

## **Good MA-thesis supervision practices**

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### (1) Starting the supervision process:

Have an initial discussion with student about level of competence (How much experienced with writing philosophy texts? How knowledgeable in the field?)

Have an initial discussion with student about level of ambition (PhD-ambitions? Teaching? Non-academic career?)

Have an initial discussion about possible subjects and scopes of thesis.

The supervisor should as far as possible ascertain that the chosen subject is manageable: not too difficult, not too easy, and sufficiently focused. There should be some literature available, though not too much.

Make sure that the student understands the aim of the writing process (what constitutes a good thesis with respect to structure, terminology, citations, academic level, originality, etc.) - it is partly stated in 'Studieordning'. It might be worth going through the details so that the student understands what is required. Don't expect students to know our implicit values regarding good academic texts.

Make sure that the student understand what the supervisor's role is: unless the thesis is written in the supervisor's own area of research, what the student get is general supervision - the supervisor provides feedback on general strategic issues about focus and structure, and acts as a critical reader and discussant.

Make clear to the student that the entire process is expected to last 6 months. There is no advantage for students in spending more time; for example, spending more time than 6 months does not qualify student for PhD-positions.

On the basis of this, ask the student to produce an abstract or initial outline of the entire thesis (1-2 pages). The abstract or outline can be mailed to the supervisor for brief comment and approval. The initial outline will of course be subject to revision at later stages.

It is vital that the student settle for a manageable subject for the thesis at first or second meeting, and that the student at any time have a plan

for what he or she is doing, even if the plan is subject to change during the process.

(2) Supervision process:

Generally supervision is given in personal meetings once a month (1 hour), or once every two weeks (1/2 hour).

Supervisor is expected to use approx. 30 hours on supervision and assessment of a thesis. If the final assessment takes up 5 hours, this leaves 25 hours for supervision. This will be enough for 5-6 meetings (lasting one hour) with an average load of preparation of 3-4 hours for the supervisor.

Generally the student writes a draft for a section of the thesis (10-20 pages, but no longer than 25 pages) for a meeting. At the meeting supervisor gives oral feedback on the draft. Suggested procedure for feedback:

Student e-mail draft in Word to supervisor a few days before a meeting. Supervisor inserts comments and suggested changes directly in the document (using Word's track changes) and return the commented version to student before meeting. At the meeting, student points to comments, changes, etc that require additional discussion.

If you prefer handwritten notes, or notes not written directly in the student's document, ask student send draft electronically in PDF, or in paper.

Generally, each draft of a chapter is commented only once.

At the end of each meeting, set a date for the next meeting, and make agreement with student about what should be written for next meeting.

It is important that the supervisor secures progress - if the student fails to produce enough in writing, then meet with the student anyway to detect problems, and to keep student motivated.

Be prepared to answer brief questions on e-mail, though generally we should require that students meet with us in person (better for motivational purposes).

If you prefer, you might suggest to student that he or she may record the session on his/her mobile phone to support memory.

If possible set student up with other students writing their MA theses  
- this may be a very important support and motivation for students.

Be sure that you encourage and support the student - tell the student  
that he/she is doing well, or at least that he/she is progressing!

(3) Other suggestions:

Literature survey. In general it is expected that the student herself  
identifies relevant literature in detail through the standard databases  
such as Philosopher's Index, PhilPapers, Google Scholar, Stanford  
Encyclopedia and others. If the student is not capable of doing so,  
supervisor should direct him/her to the relevant databases, but  
expect that the student him/herself finds out how to use them.

Direct the student to texts about writing philosophy papers unless the  
student is very experienced.

Direct student to guidelines about formats for footnotes, citations,  
references etc., unless the student is very experienced.

Direct the student to sources helping with correct language and  
grammar.

Encourage students to ask friends to help them as critical readers,  
checking language, grammar, style etc.