ranging from very hands-on and directive to very hands-off and non-directive. You should discuss your answers to the above questions with your potential supervisor to determine whether or not your learning style is compatible with his or her teaching and supervisory style.

Student Comments: Supervisor Styles

- "You should find out if the potential supervisor will help you develop a specific thesis project or whether you will be expected to do this and present suggestions to him or her."
- "Try to find out how much involvement the potential supervisor will likely have in the development of the research project, such as by designing experiments or determining the structure."
- "Some supervisors expect graduate students to problem-solve on their own and consult with their supervisor only when necessary. This suits some people, but not everyone feels comfortable with this."
- "Make sure the potential supervisor understands the importance of regular meetings. You don't

- want to be responsible for trying to schedule one only when you really need help."
- "Expect your supervisor's role to change over time as you become more skilled at research and writing?"

Planning Your Graduate Degree

Careful planning can make a big difference to the progress of your graduate degree. The relationship between you and supervisor is a partnership. Major decisions about the research to be done and the working relationship should be made together.

Ask your supervisor and graduate program advisor for advice as you think about the following:

- Consider what you want to do after graduate school. While some graduate students are interested in becoming academics, others may be interested in professional careers. If you know what you want to do, you can plan your degree program to provide you with the skills you will need after graduation.
- Decide what skills and qualifications you will need in your chosen profession. For example, if you will need teaching, supervision or presentation skills, you can structure your degree program so that you learn and practice these skills.
- Make connections with people in your chosen field before you graduate, and explore the possibilities of working with them.

Annual Plan

An Annual Plan can provide you and your supervisor with a clear outline of the work to come, as well as a document to check with periodically as the year progresses. You should be aware of these important milestones towards the timely completion of your degree:

- End of first year: course work completed; supervisory committee established and has met once
- End of second year: qualifying requirements completed (for PhD students); research work completed (for master's students); at least one supervisory committee meeting completed.
- Maximum time allowed for completing a master's degree: five years
- Maximum time allowed for completing a doctoral degree: six years
- Doctoral students should check the Doctoral Exams section of this web site.

Annual Expectations

As a graduate student, you need to find out what your graduate program, supervisor and committee expect of you on an annual basis. For example:

- Are you required to propose an annual plan?
- How often are you expected to meet with your supervisory committee?
- Do you have to provide some sort of formal progress report to your program? How often?

Student Comments: Planning the Year

We asked graduate students what advice they would give students when they are planning for the year. Here's what they said:

- "Develop a set of general goals and determine what you need to do each month to achieve them. Make others aware of your goals so there is some outside pressure to meet deadlines."
- "Whatever timeline you plan, double the amount of time you expect your actual research to take."
- "When planning for the year consider: starting and finishing dates, scholarship deadlines, timing of courses, committee meetings, timing of field work, comprehensive exams, data analysis period, writing period, waiting and revision period, defense, and time for writing articles."
- "The first year should centre around courses and a high GPA (for additional scholarship chances) and give the background for the first summer's research."
- "Consider how your course work contributes to the development of a research proposal and/or your comprehensive examination."

Setting Goals

Having a plan with clear, measurable goals will help you make consistent progress towards your degree requirements.

Long Term: Start by setting long term goals and a time frame for achieving them. Set goals that are challenging but realistic. Your long term time frame could be one year or less, but it should be one in which you can reasonably predict the future. The time frame should be short enough to encourage you to work consistently but not so short that you can't achieve your goals.

Short Term: Short term objectives break your long term goals down into manageable chunks. They make long term goals seem less overwhelming by letting you focus on smaller tasks that are more easily achieved. Completing short term objectives will help you feel successful and productive as you progress towards your goal. This is an important part of successful time management and overcoming procrastination.

Effective long and short term goals have these characteristics:

- Achievable (don't shoot too high; this will decrease your motivation)
- Specific and measurable (you need to know when you have achieved a goal)
- Has a deadline (in order to take it seriously)
- Written down (or it may be forgotten)
- Flexible (in order to accommodate circumstances beyond your control)

Give yourself an incentive or reward for achieving each short term goal. It may sound corny, but it does work to keep you moving toward achieving your next challenge.

Unexpected events and obstacles always come up, so build in time for dealing with them. Try this: determine the time you need to achieve any major goal, then add 3 or 4 months. If no unexpected events come up, you'll have met your deadline early. And if they do, you're ready for them.

Choosing a Research Topic

Choosing a research topic and methodology should ultimately be a joint decision among you, your supervisor and your supervisory committee. Initially, however, the determination of a research topic is up to you and your supervisor. Be sure to discuss the research topic early in your student/supervisor relationship.

Graduate Supervisor Comments: Choosing a Research Topic

- "I will not take on a student unless their interest is a reasonable match with funding opportunities. I offer students a range of what I am currently able to support and I also consider the opportunities that may result from their own experiences."
- "In team research, the student should know what his or her component is and how it links to the other research being done by the group."
- "If the student arrives with his or her own funding (e.g. NSERC) then the student has more latitude in selecting the topic of interest. If the funding source is a research contract or grant, there is less latitude in topic selection because the supervisor must fulfill the original commitment and intent of the contract or proposal."
- "Most of my new graduate students coming in already know what their research topic will be. Graduate students are expected to discuss their approach and research methods with me."
- "It depends on the student and on funding. Some students come with excellent ideas that can be funded, while others prefer the supervisor to advise. I vary my approach according to the student and the current funding opportunities."

Student Comments: Choosing a Research Topic

- "Start off by gathering ideas and manipulating them to see what you can come up with. This often requires a considerable amount of reading and discussion with researchers in this area."
- "Review the current topics of research in this area and look for gaps in the knowledge?"
- "Read outside the specific area you are interested in as well, and look for opportunities for synthesis between two or more areas."
- "Define your topic as clearly as possible. It must be limited and feasible. Most thesis projects are too ambitious."
- "Make sure the books necessary for your research are available in the library. You should not have to rely on interlibrary loan for very important or lengthy materials."

Scholarly Integrity

You should discuss scholarly integrity and intellectual property issues with your supervisor as soon as you start working together so that there are no surprises later.

UBC has an overall policy on scholarly integrity, but many variations are allowed within this policy. One aspect of this policy is the following: "Research conditions for all involved in a research team should be outlined in a letter from the principal investigator before team members become engaged". Sample letters to colleagues, post doctoral fellows and graduate students about such issues as compensation, supervision, authorship, records of data, ownership and/or use of data, publication rights, and commercialization, are available from Research Services. The Faculty of Graduate Studies sends notices about this requirement to all accepted for graduate studies and their supervisors at the time of admission. These notices and a copy of the letter from the supervisor to the graduate student detailing

the terms above are filed in the student file in Graduate Studies.

