

GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SUPERVISORS AND RESEARCHERS

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The guidelines outline best practices for interactions between supervisors and researchers. They draw on years of experience and discussions between professors and researchers in the Law Department and have been consolidated by the Head of Department and the Director of Graduate Studies. They have two parts. Part 1 concerns initial meetings between supervisors and researchers. Part 2 gives some tips to researchers for productive interactions with supervisors. The guidelines should be read alongside the information on [Doctoral Supervision at the EUI](#) including the [EUI's Code of Doctoral Supervision](#) as well as the [Law Researchers' guide](#) (Part 1, section 2.7 on supervision).

Part 1: Initial Meetings between Supervisor and Researchers

The initial meetings (“initial meetings”) between the supervisor and researcher typically occur in September and early October. Initial meetings are crucial for establishing the foundation of the supervisor-researcher relationship. They help define the mode of communication, understand the needs of both parties, and establish working methods. It's important to note from the outset that supervisors follow different approaches.

Points for discussion in the initial meetings:

1. *Expectations of the supervisor and researcher*

Good working relationships need clear expectations on both sides. Initial meetings should focus on discussing the expectations of supervisors and researchers. Researchers and supervisors may have different perspectives about the work that a successful PhD requires. Alignment of views from early on is key.

2. *Frequency of meetings and email communication*

A PhD is a long journey. Circumstances change, and the frequency of meetings may vary depending on the progress of the thesis, personal preferences, upcoming deadlines, and other factors. The EUI Academic Rules provide that ‘during term time, meetings should take place at least once a month, and either the supervisor or the researcher should normally be able to make an appointment at short notice’.

Supervisors follow multiple PhD researchers and must manage their research. It is unrealistic to expect instant feedback on drafts. Supervisors should provide an estimated timeframe for giving feedback.

3. *Format, timing and length of meetings*

Meetings can occur in person or virtually. Some supervisors also hold group meetings with their researchers. The meeting length depends on the content. The supervisor and researcher should discuss the meeting agenda at the beginning. The researcher may prepare a summary of the meeting, including the agreed-upon work plan and date for the next meeting.

4. *Bilateral deadlines and submission of work*

During initial meetings, the researcher and supervisor should discuss how often the researcher will submit written work. This could include agreeing on internal deadlines before official deadlines. It may also be helpful to have a meeting after the researcher submits written work, to identify any problems and determine steps to address them.

5. *Timing for feedback*

Initial meetings can include a discussion of the timing for written or oral feedback on the researcher's work. When a researcher submits written work, the supervisor should indicate the timeline for providing feedback, based on the extent of the submission and other commitments. Researchers should indicate which parts of their submitted work require particular attention. The type of feedback provided may depend on the stage of the PhD - earlier on, feedback tends to be more high-level, while as written drafts become more frequent, the feedback becomes more detailed.

6. *Research topic, research question, methodology and choice of seminars*

The PhD belongs to the researchers, not the supervisors. Researchers have full freedom to decide the direction of their work. However, they should take the supervisor's guidance into account. The Law Department's decision to allow the researcher to progress to the second year will depend partly on the May Paper readers' assessment of the feasibility and strength of the project.

In initial meetings, the researcher and supervisor should discuss the methodological options available to start the research. They should consider the different approaches and try to identify the ones best suited for the project. This will also involve a discussion on which seminars the researcher will choose in their first academic year, as well as the completion of the Personal Research Plan.

7. *Relationship with other professors (incl. change of supervisor) and EUI staff*

The supervisor and researcher may discuss associating other relevant EUI professors, including in other research units. Both should keep in mind that the initially assigned supervisor is provisional. If a change in supervisor seems advisable based on the research topic or focus, the provisional supervisor and/or researcher may raise this during initial meetings. The researcher can also contact the Director of Graduate Studies of the law department to discuss a possible change of supervisor.

The supervisor may also provide guidance about other helpful resources at the EUI, such as the names and roles of their administrative assistants, as well as identifying fellow researchers with similar interests.

8. *Specific supervision requirements of LL.M. researchers*

The sections above apply equally to LL.M. students. Additionally, LL.M. students may find it useful to set a deadline for their first draft with their supervisor, so the supervisor can account for this in their other academic commitments. It may also be appropriate

to discuss the timing for submitting the final draft, as some LL.M. students may aim to complete their thesis before the official deadline.

