

Thesis supervision guidelines (2025/2026)



Welcome!

Dear student,

First of all, thank you for considering writing your BA/MA thesis under my supervision!

Having worked with (and learned from) many students over the last nine years, I see the writing of a dissertation as **a mutually enriching journey**. Sure, there exist many possible supervision styles, and each supervisor-student relationship is unique; still, I believe **guidelines remain useful to build and maintain a trustworthy and cooperative relationship**. These guidelines aim at minimizing the risk of mutual misunderstanding, frustrated expectations, and other unpleasant scenarios. Are you ready? Let's start.

Who and what is a supervisor?

Well, to be frank I don't like the word *supervisor* that much. It implies a hierarchical relationship involving constant control, which is NOT at all what the actual research and writing process look like. I see the supervisor role more akin to that of:

- ✓ a **manager** – if the student requires quite a bit of support.
- ✓ a **coach** – if the student requires just general guidance and encouragement.
- ✓ A **mentor** – if the student is already capable of conducting their research autonomously (sometimes it does happen!)

Depending on the student, over the years I have acted as a manager, a coach, or a mentor (coach is my favourite role though, as it is the most truly collaborative). I guess most of my colleagues have had similar experiences.

These semantic nuances aside, **the supervisor is above all someone you have the duty and the right to turn to so as to ensure that your work is of acceptable academic quality**; of course, in the process you also get guidance, learn about research methods, improve your academic writing, hone your critical skills. In other words, a working supervision should resemble **a traineeship**. You learn to do research and your thesis should be an accurate record of your intellectual growth (as well as a decent piece of research, of course).

How do I choose the right supervisor?

Think about why you approached me. Well, chances are that I have taught you some courses, so you already have a pretty accurate idea of my character and field of scholarly expertise. But what if you don't? Well, first of all make sure **the research topic you have in mind aligns with the courses I teach and especially with my publications**. You can find them listed on this webpage.

Now that we've set the ground for the supervision process, let's look at how it can be effectively managed from both sides.

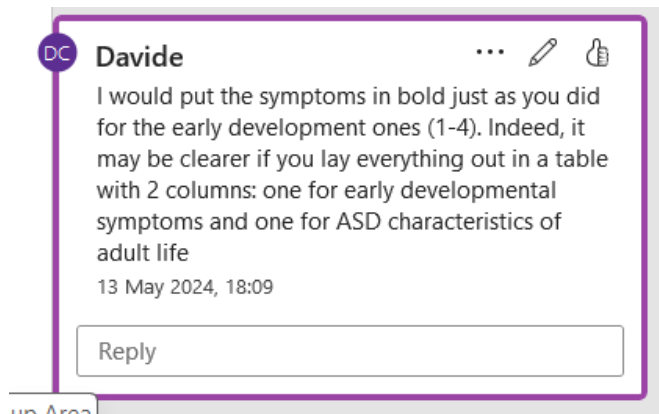
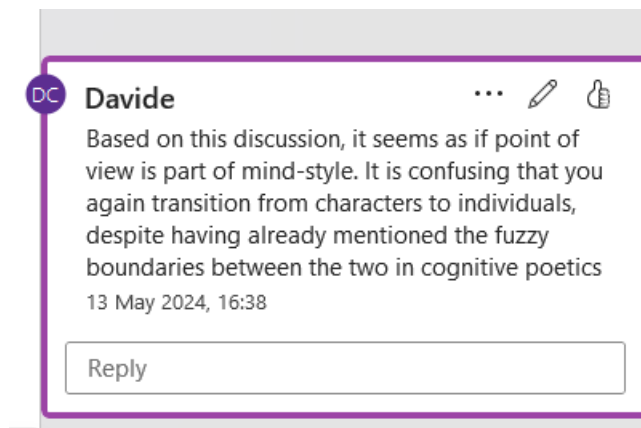
The supervisee's etiquette – be in charge of your dissertation!