Graduate Supervisor Comments: Scholarly Integrity and Publications

- "Students are always the lead authors on the work for which they have gathered and analyzed the data and done a reasonable literature search."
- "Usually there is an agreement about publication strategy up front. Usually, if the student has written the paper then their name is placed as the first author."
- "Have an agreement up front as to who is responsible for what and whose name will be on the paper(s). I also explain why I may need to be a co-author."

The Supervisory Committee

The supervisory committee consists of your supervisor and at least two faculty members. Its role is to provide support to you and your supervisor by broadening and deepening the range of expertise and experience available, and by offering advice about, and assessment of, your work.

A doctoral student's supervisory committee is responsible for guiding the student in selecting any required courses, planning the research, and preparing the thesis.

Students in a master's program with a thesis usually have a supervisory committee that advises them on coursework, research, and thesis preparation.

Graduate students who establish their supervisory committees early in their programs and who meet with their committees regularly, tend to complete their degree programs successfully, and sooner than students who wait to establish their committees.

Composition of Supervisory Committee

The membership of committees must meet the requirements of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and of the individual programs. Decisions about supervisory committee members are based on:

- the collective experiences of the people involved
- their ability to contribute to the intended study
- their availability and willingness to serve

UBC has set [policies regarding the composition and responsibilities of supervisory committees](#) [3]. Please review these thoroughly before deciding who to invite to your committee.

Assembling the Committee

In general, you should establish your supervisory committee as soon as possible after you and your supervisor agree on a thesis topic. Even before then, it's a good idea for your supervisor to consult with

prospective committee members about the proposed coursework.

Generally you, as the graduate student, are responsible for establishing your committee in consultation with your supervisor. You should discuss possible choices of committee members with your supervisor, then check UBC Policies and Procedures to ensure that potential members meet all UBC requirements. This decision is often based in part on the research interests and areas of expertise of individual professors. You should consider approaching professors whose expertise and research area overlap somewhat with the thesis topic.

In nearly all cases, you will be asked to contact potential committee members to determine if they are available and interested in serving on your supervisory committee. You can also ask your supervisor to approach a potential committee member on your behalf.

Meetings and Communications

Once you start working with your supervisory committee, it is very important to keep its members informed of your research progress. Committee members appreciate receiving the occasional note (or e-mail message) explaining where you are and what you are planning to do next. You should also let them know when they are likely to receive the next installment of the work. This is not only courteous, but also keeps your supervisory committee members up to speed and makes meetings more productive.

You should schedule a meeting when you and your supervisor feel ready to share the proposal or drafts of your thesis work with the other members of the committee.

It is generally your responsibility to set up meetings. Ensure that each committee member receives copies of written work at least two weeks before the meeting.

Getting the Most From Your Supervisory Committee

When professors agree to sit on your supervisory committee, they are agreeing to be available for consultation and discussion about your thesis. Committee members with different types of expertise may have a more objective perspective of the progress of your thesis than you and your supervisor do. Ask your committee for comments and advice on your thesis proposal and ideas, and contact them regularly when you are collecting data or developing ideas to ensure that you are on the right track. They will also serve on your examination committee during your thesis defense.

You can get feedback from your committee by meeting with individual members, sending out print materials or calling a meeting of the entire committee. Your supervisor can help you decide when and what form of meeting or consultation is needed.

Supervisor's Role

Your supervisor will often be the Chair of your supervisory committee, although this varies from one program to another. The Chair of the supervisory committee has additional responsibilities:

- While it is up to you to organize meetings of the supervisory committee, it's a good idea to involve your supervisor in decisions about meetings or other consultations.

- If you are a doctoral student, your supervisor must ensure that recommendations for external examiners are made to the graduate program advisor or head of department and forwarded to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in a timely manner. Your supervisor will also assist you to comply with any changes to be made to your thesis after your oral examination.

Roles and Responsibilities

A graduate student's progress depends upon the support of people in a number of roles at the graduate program and university levels. Both graduate students and supervisors need to be aware of these different roles and their responsibilities.

This section will clarify who is responsible for administrative decisions, and the responsibilities of the graduate program advisor, the supervisor and the graduate student.

Administrative Decisions

Both students and supervisors need to know which individuals and University bodies are responsible for different administrative decisions, since confusion about who does what can lead to missed deadlines and missed opportunities.

Each person or administrative body in the following list has responsibilities in specific areas.

The graduate student, supervisor and supervisory committee:

- student's degree program, including required and elective courses or labs
- scope and topics of comprehensive exams or comprehensive research papers
- master's thesis and doctoral dissertation topic
- master's thesis and doctoral dissertation research methodology
- structure and content of thesis/dissertation

The graduate program, department or school:

- recommendations to FoGS regarding merit-based awards
- delegation of graduate program teaching assistantships
- delegation of graduate program research assistantships
- nature of the comprehensive exam
- final Master's exam or defense

The Faculty of Graduate Studies:

- admission to graduate school
- selection of merit-based UBC awards and fellowships
- final doctoral defense scheduling and standing
- processing changes to student's academic record or registration
- approving membership on a supervisory committee for people who do not conform to requirements (doctoral only)
- leaves of absence, extensions and transfers
- student withdrawal from graduate program

- informal appeals and mediation

The UBC Board of Governors:

- tuition fee amounts

The UBC Senate:

- approval of academic policies of the University
- approval of requirements of all graduate programs and degrees
- approval of students for graduation

The UBC Senate Committee on Student Appeals on Academic Standing:

- academic appeals
- disciplinary appeals

The President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline:

- decisions regarding suspension

Enrolment Services:

- tuition fee assessment and collection

The Office of Awards and Financial Aid:

- recipients of need-based awards and bursaries

Graduate Program Advisor Responsibilities

The graduate program advisor is (preferably) a tenured Associate Professor or Full Professor. In addition to her or his own teaching and research responsibilities, the program graduate advisor agrees to take on the following responsibilities for a certain tenure of time. The graduate advisor's duties may vary, but they typically include the following:

- Attempts to recruit exceptionally qualified students
- Usually chairs the committee for Graduate Program Admissions and/or Policies
- Often serves as a representative on Graduate Council
- Acts as liaison with the Faculty of Graduate Studies
- Ensures that graduate students working on research theses are matched with appropriate supervisors and supervisory committees
- Compiles and coordinates information concerning deadlines, procedures, etc. and communicates these regularly to graduate students and faculty members. Ensures that faculty supervising or teaching graduate students are aware of, and adhere to, applicable policies and procedures

Supervisor Responsibilities

Your supervisor is the key person in your graduate degree program. Graduate education is greatly affected by the nature of the supervision and the quality of communication between graduate students and their supervisors. When students work closely and effectively with their graduate supervisors, they will improve the quality of their dissertations or theses and their educational experiences.

