

Using your supervisor

Bachelor thesis Supervision

Market and Management Anthropology

Booklet for students and supervisors

Adapted from a booklet by Thomas Harboe February 2009

1. What is good bachelor thesis supervision?

Working on your thesis is filled with numerous study-related challenges and subject-related lightbulb moments. Now you have the chance to immerse yourself in an academic topic that you yourself have chosen, and this will be in close dialogue with a supervisor from your subject. Here is a list of the most important aspects that, according to the boards of studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, characterize a good Bachelor's thesis supervision process:

- As the student, you are the driving force in the supervision process. You send drafts and formulate specific questions/ an agenda before all supervision meetings.
- The supervisor responds to the basic elements of your thesis, such as your method, your choice of theory, your empirical data and your literature.
- The supervisor's response takes as a starting point the drafts that you have sent beforehand. By so doing, your supervisor will have the opportunity to see how you actually write and carry out your intentions, and, based on this, will work out where you need help. Please note that it is not the intention that the supervisor should read the entire thesis before you submit it.
- Your supervisor will comment on the written product and respond to what now needs to be investigated and written. Your supervisor will constantly attempt to provide constructive recommendations for what to do next.

2. How do you select your supervisor?

Near the end of your fourth semester, once you know where you will be spending your fifth semester and have begun developing your research plan, you will be asked to fill in an online form requesting a supervisor you wish to work with. The supervision coordinator will attempt to pair every student with their first or second priority supervisor, also taking into account the student's research topic and the region in which they will be conducting research. You will then be assigned a supervisor for your 5th semester. You may begin working with them as early as the end of your 4th semester if they are willing.

You will be assigned the same supervisor for your bachelor assignment, unless the supervisor becomes unavailable or you decide you would like to work with a different supervisor. It is not always possible to guarantee that you are allocated the supervisor you would prefer, as the supervisor in question might be occupied with other duties.

Note that you and your supervisor have to fill in and sign an online supervision contract.

3. How do you make your supervision constructive?

Constructive supervision results from the interaction between you and your supervisor. On the one hand, you are the person writing your thesis. Your motivation, academic knowledge and interests are central, and for that reason you have the main responsibility to make the supervision process work. On the other hand, your supervisor is an experienced professional who has worked with similar academic problems before. A good supervisor is able to predict pitfalls and can advise you on how you can construct your thesis.

. It is you, and not your supervisor, who has to set the agenda. Conversely, it is also clear that you can make demands of your supervisor. If you follow the advice in this booklet, and in general do what you can to make constructive use of your supervisor, then it is not unreasonable for you to make demands of your supervisor. He or she should as a minimum be well-prepared for meetings. In other words, he or she will have read your draft and will have prepared a constructive response. Also, your supervisor ought to be able to express himself or herself clearly and precisely. If you are unsure about anything, you can always ask for explanations or clarifications. On the whole, discussions and critical argumentation will dominate the meetings. Supervision is not a monologue, and neither the supervisor nor the student should restrain themselves from asking the other party for more clarification of a claim or an analysis. Only through mutually challenging dialogue can the argumentation in the thesis be honed.

The preliminary phase

During the first supervision meetings is the time when you have to put your thesis on the right track. We advise you to contact your supervisor early in your thesis project, and preferably as soon as you know who to contact. Please share the synopsis prepared for your Anthropological Field Methods course with your supervisor when you first introduce yourself.. During the first supervision meeting, you and your supervisor should spend time discussing, in addition to academic matters, which expectations you have of each other:

- When particularly, while you are writing your thesis, will you need to receive supervision?
- How ambitious are you?
- Do you need all-round supervision (text, writing process and academic)? Or should the supervision focus on the academic content?

- When can you meet, and how many meetings can you expect to hold with your supervisor? In some cases it can be wise to arrange 'every third Tuesday'. In other cases it is better to decide on a more open arrangement, with the option for acute supervision by email or zoom.
- How many pages is your supervisor willing to look over before each supervision meeting?

Make sure that you are always well-prepared for your supervision meetings. First and foremost, you have to send your supervisor your draft text well in advance of each meeting. You should also always attach an explanatory text, in which you write precisely what you would like to discuss at the next meeting and why. This makes it possible for your supervisor to read your text focusing on what you want him or her to focus on, leading to a better response. At an actual meeting you can start by providing your assessment of the draft you have sent to your supervisor. What are you satisfied with and what do you yourself find problematic? Your supervisor can now provide feedback on your material. It is important that the feedback is both concrete and forward-looking. If necessary, ask your supervisor literally to point in the text at what he or she is commenting on. Questions to consider include:

- Is the text relevant to the problem formulation?
- Does your supervisor understand your text in the way that you intended it?
- Do you agree with your supervisor's suggestions for changes?

