
ALIGNMENT TOOL FOR PHD STUDENTS AND THEIR SUPERVISORS

Why?

Aligning expectations early and making clear agreements helps sustain motivation throughout the PhD. Unspoken expectations can lead to unnecessary misunderstandings and disappointments on both sides. This tool supports you in navigating all stages of the PhD process, making implicit expectations explicit, and organizing the work and collaboration in ways that benefit both parties.



Who?

The tool is developed to encourage a dialogue between the PhD student and the main supervisor and to ensure that you cover aspects relevant for

- making a good PhD start (**Initial meeting**), page 2-3
- following up on the process (**regular assessment**), page 4

If one of the co-supervisors is planned to carry out a substantial part of the day-to-day supervision *it is vital* that this person also takes part in the dialogue.

How?

1. Set up a meeting of approx. one hour.
2. Prepare the meeting individually: i) read and reflect on the questions in the guide, take notes, ii) decide on 6-8 questions that you find most important to discuss.
3. At the meeting: Please discuss the questions that each of you find most important. Some questions might be too difficult to answer early in the process. Then leave these questions for a later meeting, for instance 3-4 months into the project. In case of differences in opinion when discussing the questions, try to find a common ground suitable for the PhD project. Supervisors are encouraged to listen to the PhD students' input before stating their 'common practices'.
4. Please note down briefly the agreements made and keep a copy of the notes for your own use. It should not be submitted to the administration/service.

This tool is developed by Gitte Wichmann-Hansen in 2024 based on inspiration from Oxford University, Australian National University, Copenhagen University, and from the document "DTU Dialogue tool for PhD students and their PhD supervisors", 2020.

Dialogue guide for the initial meeting

1. Roles and collaboration

- What is the role and responsibility of the PhD supervisor? Does it change over time?
- What is the role and responsibility of the PhD student? Does it change over time?
- What kind of supervision style do you prefer?
- The purpose of the PhD is to develop an independent scholar. How do each of you understand independence? How (much) is the student expected to explore new research paths? What if new ideas contradict the original research protocol?
- If the PhD project is part of a larger research project, how can the PhD student navigate among the different (and possibly conflicting) demands of collaborators?
- How are decisions made in the project and who needs to be informed about the decisions?

2. Meetings

- How often will you meet?
- Who participates in which meetings (also informal supervisors)?
- Who initiates the meetings?
- How planned and formal do you expect the meetings to be, e.g., with meeting agendas and summaries?
- How do you plan to be available and communicate between meetings, e.g., code of conduct for using mails, SMS, expected response time,?

3. Planning and progress

- Who is responsible for making time plans in the project – and keeping them?
- How does the PhD student give updates on work in progress and to whom?

4. Skills

- Which skills needed in the project do the PhD student already possess, and which need to be developed?
- Who (and which activities) will support the PhD student in developing the necessary skills? (main supervisor, co-supervisor, academic writing courses, etc.)

5. Research environment and network

- How will the supervisor support the student in establishing international networks?
- How can the student make the best of (and contribute to) the local daily research environment and peers?
- Which departmental/research group meetings is the student expected to take part in?
- How to balance the need to be on campus with clinical work?

6. Writing and feedback

- How and when will you plan the writing tasks?
- What are your thoughts about using AI in writing and research? How do you use AI now?
- What are your expectations for the feedback process? E.g. How long time does the supervisor need to prepare feedback on manuscripts? How drafty or polished text should the PhD student share? What is the level of feedback details?
- Will the supervisor contribute to the actual writing as a co-author?
- How will you decide together on co-authorships?

7. Training elements

- **ECTS courses:** How involved is the supervisor going to be regarding the student's choice of courses?
- **Teaching tasks:** How will teaching tasks be arranged and how will the supervisor be involved?
- **Going on a research stay abroad:** Which criteria are important when considering the research stay? How do you decide on the location? Who takes the initiative to contact external partners/universities and to arrange all agreements?

8. Personal issues and confidentiality

- How will the supervisor(s) be available to help the PhD student if personal issues arise during the PhD study?
- In case of potential conflicts in the collaboration, how will the student and supervisor manage them?

9. Career and motivation

- What are the PhD student's goals and ambitions with the PhD project?
- Will career issues be part of the supervision? If yes, how can the supervisor assist the student in thinking about your future career plans and hopes?

Dialogue guide for regular assessment meetings

Intro

- How are things in general?
- Is there anything particularly important to discuss at this meeting?

Academic progress and well-being

- Is the PhD student satisfied with his or her own performance?
- Are planned publications on schedule?
- Is the supervisor group satisfied with the PhD student's academic performance and progress?
- Do parts of the project deserve greater focus?
- How is the PhD student's well-being in general? E.g., work-life balance and feeling of integration at the workplace?

Supervision and collaboration

- Is supervisor-input well balanced with student independence? (Is it direct and instructive when needed? When is a more coaching approach timely?)
- Do the PhD student and the team of supervisors find that they work well together?
- Are the roles and responsibilities allocated appropriately among the supervisors – or are adjustments needed?
- Does the PhD student find that the supervisor group supports the PhD project (e.g., by showing interest and commitment and being available to the extent required)?

Summary

- Is there anything else that needs to be discussed?
- Has anything been agreed upon at this meeting that requires follow-up? If so, how and when?