Supervisors should be available to help their graduate students at every stage, from formulation of their research projects through establishing methodologies and discussing results, to presentation and possible publication of dissertations. Graduate supervisors must also ensure that their students' work meets the standards of the University and the academic discipline.

Some specific responsibilities of a graduate supervisor:

- assists the student with the selection and planning of a suitable and manageable research topic.
- is sufficiently familiar with the field of research to provide guidance and/or has a willingness to gain that familiarity before agreeing to act as a supervisor.
- is accessible to the student for consultation and discussion of the student's academic progress and research. The frequency of meetings will vary according to the discipline, stage of work, nature of the project, independence of the student, full- or part-time status, etc. For many, weekly meetings are essential; for others, monthly meetings are satisfactory. In no case should interaction be less frequent than once per term.
- establishes (with input from the student and colleagues where appropriate) a supervisory committee, and convenes a meeting, at least annually, to evaluate the student's progress.
- responds in a timely and thorough manner to written work submitted by the student, with constructive suggestions for improvement and continuation. The turnaround time for comments on written work should not normally exceed three weeks.
- makes arrangements to ensure continuity of supervision when the supervisor will be absent for extended periods, e.g. a month or longer.
- when necessary, assists the student in gaining access to facilities or research materials.
- ensures that the research environment is safe, healthy and free from harassment, discrimination and conflict. When there is a conflict in advice or when there are different expectations on the part of co-supervisors or members of the supervisory committee, the supervisor is expected to endeavor to achieve consensus and resolve the differences.
- assists the student in being aware of current graduate program requirements, deadlines, sources of funding, etc.
- encourages the student to make presentations of research results within the University and to outside scholarly or professional bodies as appropriate.
- encourages the student to finish up when it would not be in the student's best interests to extend the program of studies.
- acknowledges appropriately the contributions of the student in presentations and in published material, in many cases via joint authorship.
- ensures that recommendations for external examiners of doctoral dissertations are made to the graduate program advisor and forwarded to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in a timely manner.
- assists the student to comply with any changes that need to be made to the thesis after the thesis or dissertation defence.

Graduate Student Responsibilities

When you register as a graduate student at UBC, you're making a commitment to devote the time and

energy needed to engage in research and write a thesis or dissertation. Your supervisor has a right to expect substantial effort, initiative, respect and receptiveness to suggestions and criticisms.

As a graduate student, you must accept the rules, procedures and standards in place in the program and at the university and should check the University Calendar for regulations regarding academic and non-academic matters. You are expected to:

- Make a commitment and show dedicated efforts to gain the background knowledge and skills needed to pursue your research project successfully.
- In conjunction with your supervisor, develop a plan and timetable for completion of all stages of your thesis project, adhere to a schedule and meet appropriate deadlines.
- Meet with your supervisor when requested and report fully and regularly on progress and results.
- Maintain registration throughout the program and (for international students) ensure that study permits and (where applicable) employment authorization documents are kept up to date.
- Keep your supervisor, graduate program advisor and Enrolment Services informed about your contact information.
- Give serious consideration to the advice and criticisms received from your supervisor and other members of your supervisory committee.
- Keep your work space tidy, safe and healthy; show tolerance and respect for the rights of others.
- Be thoughtful and reasonably frugal in using resources provided by your supervisor and the University, and assist in obtaining additional resources for your research or for other group members where applicable.
- Conform to University, Faculty and graduate program requirements, including those related to deadlines, dissertation or thesis style, conflict of interest.
- When your degree program requirements have been met, terminate your work and clean up your work space.
- Return borrowed materials to your supervisor, graduate program, library or reading room, etc. when your project has been finished or when return is requested.

The following suggestions can make your life a lot easier:

- Review the literature regularly and keep your literature survey up-to-date
- Maintain exemplary records of your experimental/theoretical work (so that others can replicate your results)
- While your supervisor is required to be reasonably available for consultation, it is your responsibility to keep in touch with your supervisor
- Make yourself available to your supervisor for regular meetings at mutually acceptable times
- Follow the university's policy regarding ownership of intellectual property

Student Comments: Advice for New Grad Students

- "It's all a matter of perspective. As a student you have little to no control over the administrative part of things, but on the flip side, if you take the time to get to know your administrators, things can be made a lot smoother, especially if someone in the office is willing to sign a form that is late."
- "Ultimately, you are responsible for yourself as a graduate student. It's time to learn how to self-advocate."
- "Take care of your committee. It sounds corny, but if the student doesn't care, the committee won't. For example, set up meetings (time and agenda), give them plenty of information on what you are doing (progress reports), and remind them of past, present, and future important stuff."
- "Don't expect your committee to care for your emotions. Their role is to put students to the

test."

- "Other graduate students are your ticket to a healthy student life. They either have gone through it, are going through it, or will go through it. Sharing feelings and experiences will keep you sane."
- "It's tough, yet rewarding at the same time, being a graduate student. There are a lot of us at UBC, so competition is high."
- "Be nice to librarians: they are a key resource as your research progresses. You may need their assistance not only during the literature review, but for data analysis, web searches, copyright issues."
- "Use your research to make contacts. Remember, you aren't just conducting graduate research—you are also entering a field of colleagues."

Graduate Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants

Both teaching and research assistantships are available at the graduate level at UBC. If you choose to pursue a teaching assistantship, be sure to find out the following:

- how your teaching assistant (TA) duties will fit in with your graduate program work
- the expectations of the instructor you are working for, and whether you will be expected to lecture, lead tutorials or discussion groups, hold office hours, invigilate exams, mark papers or supervise students
- whether there are any conflicts with schedules (work or times you will be away) for which you need to make alternative arrangements

For more information on TA and RA positions see the Faculty of Graduate Studies policies and procedures for teaching and research assistantships, the UBC policy on student service appointments, the UBC policy on appointment of graduate students to teach a course in which a Board of Governors appointment is required, and the free workshops for teaching assistants from the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT).

The Working Relationship

The best way to encourage an effective relationship with your supervisor is to define your roles and expectations clearly and have an effective plan for progress.

Relationship Process

How do you expect this relationship play out from one week to the next? Does it have a natural flow that allows maximum productivity between student and supervisor? Do you expect that:

- there will be open communication between graduate student and supervisor
- the relationship will be mutually satisfying
- you will not have to compromise for the benefit of your supervisor
- you will both benefit from the relationship

Work Expectations

You need to know what your supervisor expects of you in terms of work habits and communication. Once this is clear, it's much easier to develop a positive, productive relationship that is satisfying for both of you.

