

The 10 Most Important Qualities of the Ideal Graduate Research Supervisor

Posted on May 30, 2016 ·

1. **Support**

Supportiveness is the quality that PhD students value most highly in supervisors. This involves supervisors being encouraging, mentoring, and aware that students' lives extend beyond the PhD. Supportive supervisors make an effort to understand how the student prefers to work. In addition, such supervisors attend to the student as a whole person, rather than purely as a research student.

2. **Availability**

Students value availability in their supervisors. This involves supervisors meeting with students regularly, setting aside adequate time for students, and being contactable through several media (e.g., email, phone) – particularly if they are not physically present.

3. **Interest and Enthusiasm**

Students portrayed the ideal supervisor as someone who is interested and enthusiastic about the student's work. This is achieved by supervisors who are positive, empowering, motivational, and committed. Such supervisors are often in the vicinity of their students and are likely to show an interest in the student's progress.

4. **Knowledge and Expertise in the Field Surrounding the PhD**

Ideal supervisors are those who have expertise in the field surrounding the student's research. Students value highly a supervisor who can use their knowledge of the area to understand and demonstrate how the student's research topic fits within the wider field. Students do not necessarily expect the supervisor to have expertise in the precise topic of their research, however. Having a supervisor with expertise in the methodologies required in their research is particularly important.

5. **Interest in the Student's Career**

Ideal supervisors are likely to show an interest in the student's career. They help to provide support for the establishment of the student's career in several ways. These include having good contacts and introducing students to their network of colleagues, looking out for and informing students of conferences and seminars relevant to their research and career, and encouraging and facilitating the publication of the student's research.

6. **Good Communication**

Ideal supervisors have good communication skills. In particular: good listening skills; the tendency to maintain an open dialogue about the project, its progress and problems; the ability to communicate in an open, honest, and fair manner about issues that arise as they arise; and making expectations clear with regard to matters such as the process of completing a PhD or Master's thesis, budget considerations, and the role each party must play in performing the project research.

7. **Constructive Feedback**

Students see an ideal supervisor as one who provides feedback and criticism of their work that is constructive and prompt. In addition students value consistency in the feedback given. Some valued consistency across time. This is often a sign that the supervisor and student share the same focus regarding the project. In addition, where more than one supervisor is responsible for providing feedback, consistency between supervisors is important.

8. **Provides Direction and Structure**

The ideal supervisor is perceived to be one who provides an appropriate amount of direction and structure to the student's research project. She or he is prepared to create deadlines, challenge, and push the student a little when required. Such a supervisor is informative and helpful when it comes to areas of uncertainty. Further, the ideal supervisor helps to encourage good work habits in the student, thereby helping the student to help her or himself achieve the desired outcomes from their research.

9. Approachability and Rapport

The ideal supervisor is approachable and works to establish a good rapport with their students.

10. Experience and Interest in Supervision

Part of being experienced and interested in supervision, a key quality of an ideal supervisor, is having a complete understanding of the requirements and process of completing a thesis. In addition, students value supervisors who consider the needs of particular subgroups of the student population (e.g., international students, those with children, those with disabilities, and those with cultural differences). It is important that supervisors recognise the individual supervisory needs of each student. These vary between students and between different stages of their studies.