The meetings may also cover the possibility of an LL.M. student applying to transfer to the doctoral program. Please note that transfer places are limited and competitive. Details on the transfer procedure can be found in the corresponding section of the Law Researchers' guide.

Checklist of points for discussion:

1. Expectations of the researcher and the supervisor: identifying the researcher's needs and the supervisor's working methods
2. Frequency of meetings and email communication
3. Format, timing, and length of meetings
4. Bilateral deadlines and submission of work
5. Timing for feedback
6. Research topic, direction of research, methodology and choice of seminars
7. Interactions with other professors (incl. change of supervisor) and EUI staff
8. Specific supervision requirements of LL.M. researchers

Part 2: Basic Tips for Productive Interactions between Supervisors and Researchers

Preliminary remarks

Page 8 of the Code of Best Practice (link on page 1, above) states:

'There is no formula that can specify every detail of a good supervisory relationship. Different researchers have different needs and expectations, and different supervisors have different styles — and, indeed, should be prepared to adapt their style to the different needs and expectations of different researchers. Some variation in the supervisory relationship, therefore, is only to be expected. Indeed, insofar as it reflects sensitivity to the diverse needs of researchers, it is to be encouraged. However, in acknowledging the existence of legitimate differences in approach, we should also recognize two general principles that are central to the Institute's supervision.'

This document does not aim to provide a one-size-fits-all solution to interactions between supervisor and researcher but should rather be seen as a possible starting point for conversations between both.

Meetings:

1. **Schedule Regular Meetings.** Collaboratively set up regular meetings with your supervisor to discuss your research progress. Try to schedule these meetings to find mutual times when they are likely to be available (see also point 7, below)
2. **Provide Advanced Notice.** When requesting a meeting or seeking input from your supervisor, provide advance notice to allow easy and convenient scheduling. Last-minute requests should be avoided whenever possible.
3. **Be Concise and Prepared and Consolidate Communication.** It is advisable to prepare a focused agenda before the meetings, to take notes during the meetings, and to prepare a summary of the takeaways after the meetings.
4. **Express Appreciation.** Acknowledge and appreciate each other's efforts to make time for your meetings, especially during busy research periods. A genuine thank you helps build a positive working relationship.
5. **Be Flexible and Understanding.** Recognise each others research demands may fluctuate during the summer and be flexible in accommodating changes to availability.
6. **Establish Mutual Expectations.** Supervisors often undertake significant research time during the summer period. Thus, please discuss with your supervisor in which parts of the summer they will not be regularly available for intensive supervision activities.

These basic tips can help effectively interact with your supervisor while demonstrating respect for their research time, ultimately fostering a productive and mutually beneficial working relationship.

Written Drafts:

1. **Mindful Draft Management.** Avoid sending an updated draft twice to your supervisor to prevent disruptions in feedback process, as supervisors may have already begun reviewing the initial draft.
2. **Provide Context.** In your email or message, briefly outline the purpose of the draft, its relation to prior work, and any specific areas where you are seeking feedback.
3. **Request Specific Feedback.** If there are aspects of the draft you are unsure about or would like guidance on, be explicit in your request for feedback.
4. **Be Concise.** Present your ideas clearly and coherently for easier review and feedback from your supervisor.
5. **Give Ample Time.** Make sure your supervisor has enough time to review drafts prior to any departmental deadlines (e.g., May Paper, 1/3 or 2/3 requirements). This means that you would agree on a prior deadline with your supervisor in order to enable sufficient feedback.
6. **Be Open to Suggestions.** Approach the review process with an open mind and a willingness to incorporate your supervisor's feedback. Their input is valuable and aimed at improving the quality of your work.
7. **Follow Up Appropriately.** After sending the draft, check with your supervisor to confirm receipt and inquire about their feedback timeline. If necessary, you can also schedule a meeting to discuss their comments further.
8. **Respect Boundaries.** Understand that your supervisor may have other commitments and responsibilities, so avoid sending last-minute requests or emails outside of regular working hours unless absolutely necessary.

By following these recommendations, you can ensure that the process of sending drafts to your supervisor is respectful, efficient and conducive to collaborative research.