Often, we only become aware of our expectations when they are not met. Here's an opportunity to think about your expectations so they don't come as a surprise later. Consider discussing these expectations with your supervisor after you've spent some time thinking about them.

- **Research direction:** How much direction in your research do you expect? How much influence do you want?
- **Knowledge:** Should your supervisor teach you all you need to know for success in graduate school? How much do you want handed to you and how much do you want to find out on your own?
- **Status:** Do you want your supervisor to act as your superior or more as your colleague or co-worker?
- **Time:** How much time do you expect your supervisor to have for you on a weekly or monthly basis? How much is he or she willing to give you?
- **Feedback:** Exactly what type of feedback do you expect from your supervisor? How do you respond to positive feedback? Negative feedback? Do you like feedback that's general or more detailed?
- **Priorities:** Does your supervisor expect you to have your thesis research as their number one priority?
- **Planning:** How much planning does your supervisor expect you to do, and how much help are you likely to get?
- **Skills:** What skill level does your supervisor expect you to have in the following areas: time management, research methodology, project management, statistics, computer use and writing?
- **Work Habits:** How do you work best and most productively? At home or in a university environment? Alone or with others around to consult with? What is your most productive time of day: morning, afternoon, evening? Is your supervisor willing to accommodate your preferred work style or do you need to reach a compromise between his or her expectations and your preferences?
- **Communication:** How do you prefer to communicate: face to face, on the phone, voice-mail, e-mail? Do you expect your supervisor to initiate contact with you?
- **Reviewing Work:** How often does your supervisor want to review your work? In what format? Should you present the work in a meeting, or would he or she prefer to read it? Are rough drafts okay for review, or should you provide complete and well-edited work?
- **Consultation:** Does your supervisor expect to be consulted on most decisions regarding your thesis or prefer you to contact him or her only with particular problems? Will you have fewer consultations as you progress, or is it important, regardless of stage, that you check in regularly?

The Ideal Match

Once you've thought about these questions and your responses to them, you will have a better idea of your expectations of your supervisor. Discuss these expectations with your supervisor and figure out:

- which ones can be met
- which ones can be met with support from the other person

- which ones cannot be met

This discussion should result in a clear set of parameters for your working relationship.

Avoiding Common Problems

Life can be unpredictable. So can graduate school. Unexpected things can happen when you analyze data, when you interact with your supervisor, or when you submit a manuscript. When something unexpected happens, you have the opportunity to step back and reflect so you can learn from the experience. Here are some questions to ask:

- What did you expect to happen?
- What did happen?
- What role did you play in the result?
- What could you have done differently to change the result?
- What role did your supervisor play in the result?
- What could your supervisor have done differently to change the result?
- What can you learn from this experience?

Graduate Student and Supervisor Agreement

[University Policy 85](#) [4] requires that research conditions for all involved in a research team should be outlined in a letter from the principal investigator before team members become engaged.

Letters are to cover issues such as compensation, supervision, authorship, records of data, ownership and/or use of data, publication rights, and commercialization. The templates provided here should be adapted with information specific to the program.

- [Graduate Student and Supervisor Agreement](#) [5]

Ground Rules

Experienced supervisors recommend that "ground rules" for interactions with students be established early and maintained. Here is a list of ground rules that should be clarified in initial meetings between a graduate student and his/her supervisor:

- How frequently you will meet and why (data updates, literature reviews, etc.).
- The student's role with regard to the data collection and analysis.
- The supervisor's role with regard to the student's data collection and analysis.
- Who will train the student to do technical work, and what is the role of the program technician.
- Standard hours for office space, weekend work or labs.
- A timeline for the research program, which may include experiments, data analysis, manuscript writing, and thesis writing.
- Presentations at conferences and meetings: how many, how often and who pays.
- Safety considerations which may need to be completed before working such as training programs, standard office or laboratory etiquette, or laboratory attire.
- The use of university computers and accounts for research, net surfing, games, personal work, etc.
- Applicable funding sources and the duration of such funding.

Time Management

Managing your time effectively can have profoundly positive effects on your productivity at work as well as your general sense of well-being.

Monitor Your Goals

Monitor the goals you set in your Annual Plan to make sure they are still realistic. Sometimes you will need to modify these as circumstances change. Having realistic, achievable goals can help you manage your time better.

Know Your Best Working Times

Are you a morning person? A night owl? Do you tend to wilt after lunch? Our personal energy cycles influence our alertness and productivity at different times of the day. We can often get twice as much done in an hour when we're alert and productive than when our energy is at an ebb.

- Think about when you are your most alert and productive, and schedule that time for your tasks that require thinking and analysis.
- Think about when you tend to wilt or fade, and save mundane tasks for that time of day.

Get Enough Sleep

Most adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep a night. Sleep deprivation can cause disorientation, irritability, difficulty concentrating and memory problems. People who haven't had enough sleep make more mistakes and are less productive. Napping helps, but it's not a replacement for uninterrupted sleep.

Plan Uninterrupted Time

An important consideration for effective time management is finding regular times in your day when you can work uninterrupted. Then you can schedule tasks that require concentration and focus at these times.

If you don't have any blocks of time that can be predictably defined as uninterrupted, you may need to create them. Here are some things that you can do to create uninterrupted time:

- turn off the phone ringer
- close your office door
- work at home or away from your office in a quiet place

Procrastination

For some people, procrastination is a real time management problem that keeps them from achieving their goals. When you find yourself procrastinating, ask yourself:

- Why are you procrastinating in the first place?
- Is this task important to you?
- Does it link to one of your long-term goals or priorities?
- If the task isn't important to you, is it important to someone else?

Perhaps if this task isn't important to you, it's something that you can consider delegating.

Delegation

Delegation can help you get more things done and provide opportunities for others to gain experience in work related to graduate research. Here are some tips for effective delegating:

- Don't delegate what you can eliminate.
- Respect other people's time and abilities: Consider who can do the job most efficiently and effectively and when.
- Delegate some tasks you don't want to delegate. Often, our pet tasks impede our ability to get more important things done. Usually someone else can do these pet tasks just as well as you can.
- Plan your delegation. Consult with others first, select people you think are capable of doing the job and who would like to do the job, then train them if necessary. Delegate gradually, insist on feedback, and then leave them alone.
- Delegation is one of the most effective methods of developing other's skills. Make the extra effort to spread delegation across the board, and develop a strong team with no weak links.