- ✓ **Reach out** to your potential supervisor; don't assume it is their duty to accept you; rather, frame the supervision process as an opportunity for both of you.
- ✓ **Propose research ideas** with enthusiasm but no naivete.
 - ! It doesn't look very good if you have no research topic ideas/preferences in mind – if that happens, though, it is not the end of the world, and I will certainly be able to suggest topics to explore.
- ✓ **Be ready for compromise**, for example if the topic proposed is too difficult, unrealistic, or lies outside the supervisor's field of expertise.
- ✓ **Agree on** (or even ask for!) **interim deadlines** for draft chapters or other research steps (e.g., preparation of bibliographical references, collection, and coding of data, etc.).
- ✓ Be **responsible for** the logistics: meeting **deadlines**, complying with **formatting requirements** (esp. wordcount & citation style), accessing **relevant information** (e.g., the dates of BA and MA thesis defence). None of these is the supervisor's responsibility!
- ✓ **Let your supervisor** be free to **focus on the actual content** of your thesis, without expecting her/him to chase after you in case you are late with your submission or if you interrupt communication without any apparent reason.
- ✓ **Be mindful** of your supervisor's time: your supervisor also has to teach, do their own research, apply for grants, and many other things. Remember that each BA thesis is officially allocated **19.2 hours** and each MA thesis **25.6 hours**. Therefore:
 - Submit draft chapters only once you believe they **are at an advanced stage**. Why not asking your peers to take a look at them first?
 - Don't expect your supervisor to read and comment your full thesis draft more than once; and send final draft **one week before the official submission deadline** at the latest.
 - Don't expect to have **consultations** more than **once a month** on average.
 - Prepare a **meeting agenda** (a list of questions & issues) ahead of each consultation. This will enable your supervisor to prepare in advance to address your points more efficiently.
 - For quicker queries, use Teams or VU email.
- ✓ If you experience burn-out, depression, or are simply going through a tough time, consider getting **professional psychological support**: as emotionally supportive as your supervisor can be, he/she is not a trained psychologist and so cannot (and *should not*) meet these challenging demands.
- ✓ Last but not least: **include** your supervisor in the Acknowledgment section of your thesis!

The supervisor's duties (and my own supervision style)

- ✓ My expertise area is **stylistics**, or the linguistic analysis of literature; as this is an eclectic and quite young discipline, frameworks and methods are still in a flux, so curiosity and a bit of daring are welcome. Past dissertations' topics include:
 - ASD mindstyle in three contemporary novels
 - Associative responses to emotional, abstract, and concrete words
 - Deixis in song lyrics

- Difficulty of award-winning poems
 - Gaps as stylistic devices in Joyce's *Dubliners*
 - Metaphors in popular science literature
 - Representation of gender in break-up scenes from movies
 - Stylistic evolution in love sonnets from 19th to 21st century
 - Stylistic representation of Self and Other in postcolonial literature
 - Stylistic representation of women in poetry
- ✓ As your supervisor, I will give you **extensive feedback** on your chapter drafts (once per chapter) as well as on your full thesis draft (once).
 - ✓ The extensive feedback comes essentially in three forms:
 - **Side comments** in the track changes option in Word – especially for local theoretical aspects, e.g., the weakness of an argument, the lack of a citation or other kinds of supporting evidence, alternative explanations and so on.



- **Deletions or rewordings** of the actual text, again through the track changes option in Word. In these changes I amend **typos/grammatical mistakes** but also **stylistically inappropriate choices** (e.g., informal vocabulary choices), **conceptually weak formulations** (e.g., tautologies, repetitions, vague statements) or **move content around** (e.g., a paragraph in the Introduction that should instead go to the Data and method section). If my intervention here can be quite extensive it is because I believe supervision is also a kind of training; at

the same time, my interventions do not amount to co-authoring, as this would be unfair and muddle the student's own academic achievements.

~~instance~~ (1a), Marcelo struggles to understand ~~the~~ idiom *looking out for number one*. ~~The misunderstanding of this idiom likely arises from the literal interpretation of the phrase. This phrase is a figurative expression implying that most people prioritize their own interests and well-being above others.~~ The phrase *number one* is a colloquial term for oneself or one's own interests and ~~the~~ phrasal verb *looking out for* means taking care of or prioritizing. Overall, this idiom is a figurative expression implying that most people prioritize their own interests and well-being above others. The idiom implies that individuals tend to prioritize themselves over others in various situations.