Always ask your supervisor to say what is good in your writing, as this will help you to understand what to keep and build on. It is not the role of your supervisor to secure you a high grade, but he or she should provide you with clear guidelines for where he or she will place emphasis when assessing your thesis. Take notes during your supervision meetings. Last but not least, it is advisable to keep your supervisor informed of what you have been doing as a result of previous supervision meetings. You can begin each meeting by 'evaluating' the feedback you received at the previous meeting in terms of whether you:

- could use the feedback.
- found the feedback to be of less use.

It is important to clarify the time frame in which a student can expect a reply from a supervisor, whether that be a few days or a full week. If a supervisor does not receive a reply within the agreed upon time frame, they should feel free to write a reminder email and/or contact the supervision coordinator. Be aware that your supervisors have many other responsibilities and demands on their time, but don't be shy about making sure you get the advice and support you need.

“What is the connection between supervision feedback and your final grade?”

Students should always treat concrete comments (both positive and negative) with care. Firstly, it must be remembered that the external grading of the thesis has greater formal influence on the final result than the supervisor’s assessment. Secondly, sections of the thesis that seem to make sense in isolation might be problematic within the context of the work in its entirety, or vice versa. In other words, you should avoid uncritically seeking your supervisor’s approval, and furthermore you should always ask your supervisor detailed questions. Do not settle for comments such as: “The structure looks fine” or “You cannot use that model for analysis”. Always make sure you hear the arguments for why the structure looks fine, or why you cannot use that model for analysis.

How much can you expect your supervisor to read?

We do not recommend you to ask your supervisor to read thoroughly every paragraph of your thesis. Firstly, there will only be time for a few meetings if your supervisor has to read large amounts of text before every supervision meeting. Secondly, your supervisor’s response to thirty pages of draft text will typically not be in as much detail (and thereby constructive) as with three to ten pages. You might decide that it would be helpful for your supervisor to skim several pages before a supervision meeting in order to gain an overview of a whole chapter, for instance. If so, you should be especially meticulous when you point out in your email which sections of text require particular attention. Use your supervisor to discuss the problem formulation of your thesis, the method, your choice of theory, the structure, and the paragraphs heavy in analysis. It is important for you to be careful in your choice of draft text that you send to your supervisor.

Which texts are suitable for supervision?

No-one expects you to produce a finalised text for supervision. On the contrary, it would often be a waste of your time and your supervisor’s time if he or she is not involved from an earlier point in your writing process. So be prepared to supply your supervisor with text that is in an early stage of development. The quality of the supervision depends greatly on your attitude towards how your text will be received. This includes your need, desire and willingness to edit, alter and re-write the text. The introduction and other texts that provide an overview are suitable supervision texts. The introduction (including the problem formulation, the limits of the thesis and the structure) is the ‘informative labelling’ of the thesis, and as such it steers the whole thesis, both as a product and as a writing process. The various meta-texts in your thesis (eg at the start and

end of each chapter) are suitable texts to send to your supervisor. Your choice of literature as a suitable supervision text. Early in the writing process your supervisor should comment as clearly as possible on your choice of literature and references. He or she can help by:

- supplementing your proposed literature.
- determining if it matches the aims of your problem formulation.
- considering methodological aspects in your search for appropriate literature.

Remember, however, that your supervisor is not necessarily the expert in your chosen field, and that in connection with specific literature you will need to make independent decisions. When you send your text to your supervisor, you should always include an explanatory text. It is not sufficient to write: "I look forward to hearing your opinion of my text" or: "I am interested in whatever you think it is relevant to comment on". You should make time to write a well-planned explanatory text for your email that is the equivalent of between half a page and a whole page, considering the following:

- What are you sending? Where does it belong in your thesis? (Attach the latest version of your table of contents if necessary.)
- How near completion would you say the text you're sending is? At the brainstorming stage? Halfway through? Almost finished?
- What should your supervisor's comments focus on? Which are the most pressing questions?

4. Writing Groups

Writing groups are groups in which four to six students writing their bachelor's theses meet regularly to provide each other with prepared feedback on each other's drafts. Writing groups are an important supplement to academic supervision. It can be of benefit for both you and your supervisor if you are able to integrate writing groups naturally into the process of writing your thesis.

- People other than your supervisor will challenge you in your writing process.
- You will be informed of where your text lacks clarity, which you might not have been aware of due to you (and your supervisor) being too close to the material.
- By reading other students' drafts you will gain ideas for improving your own text.
- You will receive suggestions for how to deal with issues that are causing you problems and taking away your focus.
- You will be able to exchange your experiences about the writing process with other students who are in the same situation.

- You will be able to improve your awareness of language.
- The process will help you keep going