Delegation is not only a skill, it's a way of life: Like everything else, in order to be effective, you have to work at it. But once perfected, it will multiply your success a hundredfold.

Saying No

It is often difficult to say 'no' to requests that are made of you. Here are some things that you can do to determine what you need to say 'no' to, and how to say it:

- Why do you want to do this? Is this something that relates to your priorities or do you want to do this because your ego is involved? Sometimes we say "yes" to things because we want to boost our egos, even if the task or project takes time away from our other priorities.
- Buy yourself time before you respond. If you are unsure, ask the person if you can get back to them. During this time you should think about what saying "yes" to this task means: what you will gain from it, how much time it will really take, and what you won't be able to do if you say "yes".
- Block out time in your calendar first. Make your other tasks and responsibilities explicit to yourself and others. Block out the time this task will take and see how it fits in with your other tasks.
- Get a second opinion. Ask a trusted colleague or friend what he or she thinks. Find out what your friend thinks you would gain or lose by saying "yes" or "no".
- Look for other solutions. Could you do part of the task? Can you provide guidance to another person instead? Is there someone else who might be better suited to the task?
- If you are sure you need to say "no", say it sooner rather than later, and say it firmly but graciously.

Some Potential Challenges

While you may aspire to an ideal relationship with your graduate student or supervisor, realistically it

should lie somewhere in between your ideal and an ineffective working relationship.

Remember, there are policies regarding minimum expectations of graduate students and supervisors. It's realistic to expect that challenges will come up in the course of your working relationship. Here are a few common challenges and some suggested solutions.

It's Getting Too Personal

The relationship between graduate students and supervisors is complex, as they often spend long hours together working towards a common goal. Given the intensity of this relationship, there is also the potential for the relationship to become too personal. This can be very uncomfortable for one or both of you.

You can usually avoid this situation by following the guidelines in the Getting Started section. However, not everything that can go wrong can be anticipated nor avoided. If you think that the relationship is becoming too personal, tell the other person and talk about the boundaries of a professional working relationship.

If this discussion doesn't yield the results you're looking for, you may want to contact the UBC Equity Office. UBC has policies in place to deal with discrimination (unfair differential treatment of individuals and groups based on prejudice and stereotypes) and harassment (behaviour that humiliates, intimidates, excludes, and isolates those it targets).

There's No Time

Your supervisor's too busy to meet as often as you'd like. What do you do? You know the routine: you need to meet with your supervisor before you can take the next step in your research, but he or she can't meet with you until sometime the following week—or later. Or you meet with your supervisor in his or her office, and are frequently interrupted by important phone calls and knocks at the door. What can you do?

- Don't take it personally! Your supervisor is a busy person who has many other responsibilities besides supervising graduate students. It's not about you.
- Plan your meeting schedule together, and consider the best time of day, day of the week (maybe weekends are better?) and meeting location (away from the office to reduce interruptions?).
- Do you have to meet face to face? If you just need a quick response to something, an e-mail might be more convenient and effective for both of you. Similarly, scheduled phone meetings can sometimes replace in-person discussions.

You're having trouble getting important work done? What do you do? You're not alone. Lots of people have difficulty with time management and procrastination. Go to the Time Management section for more information.

Personal and Life Stress

Personal stress outside of academic life can have a significant impact on your ability to work effectively. Graduate students and supervisors may experience challenges with relationship, marriage, parenting or family issues. Health problems or other unexpected situations can add to the stress of academic work.

UBC Counselling Services provides assistance to all members of the UBC community. Contact them if you think that you or someone you know might benefit from counselling, or just from talking to someone

who will listen without evaluating or judging. The Counselling Services web site provides guidance on identifying people at risk.

Funding Problems

Graduate students are responsible for finding their own financial support. There is a variety of options for awards and financial aid at UBC. For more information, see the awards section of this web site.

If you find you are short of funding for a brief period, you may be able to apply for emergency funds through Financial Services.

Problem Resolution

The best way to handle a problem between you and your supervisor is to identify it while it's small and manageable, and collaborate on finding a solution.

In general, it is expected that student concerns will be dealt with as close to the source of concern as possible. This list shows who you should consult during resolution of specific types of problems, and the order in which they should be consulted:

Courses and course grades:

- course instructor
- graduate program advisor
- head of the department

Status in the program, comprehensive examinations, thesis supervision:

- student's supervisor
- graduate program advisor
- head of the department

If no resolution can be achieved after following these steps, the problem may ultimately be taken to the Dean of Graduate Studies. The Dean of Graduate Studies will check to ensure that each previous level of problem resolution has been explored to the fullest extent before proceeding to other levels.

Ending the Relationship

Changing circumstances and life events may lead either you or your supervisor to consider ending the working relationship. This section will give you some guidelines.

Why Change Supervisors

- There are several reasons why a change of supervisors may be the best option for both the graduate student and supervisor:
- Supervisor leaves the university: The supervisor retires, leaves the university to work

somewhere else or is on sick leave for more than a year. If the student has almost completed his or her thesis this may not be an issue, as long as the supervisor is still available for support. However there must still be someone in place with a formal link to UBC who can look after the academic and administrative aspects of completion of the student's degree program.

- Incompatibility of graduate student and supervisor: Sometimes two individuals simply don't get along and it interferes with their academic activities.
- Funding: Sometimes funds designated for a student's stipend do not materialize and other funds are not available. Sometimes research funds run out.
- Student changes area of interest: Sometimes, a student's research focus changes or shifts to such an extent that the supervisor feels he or she no longer has the appropriate background to supervise the research. Also, a student may lose interest completely in his or her research and wish to change fields entirely.

Before Doing Anything Drastic

Changing supervisors is a big step. It can be stressful and take time that you might otherwise spend on your work. Before you take this step, ask yourself these questions:

- Have you discussed the problem or conflict with your supervisor?
- Have your conversations about the problem been sufficiently clear that both you and your supervisor agree on the problem?
- Have you and your supervisor attempted to remedy the problem?
- Have you involved the supervisory committee members in your discussions and sought their advice?
- Have you followed the procedures outlined in the Problem Resolution section?
- Have you and your supervisor explored the implications of changing supervisors?
- Have you considered whether there is anyone else in your graduate program who might have the knowledge, experience, time and interest to supervise you?

Supervisor on Sabbatical Leave

There are two types of sabbatical, and each one has a different impact on the graduate student/supervisor relationship:

- Local sabbatical: When a supervisor takes a sabbatical in his or her own lab (i.e. locally), graduate students are usually able to spend much more productive time with the supervisor.
- Distant sabbatical: When a supervisor takes a sabbatical away from the university for a significant period of time, contact between graduate student and supervisor is dramatically reduced.

