

On the Same Page?

An expectations conversation tool for PhD students and supervisors

Doctoral supervision works best when student and supervisor hold a shared, explicit understanding of who is responsible for what. The 19 prompts below cover the aspects of the supervisory relationship where expectations most often stay unspoken. There are no right or wrong answers, as the aim is a conversation, not a score.

How to use this tool

1. Student and supervisor each complete a copy independently, circling one number per item.
2. Compare your answers together (ideally in the first or second supervision meeting, and briefly again each year).
3. Discuss any item where you differ by two or more points, and any item either of you feels strongly about.
4. Note what you agree in the box at the end. Expectations legitimately change as the PhD develops — that is the point of revisiting them.

The scale

1 = entirely the supervisor's responsibility · 2 = mostly the supervisor's · 3 = genuinely shared · 4 = mostly the student's · 5 = entirely the student's responsibility

#	The supervisor-led view (1)	Circle one	The student-led view (5)
1	Topic selection The supervisor is responsible for selecting the student's research topic.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for selecting their own research topic
2	Theoretical framework & methodology The supervisor decides which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate	1 2 3 4 5	The student decides which theoretical framework or methodology they wish to use
3*	Scope & timeline The supervisor should develop an appropriate scope and timeline of research/study for the student	1 2 3 4 5	The supervisor should leave the development of scope and timeline of research/study to the student.
4	Services & facilities The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is aware of and has access to the services and facilities they need	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for ensuring that they are aware of and have access to the services and facilities they need
5	Policies & procedures The supervisor is responsible for advising the student of all relevant policies, procedures, and requirements	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for finding and being familiar with all relevant policies, procedures, and requirements

#	The supervisor-led view (1)	Circle one	The student-led view (5)
6	Personal circumstances The supervisor and the student should consider personal circumstances in managing the PhD.	1 2 3 4 5	The supervisor and the student should not consider personal circumstances in managing the PhD.
7	Organising meetings The supervisor is responsible for organising meetings with the student.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for organising meetings with the supervisor.
8	Appropriate feedback The supervisor is responsible for ensuring feedback is appropriate for the student to progress.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for ensuring the feedback they receive is appropriate for them to progress.
9*	Conflicting feedback If the supervisory team provides conflicting feedback, the primary supervisor is responsible for giving the student clear direction.	1 2 3 4 5	If the supervisory team provides conflicting feedback, the student should decide the right direction to take.
10	Progress monitoring The supervisor should check regularly that the student is working consistently and on task.	1 2 3 4 5	The student should work independently and not have to account for how and where time is spent.
11*	Emotions in feedback The supervisor and the student should consider emotions when giving and receiving feedback.	1 2 3 4 5	The supervisor and student should not consider emotions when giving and receiving feedback.
12	Draft submission timing The supervisor should insist on seeing all drafts of work to ensure that the student is on the right track.	1 2 3 4 5	The student should decide when to submit drafts of work to the supervisor.
13	Correcting written work The supervisor is responsible for correcting written work (e.g. structure, content, consistency, accuracy, completeness, spelling, grammar and punctuation).	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for correcting written work (e.g. structure, content, consistency, accuracy, completeness, spelling, grammar and punctuation).
14	Thesis submission readiness The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the thesis is ready for submission by the required date.	1 2 3 4 5	It is up to the student to ensure the thesis is ready for submission by the required date.
15*	Supervisory team communication The supervisor is responsible for coordinating communication within the supervisory team	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for coordinating communication within the supervisory team
16	Research ethics The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that research ethics applications and reporting are completed appropriately.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for ensuring that research ethics applications and reporting are completed appropriately.

#	The supervisor-led view (1)	Circle one	The student-led view (5)
17	Networking The supervisor is responsible for facilitating networking opportunities and making introductions to relevant researchers.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for seeking out networking opportunities and introductions to relevant researchers.
18	Mentoring & career development The supervisor is responsible for providing mentoring and career development guidance.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for seeking out mentoring and career development guidance.
19	Co-authorship expectations The supervisor is responsible for establishing expectations regarding co-authorship on journal articles.	1 2 3 4 5	The student is responsible for establishing expectations regarding co-authorship on journal articles.

** Items where LSE students and supervisors most often differed in the 2026 survey (conflicting feedback, scope & timeline, team communication, and emotions in feedback).*

Points we have agreed — and anything to revisit next year