

Philosophy of Supervision

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Department of Management

TEXT: Center for Contemporary Cultures of Text

Preface

This document covers my general philosophy of supervision for bachelor and master theses and other scientific writings during bachelor and master studies. Some – and only (!) some – ideas may be applicable to PhD thesis and postgraduate scientific writings. Also notice that it covers my personal views and objectives.

Do not take this document as a list of rules, but use it to understand why I do things the way I do them and to figure out, if my way of supervision fits you. This document does not cover directly formal or legal rules, see the links to the FAQs, e.g., [here](#). In case you are unsure, feel free to ask.

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The Role of the Supervisor

I like the Danish word for supervisor *vejleder* very much, as it translates word for word to something like *trail guide*. A supervisor is a guide, not more and not less, but *you* as student have to do the trip by *your own* feet. The supervisor is there, has a ready ear and can be asked for advice, but a supervisor will not organize or even do your project for you.

Of course, you can – any maybe should – ask your supervisor how to organize and plan your project, but do not expect her or him to take care of your organization, track your deadlines, or force you to work.

Finding a Topic

First of all, think about the field you would like to work in. Think about lectures and courses, your student job, your interests, etc. and which topics, in terms of broader fields, could be relevant for you. If you are interested in doing your thesis in collaboration with a company, talk to them. As professors, we are not responsible for finding or providing contact to companies. Of course, you are welcome to do an *internal* thesis, i.e., a thesis without any company and solely based inside the university.

After you know which field could be relevant, look for a supervisor. MGMT maintains lists online ([Bachelor](#), [Master](#)). If you struggle to find an interesting topic, use the topics on

the list as inspiration. For suggestions of specific thesis topics, you may also contact a supervisor and ask for ideas, e.g., ask a professor after a lecture. Remember, university employees are in first place researchers, so topics suggested by them might be slightly biased towards research.

The regulations expect that you first contact a supervisor (only one at a time) with your specific topic idea. Be prepared that supervisors may ask for more details or forward you to colleagues. When presenting a topic to a supervisor think in a way: „How do I convince this researcher of my topic. Why is this relevant and what will my thesis provide to its audience (e.g., the company I collaborate with, the research field)“.

If both of you agree on supervision, you may register your thesis and need to specify a title, a task description, and the supervisor. The title and task description is not final and may be changed later. In general, choose a slightly broad title and description that you can develop in detail while working on the thesis.

Afterwards, some formal steps inside university follow: Your supervisor will have to approve title and description, and will be formally appointed as supervisor. Normally, you will not notice anything about this. Next, it is time to start supervision (→ [\(Before\) The first Meeting](#)).

I do not expect anything else, but some supervisors may ask for more detailed exposés.

My Fields and Topics

As I come from Computer Science, many of my topics contain or align with some type of coding, automation, and computer (usage). However, you do not have to code all thesis I supervise. My topics are:

- Machine learning
- Data science
- Generative AI
- AI and agent-based systems
- Legal aspects of AI

Group Theses and Group Supervision

Legally it is allowed to write one thesis in a group of students. The grade will still be individual. I am not a fan of this approach and do not recommend to do it. However, I may still accept supervision of group theses.

Different from group theses is group supervision: In case two students write their thesis with the same supervisor and have different but similar topics, some supervision meetings may become joined meetings of both students with the supervisor. Those meetings save some time and can be quite effective, as all benefit from a joint discussion.

(Before) The first Meeting

After agreeing on supervision, I normally ask when you want to start with your thesis and thus when we should plan our first supervision meeting. The rough start date allows me to plan accordingly. We will determine the specific date and time later, initiated by an e-mail from your side.

For this first meeting, I suggest you prepare a week-by-week schedule until the date for handing in your thesis. Write down for each week what you would like to do in this week

and what you would like to finish. It might be quite superficial or more detailed. Also mark weeks where you may be busy with other tasks or plan to be on vacation. Remember to include a buffer if something does not go as planned.

This document is the basis for our first meeting, and we will discuss your plan and its feasibility. I will also indicate the weeks I plan to be absent, so we can plan around. Furthermore, it is a good idea to talk about when I should schedule some time for giving feedback on written drafts.

Time and Hour Allocations

As supervisor, I get 21 hours per thesis. Thereof, 1 hour is for the defense and 8 hours are reserved for grading the final thesis. Thus, 12 hours remain for the supervision. Having weekly meetings of 30 minutes each, there is enough time for approximately half a year of supervision meetings, while the overall period is less in most cases.

In summary, there is enough time to do regular supervision meetings while keeping enough time reserved for feedback on drafts and other tasks. However, it is good to know the values – and no, I will not use a stopwatch and vanish after it reached 12 hours. But on the other hand, I cannot provide 36 hours of supervision for one thesis.

Regular Meetings

You can expect to meet every one or two weeks for approximately 30 minutes to discuss all your questions and topics. Just ask for a meeting by email and we will find time and date. Normally, this will be somewhere in the next week. For regular meetings, it is quite handy to talk about the next meeting at the end of the current one.