Generally, only distant sabbaticals pose challenges for graduate students and supervisors. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring their graduate students have adequate supervision for the sabbatical period. Supervisors should:

- Appoint an interim supervisor who is knowledgeable in the graduate student's area of research.
- Stay in close contact with the Supervisory Committee and follow the progress of the research.
- Set up regular meeting times through telephone or web conferencing.
- Stay in regular contact with the student through e-mail.

Procedure for Change

The procedure for changing supervisors is specific to individual programs at UBC and the Faculty of

Graduate Studies has no formal role in the process. Programs are responsible for ensuring that each graduate student has a supervisor.

If the supervisor leaves the university due to retirement, sabbatical or extended sick leave, the program must appoint a replacement. If the graduate student is considering changing supervisors, he or she should:

- Discuss this with the Graduate Advisor or the Associate Dean of the Faculty
- Attempt to resolve the issue through discussion with the Associate Dean and the original supervisor
- Ensure that both "old" and "new" supervisors are part of the decision
- Ensure that the Supervisory Committee approves the change
- Ensure that the Program approves the change
- Notify the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the change

The Graduate Thesis

Your thesis will be the final product of your time in graduate school. You should be planning your thesis from the very beginning of your degree program.

A thesis is a substantial piece of scholarly writing that reflects the writer's ability to:

- conduct research
- communicate the research
- critically analyze the literature
- present a detailed methodology and accurate results
- verify knowledge claims and sources meticulously
- link the topic of the thesis with the broader field

A thesis at the doctoral level is called a dissertation, but dissertations and theses are usually referred to collectively as theses. There are some differences between a master's and a doctoral thesis:

- A master's thesis must demonstrate that the student knows the background and principal works of the research area, and can produce significant scholarly work. It should contain some original contribution whenever possible.
- A doctoral thesis must contain a substantial contribution of new knowledge to the field of study. It presents the results and an analysis of original research, and should be significant enough to be published.

The UBC Library keeps copies of all theses written by UBC graduate students. Take a look for examples of theses in your area of interest. Your graduate program or supervisor may also have copies on hand.

Do not follow the formatting of these theses. Please refer to Masters and Doctoral Thesis Preparation and Submission on this web site for formatting details.

The Thesis Proposal

Your thesis proposal should be developed in consultation with your supervisor and committee. The thesis proposal should include:

- a background theory
- a working hypothesis
- a methodology which should be organized under chapter headings
- a body of work for analysis
- a bibliography

If your thesis will be presented in an alternate format (such as performance), be sure to include this in your proposal.

Some graduate programs require students to undergo a thesis proposal defense. Check with your graduate program about the type of proposal required.

Documenting the Proposal

In order to save time and stress later, it is important to keep a bibliography of articles and other pieces of information that you come across as you do initial library research for your thesis proposal. Here are a few tips:

- Always keep full bibliographic information (author, title, place and date of publication) for each source you read.
- Write a full bibliographic reference on the first page of each article you photocopy.
- Keep a running bibliography up to date.
- Use a good bibliographic word-processing package; a librarian can help you choose one.
- Carry a notebook around with you and jot down new titles or ideas as you come across them.
- Work collaboratively if you can: ask friends to look out for articles or book chapters that you might be interested in.

Before you Start to Write

Before you begin writing your thesis, find out exactly what your program expects. Even if you have been publishing research as you go along, your thesis must be more than the sum of your publications.

Supervisory Committee: Hold a meeting of your supervisory committee and present your research and thesis ideas to them. The committee and your supervisor will determine whether or not you have enough data for a complete thesis. You don't want to find out after you have written the thesis that your supervisory committee feels you should conduct a bit more research.

Revisions to Outline: Before starting to write your thesis, create a detailed outline and discuss this with your supervisor and committee members to get their feedback and suggested revisions. They may have valuable insights into how to organize the content of the thesis, what data to include and potential areas that you should learn more about in preparation for your thesis defense.

Please refer to [Dissertation and Thesis Preparation](#) [6] for information on preparing and formatting your thesis. If you follow these guidelines from the start, you will save yourself a lot of time later when polishing the final version of your thesis. Pay particular attention to the section [Thesis Basics](#) [7], as this information is very important for planning and preparing your thesis.

Thesis Structure

In consultation with your supervisory committee, start to plan the structure of your thesis. Prior to March 2010 there were two possible structures: traditional, and manuscript-based.

New Structure and Format

On March 18 2010, the Faculty of Graduate Studies Council endorsed a new single structure and format to be followed for UBC theses and dissertations. The thesis or dissertation must be a coherent document that provides a complete and systematic account of your research, but it may include material from publications or that is in preparation for publication. The new structure provides considerably more flexibility than the previous structures outlined for traditional and manuscript-based theses and dissertations.

Full details are available on this website at [Structure of UBC Theses and Dissertations](#) [8]

Style

Formatting guidelines and specifications can be found in [Dissertation and Thesis Preparation](#) [6].

Check with your graduate program to find out which style manual you should use. Get the most recent edition of the recommended style manual and read it thoroughly before you start writing. You can save yourself a lot of time and grief by using the recommended style from the start. Remember that rules and conventions will change over time, so don't copy the format used by a previous student.

Student Comments: Thesis Style

- Use the word processor's table of contents generation feature from the start. This will help you maintain your sanity through many revisions. Include only chapter titles and main headings within each chapter in the Table of Contents.
- Use an 11 or 12 point font for all drafts.
- Check with your program for the preferred font. Traditionally, a serif font (such as Times New Roman) is used for theses and dissertations.
- Double-space all text, even in proposals.
- Leave large margins on all sides, so supervisors or committee members can insert editorial marks or marginal comments in the text.
- List exact page numbers for all direct quotations. For example, see the APA or Turabian style manuals for advice on how to cite material, and how to present quotations that have omitted words.
- Be prepared to produce several drafts before arriving at a final version. Theses and dissertations are serious pieces of scholarly work. You will not likely ever again have a piece of work so thoroughly scrutinized.
- Try to make every draft look like a final draft: well-organized, carefully edited and clearly printed. This demonstrates that care has been taken in its preparation. All drafts should show

careful attention to detail. Don't use your supervisor as a copy editor.

- If you plan to have someone else layout your work, be sure to reach an understanding about how much it will cost to have revision work done and new drafts printed.

The Writing Process

Writing the thesis really starts with writing the thesis proposal. Work out the proposal in consultation with your supervisor and supervisory committee. The proposal should include:

- an identified body of work for analysis
- a working hypothesis
- a background theory
- a methodology, organized under chapter headings
- a bibliography

The key distinction between the proposal and the thesis is that the proposal describes something you intend to do while the thesis describes something you have done. For example:

- In a proposal: The purpose of the research is to...
- In a thesis: The purpose of the research was to...
- In a proposal: The respondents will be interviewed...
- In a thesis: The respondents were interviewed...

