

# Working with your Supervisor

A unique professional relationship

MA CAA  
Dr Bernadette Brady



Your supervisor is the scholar who mentors you through your dissertation journey.



Without expert guidance your own thinking can go off course and end up not being able to contribute to your field of study. Your supervisor, when producing their own academic papers, is aware that they can also lose track and will also ask for feedback from their own peers.

# The Beginning

## Submitting the Dissertation Proposal Form

Generally your first contact with your supervisor is to work with them to help you shape your proposal form.

They will help you bring your ideas which you developed in the forum to a focus. The aim of the proposal form is to **sharpen your academic rational and methodology.**

This can take time because until you have a clear research idea designed and laid out with its methodology you are not able begin the journey of the research. Clarity at this point makes for a successful dissertation.



# Roles: Who is responsible for what

## Your Supervisor

- Your supervisor will seek at all times to **support** your journey through your dissertation.
- Their role is to support but not shape your dissertation. They will ensure that **your research** addresses the **different arguments in the field** and that you refer back to those arguments in your findings. This will make your dissertation of greater academic value to the topic you are researching.
- It is important to remember that you are in charge of the creative thinking aspect of your dissertation, **once you make those decisions**, your supervisor's role is to ensure that your those decisions are sound.

**Note:** Your supervisor is also required to keep a record of your meetings noting the key points of the discussion, and what you have both agreed to as the next step to be taken.

## Your Role

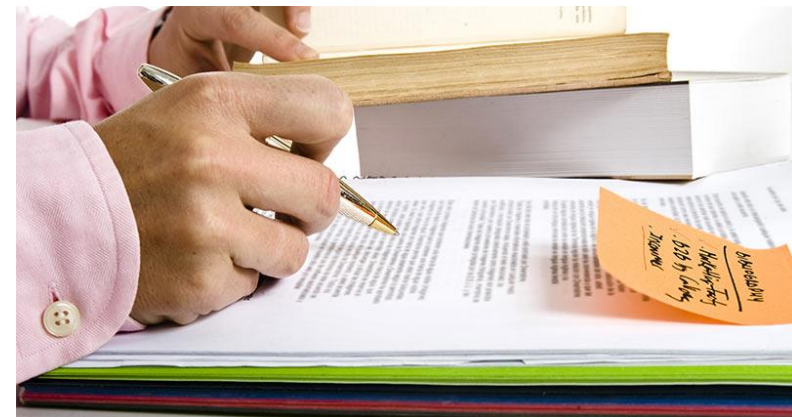
- Your need to take careful note of the guidance and feedback given by your supervisor. It is your responsibility to seek out your supervisor's advice and at each Skype session you should have your own list of topics that need to be discussed.
- From time to time your supervisor may suggest that you seek the advice on a topic from another tutor. In this case they will probably email the tutor and ask for their opinion on your behalf. If you are emailing another tutor concerning your dissertation then you should copy your supervisor into the email.
- You should alert your supervisor to any issues that could impact on your ability to meet your agreed timetable in completing your dissertation.

## Reading chapters

When you have chapters completed to the second draft stage you can ask your supervisor to read it and make comments.

This is a valuable process as they will be able to point out areas of weakness that you may need to address or also suggest some other references. **Be prepared to have what you think is a finished chapter coming back to you with lots of comments.**

Your supervisor may also ask to see your entire **draft** dissertation before you submit your final dissertation to the university. This will improve your marks so aim to have **your work completed at least six weeks** before your due date to allow this process to happen.



Remember your Supervisor is not:

Your co researcher.

Your co writer.

Your research designer.

Your copy editor.



Your Supervisor will

- Help you with the structure of your dissertation.
- Suggested references.
- Give you feedback on your written arguments as to whether they are sound or not.
- Ensure that your arguments are supported within your literature review.

They will also make you a high priority on their work list.

# Making the Most of your Supervisor

## Meetings – keeping connected

You should set up meetings with your supervisor which may be several months apart, but these can act as markers for you to achieve certain phases of your work by these meetings.

Also you can email your supervisor if you have questions that you are not able to resolve.

Send your supervisor some parts of your dissertation before your meetings means that you can have a meaningful discussion on your work during the meeting. **But do not waste their time with incomplete or only roughly written pieces.**

### Tip:

Be prepared for your meetings

Have a list of questions or points you want to discuss.



# Top Tips

## Recommended Reading

A strongly recommend book for all dissertation students is Biggam, John, *Succeeding with your master's dissertation : a step-by-step handbook*, 2nd ed. edn. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2011). This book is available as a PDF from Academia.edu

## Stay in Touch

- Use the 'Water Cooler' Forum on the Dissertation Moodle page to stay 'in the loop'. On this forum talk to other students about what they are doing.
- Come to Dissertation Seminars – ask questions!
- Make sure you keep in touch with your supervisor.
- You can also email Nick and/or Bernadette if you have concerns.

## A Word about Ethics – if you are working with human participants

### The EI Form

The first step is the EI form needs to be completed. The final risk box at the end of the form **MUST** contain some text about how you will deal with any unforeseen risk that could emerge. On this form you must state that you will keep the data under password or lock and key protection. On this form you must state that you will destroy the data after a number of years – you can use three years as your time line. This form will need to be approved by the university's ethic committee.

### The Interviews

The **Interview Release Form** is available on Moodle, it needs to be filled in and included with your EI form.

You **list of draft questions**. This should be a separate document and needs to be just five or six draft questions that you are planning to ask in your interview. **The Participates Information Sheet**. This is a sheet that you create and then give to the people involved in your research which briefly explains the nature of your research.

### The Questionnaire

If you are also conducting a questionnaire, then you need to include: A draft **copy of your questionnaire**, you may change this and it does not need to be all finalised, but a list of questions that you are going to include in the questionnaire. The top of the questionnaire **MUST contain some ethical information**, explaining the project, saying that people can withdraw and that their information will be anonymous. **The questionnaire must contain some method of gaining consent**. At the end of the top section you can put a check box asking do they consent for the data in the questionnaire to be used.

There is a check list on the Dissertation Moodle page along with the correct forms.