In ~~another instance~~ (1b) Marcelo fails to understand ~~what the~~ idiomatic expression *to jump your bones* ~~implies. The meaning of the idiom is Because as a colloquial expression it means to~~ express strong sexual interest in someone or to initiate sexual activity with them. ~~It is not meant to~~

Example of rewording+deleting redundant information

~~Additionally, research~~ has also elucidated the effects that narrative gaps have on the reading experience. Both Prince (1988: 2) and Mosher (1993: 412) found that narrative gaps are used to produce a sense of mystery, suspense and surprise in a story. The readerly experience of narrative gaps has been further illuminated by ~~However, a more recent research based in cognitive psychology as well as narratology, has revealed additional details regarding the reader experience of narrative gaps.~~ One experimental study done by Gerrig found that readers tend to focus more on characters

Example of (more limited) rewording

- **General comments** usually provided in Teams or via email: this is because there are some crucial, overarching points that can be easily overlooked if stated in the side comments:

Keying 'James Joyce' in Language and Literature delivers 63 results: <https://journals.sagepub.com/action/doSearch?AllField=james+joyce&SeriesKey=lala&startPage=0&pageSize=10>. A few appear highly relevant, though I cannot see any mention of deixis (Joyce is mostly discussed for his stream of consciousness technique)

Of course, there will be many other journals/sites where Joyce's style has been discussed. I'd suggest you do a preliminary search, reading abstracts only, and identify a certain number of relevant articles. You may also want to contact Jüraté Levina, who is a Joyce scholar, though she approaches him through a more philosophical (phenomenological) lense.

Regarding deictic ambiguity, I'd recommend checking the works of David Herman, for instance this one: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42946258>



Textual "You" and Double Deixis in Edna O'... X
David Herman, Textual "You" and Double Deixis in Edna O'Brien's "A Pagan Place", *Style*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Second-...
www.jstor.org

General comments: recommending sources.

My advice would be to simplify your manipulations as follow: in neutral sentences, the focus part would be sentence-initial (e.g., 'Moses' took two animals of each kind to the Ark'), meaning that the Focus part corresponds to the unmarked Theme. Then in the manipulated versions, the focus part would correspond either to a marked Theme ('It was Moses who took two animals of each kind to the Ark') --> this would be your 'manipulated-focused' (mf) condition; or to the Rheme ('Two animals of each kinds are what Moses took to the Ark')

In this way, importantly, the manipulations wouldn't simply be 'formal' or 'mechanic' but theoretically grounded: one hypothesis would be that in the neutral condition the focus part is relatively salient (unmarked Theme), so it would be easier for participants to deem it true/false compared to the second kind of manipulation where the focus is moved to the Rheme ('Two animals of each kinds are what Moses took to the Ark'); but when the Theme is marked, it would be even easier to spot the truth/falsity of the statement

To recap: I see these as three conditions: 1. Focus part is Unmarked Theme = 0, no manipulation; 2. Focus part is Marked Theme = II; 3. Focus part is (unmarked) Rheme. In this way, you basically manipulate the information structure regardless of the syntactic structures needed for the manipulations, ensuring that the sentences sound natural

General comments: methodology

1. you need to improve the data and method section by listing, defining and exemplifying all categories (including sub-categories) used, and exactly how you identified the occurrences of AS in the novel (close reading, running the AS checklist against the dialogues, but perhaps not against the main narration? etc)
2. you often need to rearrange information and paragraph (see in-text comments): for examples, the comparison of the 3 novels should come at the beginning of the analysis section, not at the end; and some paragraphs need to be moved back to the data and section or even to the introduction
3. it is unclear how you integrate your findings and the findings of Semino and others on Haddon's novel. Your contribution in this regard is unclear (also, it is unclear what your analysis of Haddon adds to that you performed in your BA paper)
4. in the analysis, the examples must always precede the analysis, never the opposite, otherwise the reader gets confused
5. in the appendixes, it is not always clear why some paragraphs count as, say, pragmatic failures. You need to explain things better in the data and method section
6. it is unclear if you are following a method set out in other papers, e.g., you review a paper where 13 categories are devised. Are you following them? if so, state it explicitly

7. some instances could be understood as violations of Grice's maxims (e.g., verbosity as violation of the maxim of quantity): mention it

8. revise the definition and application of echolalia (see in-text comments)

General comments on first full MA thesis draft

Some final points:

- ✓ **Consultations** can be held either in-person or online (via Teams).
- ✓ **Mock-interviews** can be arranged in preparation for the actual thesis defence.
- ✓ **I like to invite students** who successfully pass their defence to a drink to celebrate their achievement.
- ✓ **I hope to collaborate with students** even after the completion of their studies – especially if the student is passionate about research and her thesis is promising and can potentially be turned into an academic article to submit.

So, now you should have a pretty clear idea of what the supervision process will entail. Let's start to work together! 😊