Student Comments: Writing Tips

- Remember that what you write at the beginning will almost certainly need changing.
- If you frequently suffer from writer's block, try leaving each day's work slightly unfinished so you will have a sense of continuity when you come back.
- Write the introduction last...or prepare to revise it continually. You may know what you mean at the beginning, but the words will come more easily at the end.
- Keep full bibliographical details. And never delete a reference until the final drafts! At a later stage of the research, you may need it again.
- Have someone comment on your written style at an early stage.
- Ultimately, your thesis will be in a library. Your ideas should be accessible and clear for future researchers, so keep your writing simple.
- Allow plenty of time for writing.
- Allow more time than you think for "packaging", such as making multiple copies of your work, printing color figures etc. Budget ahead for copying, typing services, printer ink cartridges, binding, etc. You will be making multiple copies of your thesis at different stages before and after the defense. The production process can become very expensive.
- Use quotations selectively.
- Always re-state the meaning of a quotation in your own words immediately before or after the quotation, and explain your use or reason for using the quote.
- Label your diagrams, graphs, tables and figures properly. Each one should be self-explanatory.
- Post a short list of critical style features next to your monitor. Get in the habit of applying them, even in the early drafts.
- Have someone carefully read your drafts for errors, especially before submitting drafts to your supervisor and committee members.

- Criticize, evaluate, analyze; don't just describe.

Handing in the Work

Arrange with your supervisor to hand in work regularly. Include a memo with each piece of writing explaining how it fits into your work to date and the thesis as a whole. Hand in material that is clear, professionally formatted and well edited and proofread.

Start sending work to supervisory committee members once your supervisor is happy with it.

Schedule a meeting with your supervisor once you have handed in some work. Phone a few days in advance to see if there is anything else you need to read or prepare. Arrive at the meeting on time.

Be honest when reporting your progress to your supervisor. If you're excited about it, let it show. If you have writer's block, lost your confidence, or are having personal, family or health problems, let your supervisor know directly and immediately.

Follow the advice your supervisor gives you, especially if you have asked for it. If you disagree with the advice, talk it over with your supervisor. At the end of the meeting, recap the main points of the discussion and set a date for the next one.

In general, meet only with your supervisor in the early stages of the work and involve the supervisory committee in the later stages.

Keep your supervisor and committee informed of your progress via regular e-mail memos. Some supervisors prefer phone conversations, so you should discuss this individually.

Turn-Around Time

It's hard to imagine when you're in a deadline panic, but...

Supervisors also have rights and competing obligations: other students, their own research, undergraduate courses, administration, and even a few shreds of life outside the program. These determine how quickly a supervisor can read drafts and how much time he or she can give to keeping up with the student. Supervisors have to draw lines to protect themselves as well as give the student space to work independently.

How to expedite turn-around from your supervisor and supervisory committee:

- Recognize that there are two "crunch times" in the year during which it is likely that turnaround time on drafts will be longer. The Fall crunch time runs from about August 15-October 15 and the Spring crunch time runs throughout March and April. These are the times of year when students are finishing their programs and want quick turnaround on drafts. These are also the times of year when faculty are beginning and ending terms and trying to help other graduate students meet these deadlines.
- If you expect to be pressed for time, especially as the end of the program approaches, discuss the situation with your supervisor in advance.

- Recognize that most faculty read and respond to drafts in the order in which they are received.
- Let your supervisor and committee members know when you intend to have a draft in their mailboxes. Agree in advance where materials will be dropped off and picked up and on a target date for feedback.
- Ask your supervisor and committee members when they will be out of the office for any extended period. Faculty members may leave the campus to conduct their own research or attend conferences. Plan your timeline accordingly.
- Ensure that your work has been properly formatted, spell-checked and pre-edited, and, if possible, peer-reviewed.

Defending the Thesis

All doctoral programs and some master's programs require students to defend their theses before they can graduate. If you are a master's student, you should check with your graduate program to find out whether you are required to defend your thesis.

If you are a doctoral student, your graduate program may require an additional oral examination prior to your thesis defense. Please contact your graduate program advisor for more information.

Presentation Skills

Part of your success in defending your thesis will depend on your ability to present yourself and your research effectively and confidently. Becoming an effective and confident presenter can be learned through practice and feedback. As well, there are some basic skills and techniques that will help you in any presentation situation.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies Professional Development Initiative and UBC's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT) both offer workshops that may help with your presentation skills. Workshops can provide participants with tips and techniques that will help them present effectively and confidently, and some workshops will give you the opportunity to practice your presentation skills and get feedback on them in a supportive environment.

The Dry Run

Before the actual defense, do at least one dry run in front of trusted friends or colleagues who can give you honest and helpful comments. The dry run audience should be able to:

- give you feedback on the coherence and effectiveness of your presentation
- ask questions you haven't thought of yet
- ask you some of the questions that you think the examining committee will ask
- give you feedback on your skills as a presenter, including noting distracting or ineffective verbal or physical behaviours
- tell you what you are doing well, effectively, and right

Be sure to schedule your dry run well in advance of the actual defense, so you have time to make the necessary adjustments to your presentation. One graduate student offers this advice on dry runs: "I did two dry runs and I found that both were very helpful. For my final defense I would do three or more if possible."

Anticipating Questions

In an oral thesis defense, examiners often ask questions related to their own specific fields of study. Before your defense, take some time to become familiar with the particular areas of research interest held by the members of your examining committee. Write down some of the questions you think they might ask and formulate your answers. Then get together with a fellow graduate student. Ask each other the questions you think the examiners will ask, and practice your answers until you feel comfortable with them.

Some graduate students have found it useful to meet their examiners beforehand so they can get acquainted and learn more about the questions examiners may ask.

Organizing the Content

At the beginning of the oral defense of your thesis, you will have an opportunity to give a brief (e.g. 30 minute) synopsis of your research as a presentation. Here are some tips for organizing this presentation.

You won't be able to cover all your research in the time allotted to you, so consider carefully what to include and what to leave out or mention only briefly. Remember, many of the details of your research will be revealed during the question period. When you consider the content to include, ask yourself the following questions:

- What aspects of my research will help me show how the work fits together logically?
- If my thesis were a story, what parts would be essential for my examination committee to hear, and what parts are less important?
- How can I explain these essential aspects of my thesis clearly? Do I need to use figures or graphs? Should I have the components stated in point form? Would a flow chart help?

