

Many of the issues that arise between supervisors and graduate students result from miscommunication or unmet expectations. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to maintain open communication with their students. Solid communication efforts also help mediate the inevitable power imbalance in the supervisory relationship.

Start early...

Experience suggests that the discussion of expectations at the very beginning of a student's program sets a positive tone and greatly assists with a student's future success. Your department should have created a generic Supervisor-Student Essential Conversation Checklist. Use it.

Supervisors may also wish to discuss their preferred means of communication, their requirements concerning attendance in labs or seminars, and their desires for progress reports. It is the responsibility of the supervisor, with the student, to establish a realistic timetable for the completion of the various phases of the graduate program.

Lastly, you should develop a system for tracking the progress of your students through to completion. No one system is used at the University of Alberta.

Some suggestions...

Use what works for you, but your tracking system should include:

- the provision of milestones and deadlines, as well as guidance as to the time expected to complete each phase
- the involvement of the student to instill ownership and responsibility and to facilitate communication
- a means to identify problems: timely identification of potential obstacles now can avoid serious problems later; and
- inquiries about a student's plans and goals for the coming year or for the next six months, depending on the frequency of reporting