You do not have to prepare for a meeting, but then I also will not prepare and thus, the meeting will most likely not be helpful for you. So, prepare your questions and topics to talk about. It might be a good idea to let me know in advance, such that I can prepare myself and, e.g., find an answer to your questions in advance. If you send me questions, send them at least 48 hours before the meeting, such that I can find some time to prepare. In case you ask for feedback on written documents, give me around one week – active reading and good feedback takes a lot of time. In case there is less time, feel free to send the document or the questions, but I might not be able to prepare or read all of it.

What I Expect

Be yourself and always ask if you do not understand something – be honest, be open, express your thoughts – I am your supervisor during the supervision period. Only, after you handed in your thesis, my position changes to becoming examiner.

If we had planned a meeting and you have nothing to discuss, feel free to cancel. That's better than two minutes of saying „Hi“, „Nothing new“, and „Bye“ – and I get some free time in my schedule.

If you are not able to make it in time or at all, let me know. We may be able to reschedule and I am always flexible in terms of online or in-person meetings.

Feedback to Drafts

I encourage you to send me first drafts as soon as possible, after you have them in a slightly stable version. Please show me, e.g., the first version of your introduction, meth-

ods chapter, or literature review. I will read the document and annotate it with my thoughts and suggestions, so drawing lines, writing text, and adding my thoughts.

I will not be able to read your whole thesis multiple times before you hand in, but I can read some parts more often and other parts less or not at all – that is up to you.

In the end, it is *your* thesis and *you* will have to defend it. You should only take a suggestion from me, if you stand behind it. You must not, under no circumstances, adopt a suggestion you do not understand: I may be just plain wrong!

But, keep in mind, there might be – or is – a reason why I had this thought while reading your text. Thus, take it as marker ‚Over here!’ and thoroughly take a closer look. Of course, feel free to ask, and always, feel free to ignore – it is *your* project and *your* thesis.

To my experience, the first draft always needs a ton of work and the earlier we start working on it, the sooner you get your first part finished. And if you did not start the other parts, you can apply your experience to them and the other parts will require less polishing and time.

Things I (May) Should Know

You do not have to tell me about your expectations in terms of your final grade, I will continuously adapt my supervision to you. I also do not need to know about any other previous grades. However, in special cases, it might be helpful if you tell me about your expectations:

If you want, by all means, make 12 points, you may want to tell me. I will adapt my supervision accordingly. However, always remember: Just because you want to make 12 points does not mean you will get them.

On the other hand, if you just want to pass – and there are many good reasons for aiming that way – you can let me know, too. Again remember, wanting to pass does not safely ensure that you will pass.

What you Can Expect

You can expect from me, when being your supervisor, to be available for meetings and having a ready ear for questions of any kind. I will be happy to help and give advice. You will receive my honest answers and opinions, which will often be „it depends“ followed by bunch of options and their respective advantages and disadvantages. As it is your thesis, you will have to decide (and defend your decision) in the end. But my answers may also be „I don’t know“ or „We will figure it out together“.

In general, I respond to mails within 24 hours or I start the required process within 24 hours, e.g., filling in documents and forwarding them to others. During holidays and weekends it may take slightly longer.

I will grade your thesis solely based on your thesis (and defense) and not the supervision process. As mentioned before, it is your thesis and you have to defend it. You do not have to follow my suggestions and I will not take rejected ones into account.

What you Cannot Expect

I will not do your project or thesis. I will not force you to work or to meet with me. If you do not send a mail for a first meeting or start asking questions, we will meet at the defense for the first (and only) time. This is okay for me, but I would not recommend it.

Well, if I don't hear from you, I may remember that I agreed on some supervision in the middle of the semester and then send a message asking if there is something to discuss.

Furthermore, I will not do the organization for you or manage you at all. However, you may ask me for the next steps or for advice how to organize yourself, stay motivated, or better break down the tasks. You may even ask me to send follow up e-mails twice a week.

I will not take minutes of our meetings, this is your responsibility. You may — even it is not advisable — ask the same question every week. Of course, we can talk about how to take and organize notes from meetings. You may also ask to record meetings (for personal use only) and create an automated transcription from the recordings later.

The Defense

After you have handed in your thesis, I become your internal examiner. Therefore, I will not be able to check your slides or give feedback on them. However, we may talk about the defense and the slides in one of the later supervision meetings. Obviously, I am available for all formal questions regarding your defense.

Use the defense to present your work and remember that both of us, your internal examiner and external examiner, have read the thesis. Therefore, we know about it and you should not try including all details — focus on one or two relevant parts and examples. Try to make it self-contained, start with the motivation on the first slide, use running examples, describe your methods or products, show the results, and close with your running examples linking back to your first slide and motivation.

It is normal to feel nervous and all of us (you, the external examiner, and me) know this. If there is something we should know before, just tell us. I am not there to fail you, I am looking forward to a nice summary of the work and a subsequent scientific discussion among *colleagues*. Remember, the co-examiner is external and is likely unknown to both of us.

Summary

1. Contact me and ask for supervision
 2. Register thesis and wait for formal allocation of supervisor
 3. Plan the first meeting and bring a weekly plan
- ▶ It is your thesis and your responsibility to write. I am available as supervisor, ask me, email me, and talk to me.
 - ▶ Nothing else than your thesis (and how you present and defend it) will determine whether you pass or fail.