Organizing the Structure

There are many different ways to structure a presentation. The one you choose should be determined by the purpose of your presentation. In a thesis defense, the purpose is usually to inform and provide a convincing argument about the value of your work as a significant contribution to your content area. Here are a few suggestions for structuring the content of your presentation:

Opening: You should always have some sort of opening to your presentation to get your audience focused on what you have to say.

Purpose: Let your audience know what you hope they will get from your presentation, what you are going to tell them about.

Body of Presentation: This is the main content of your presentation. This section should connect directly to your opening and purpose. The following are some possible methods of structuring this section of your presentation:

- Chronological/historical: past, present, future
- Sequential: first, second, third
- Geographical: north, south, east, west
- Categorical: oranges, apples, bananas
- Compare and Contrast: negative vs. positive, our side vs. their side
- Hierarchical: top, middle, bottom
- Review of options: option 1, option 2, option 3, recommendation
- Expanding radius: individual, neighbourhood, community

Closing: The most important part about the closing is to have one! Here are some suggestions for closing:

- Close your presentation by referring to your purpose
- Summarize the main points of your presentation
- Make a statement
- End the way you began
- Thank your audience

Research Ethics: A Guide for Graduate Students

What types of research need an ethical review?

If your research involves animals, fish or invertebrates, you will need to study the Animal Care Committee webpage at www.ors.ubc.ca/ors/animal-care [9]. Note that in fall 2004 an electronic submission system called Researcher Information System Ethics (or RISE) was introduced for new applications.

If your research involves bacteria, viruses, plasmids, recombinant DNA, animal tissues or other biohazards, then go to the Biosafety Committee webpage at <http://www.ors.ubc.ca/contents/biosafety> [10].

Research Ethics Boards

If your research involves human subjects, human tissue, human stem cells or data collected on human subjects, you will need to submit an application to one of the UBC Research Ethics Boards (REBs). The homepage for all of UBC's Research Ethics Boards is at <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/home> [11].

For research involving human subjects, either directly or indirectly, which are non-invasive to the person, an application should be sent to the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). The BREB reviews all research involving interviews, focus groups, aptitude testing, internet surveys, telephone

polls, or psychological experiments. Research using previously-collected personal information which is not in the public domain must also have an ethical review.

Applications that involve medical research such as clinical trials, epidemiological studies with blood or tissue samples, medical imaging, rehabilitation or exercise programs, genetic banking of tissues or human stem cell research should go to one of the Clinical Research Ethics Boards (CREBs). At UBC there are three research ethics boards for clinical research. Providence Health Care and BC Cancer Agency have site-specific UBC Research Ethics Boards. All other UBC, and UBC-affiliated, clinical research goes to the UBC Clinical REB.

How do I apply for an ethical review?

Download the application forms and information from the Office of Research Services' webpage at <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/home> [11]. At present, submission is in the form of paper copies; the number of copies to submit varies according to the size of the Committee or Board. Please read the Guidance Notes and other information carefully. The Researcher Information System Ethics (RISE) will be extended to human ethics in 2005, so watch the ORS webpages for future developments related to e-submission.

Who is the Principal Investigator for research conducted by students?

For graduate thesis research, the student's supervisor is the Principal Investigator and takes ultimate responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research. Students are named as co-investigators in the application.

Useful Contacts

Animal Care Committee - Lynn Macdonald, Manager

Webpage: www.ors.ubc.ca/contents/animal-care [12]

Enquiries: Tel: 604-827-5115 or e-mail Fred.Woo@ors.ubc.ca [13]

By September 10 2005 all students and their supervisors using experimental animals must complete the LLAL animal care course.

Biosafety Committee - Lynn Macdonald, Manager

Webpage: www.ors.ubc.ca/contents/biosafety [10]

Enquiries: Tel: 604-827-5115 or e-mail Fred.Woo@ors.ubc.ca [13]

Behavioural Research Ethics Board - Shirley Thompson, Manager

Webpage: <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/behavioural-research-ethics-board> [14]

Enquiries: Tel: 604-827-5114 or e-mail Nadia.Rad@ors.ubc.ca [15]

Clinical Research Ethics Board - Susan Chunick, Manager

Webpage: <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/clinical-research-ethics-board> [16]

Enquiries: Tel: 604-875-4111 ext 68919 or e-mail Erin.Desjardine@ors.ubc.ca [17]

For UBC Providence Health Care REB and UBC BC Cancer Agency REB contact details are given at <http://research.ubc.ca/ore/human-ethical-review> [18]

TCPS

Try the NEW online TCPS tutorial!

What is TCPS? Who needs to know about TCPS? Where is information on TCPS?

- TCPS is an abbreviation for Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research involving Humans.
- Now there is a new online tutorial for TCPS. It is an excellent educational tool and particularly useful for new researchers and graduate students. The direct link is www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/tutorial [19]
- For full details of the TCPS guidelines go to <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/> [20]
- All human subject research at UBC must adhere to TCPS guidelines. TCPS covers research involving the recruitment of human subjects in person, by mail-out or internet. TCPS also applies to research involving human tissue and personal data collected on human subjects.
- All research proposals involving human subjects need ethical approval before the research starts. Please check out the information relating to the UBC Research Ethics Boards by visiting <http://www.ors.ubc.ca/home> [21]

Source URL: <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/handbook-graduate-supervision/handbook-graduate-supervision>

Links:

[1] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/printpdf/book/export/html/2655>

[2] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/print/book/export/html/2655>

[3] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/faculty-staff/policies-procedures/supervision>

[4] <http://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/policy85.pdf>

[5] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/forms/student-supervisor-agreements>

[6] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/dissertation-thesis-preparation>

[7] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/dissertation-thesis-preparation/thesis-basics>

[8] <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/dissertation-thesis-preparation/structure-ubc-theses-dissertations>

[9] <http://www.ors.ubc.ca/ors/animal-care>

[10] <http://www.ors.ubc.ca/contents/biosafety>

[11] <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/home>

[12] <http://www.ors.ubc.ca/contents/animal-care>

[13] <mailto:Fred.Woo@ors.ubc.ca?subject=Enquiry>

[14] <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/behavioural-research-ethics-board>

[15] <mailto:Nadia.Rad@ors.ubc.ca?subject=Enquiry>

- [16] <http://research.ubc.ca/ethics/clinical-research-ethics-board>
- [17] <mailto:Erin.Desjardine@ors.ubc.ca?subject=Enquiry>
- [18] <http://research.ubc.ca/ore/human-ethical-review>
- [19] <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/tutorial>
- [20] <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/>
- [21] <http://www.ors.ubc.ca/home>