



*Faculty Focus* Workshop Resources:  
“Successfully Supervising Thesis/Dissertation Students”  
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## General Advice and Tips for Thesis/Dissertation Committee Chairs

- Keep in mind that students have differing work styles and levels of abilities. Some have more knowledge about the academic world (e.g., norms, etc.) than others. Some students are very independent and would rather not meet frequently. Other students will need and want to meet more frequently with you. They might also need more structure and clarity on expectations. Thus, your advising style and expectations might be different with each student.
- Students also have different levels of interest, passion, and reasons for writing theses and dissertations. Some advisees plan to follow traditional paths to academia. For others, the thesis or dissertation is a stepping stone to a career, a promotion, and/or a higher salary.
- Be sure to clarify your expectations of your work with your advisee (refer to “Best Practices” in this packet).
- Advisors have different styles. Some see the student as an apprentice or mentee, while others see their students as colleagues or potential colleagues. Think about your “model” for advising and consider the pros and cons of different styles. Regardless of your style, we are usually trying to move students to be independent.
- Have university and Graduate College resources at your fingertips (refer to the “Resources for Thesis and Dissertation Student Advisees” in this packet).
- Think very intentionally about how you will provide feedback, including how much you are willing to provide help with student writing. Try to put yourself in your students’ shoes. Line-by-line editing isn’t always the best way to provide feedback. Consider when to provide feedback and the content and format of your feedback.
- When students are not making progress, ask them to create several simple action items based on what was covered in your meeting with them. The action items must be completed in writing before the next meeting. Some advisors will not meet with them again until they have done at least a percentage of the tasks on that list. It helps students break down overwhelming tasks AND make steps towards progress.
- Take a look at theses and dissertations in your department so you can calibrate the scope of the project (i.e., not ask too much or too little from your advisees):
  - Digital Collections Repository, at <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/>
  - Click on the *Dissertations and Theses* section of Digital Collections, which will bring you to this site: <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/134>

## **Best Practices: Clarifying Expectations with Thesis/Dissertation Advisees**

What follows are potential points of discussion you might have with your new thesis/dissertation advisees (depending on your preferences and the guidelines, expectations and policies of your particular program, etc.):

- Let advisees know that the thesis/dissertation usually takes longer than students expect.
- Discuss approvals for IRB or IACUC (if needed). For example, for projects involving human subjects, the IRB application process itself can take a couple of weeks or more depending on the nature of the study and level of IRB approval.
- Discuss how and why expectations for the thesis/dissertation are higher than those in most of the graduate classes.
- Discuss expectations about feedback that you will provide. It is useful for advisees to know that they will receive lots of feedback about their writing and ideas. Discuss how criticism is not personal but serves to make their work better.
- Discuss how revisions are constant in this project.
- Inform advisees that it is their responsibility to determine all deadlines, formats, and administrative work (e.g., forms and signatures needed) related to the project and the defense.
- Discuss how you are the advisee's guide and available to answer any questions but the project is their responsibility.
- Let advisees know how much time you typically need to read drafts of chapters and other written work (e.g., 1-2 weeks per chapter). Some students are unaware of the fact that faculty have significant workloads in teaching, research, and service and expect a fast turnaround.
- Inform advisees that they can utilize lots of resources on campus that will support their journey.
- Discuss why advisees should stay in contact with you on a regular basis (e.g., otherwise, you cannot know which resources they need, how to help them get "unstuck," etc.)
- Discuss how often do you want to meet and your communication methods preferences (email, phone, Teams, Zoom, etc.).
- Discuss when advisees should submit drafts, e.g., at an early outline stages or more polished stages.
- Discuss to what extent the thesis or dissertation committee is involved throughout the process. When do you prefer for the advisee to send chapters to the committee members (e.g., several drafts throughout the process or complete drafts only)?
- Discuss your expectations about emailing (for example, perhaps you do not respond to emails on weekends).

## Recommended Reading: Mentoring and Advising Graduate Students

Biswas, Shampa. March 13, 2019. "[Advice on Advising: How to Mentor Minority Students.](#)" *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Butkiewicz, Tom. November 4, 2021. "[Applying EQ on Dissertation Committees.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Early, Jessica and Trialyn Nelson. March 8, 2020. "[How to Work Well with Graduate Students.](#)" *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

\*Else, Holly. November 11, 2021. "[Sleeplessness and Anxiety: PhD Supervisors on the Toll of COVID Pandemic.](#)" *Nature*. \*Thanks to Dr. Donna Vandiver for sharing this article!

Ezarik, Melissa. October 28, 2021. "[Students Need Mentors, and More Help in Making Those Connections.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Ezarik, Melissa. October 22, 2021. "[Savvy Students Get the Guidance.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Halonen, Jane S. and Dana S. Dunn. September 10, 2021. "[The Sound of Fury: Why to Avoid Giving Feedback in All Caps.](#)" *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Mallik, Tithi Basu. November 15, 2021. "[Graduate Students Should Seek Multiple Mentors.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Methodspace, SAGE Publishing. "[Tips for Faculty Who Mentor Students Who are Working Professionals.](#)" Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Oltman, Gretchen, Jeanne L. Surface, and Kay Keiser. 2019. *Prepare to Chair: Leading the Dissertation and Thesis Process*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield. [Available in the library.](#)

Rockquomore, Kerry Ann. July 29, 2013. "[Be a Coach, Not a Guru.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Rockquomore, Kerry Ann. November 4, 2015. "[How to Listen Less.](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Rockquomore, Kerry Ann. December 2, 2015. "[Why Won't My Students Finish Their Dissertations?](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Schultheiss, Katrin. March 4, 2018. "[Ghost Advising.](#)" *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Shore, Bruce. 2014. *The Graduate Advisor Handbook: A Student-Centered Approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Available in the library.](#)

Stewart, Debra W. and James R. Neumeister. July 14, 2021. “[What We Learned in the Pandemic About Graduate Training](#).” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School. “[Checklist for Dissertation Chairs](#).” Retrieved December 20, 2021.

Wagner, H. H., C. Boyd, and R. Napper. 2016. “[How to Share the Process of Graduate Advising](#).” *FACETS* (2016): 263-279.

Wisdom, Maria LaMonaca. February 19, 2021. “[Who’s Responsible for a Ph.D. Student’s Success?](#)” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Wisdom, Maria LaMonaca. September 21, 2021. “[Why Don’t We Teach Ph.D.s to be Mentors?](#)” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Wofford, Annie M., Kimberly A. Griffin, and Josipa Roksa. 2021. “Unequal Expectations: First-Generation and Continuing-Generation Students’ Anticipated Relationships with Doctoral Advisors in STEM.” *Higher Education* (online first): 1-17.

## University and Graduate College Resources for Students

### *Resources Specific to Completing the Thesis or Dissertation*

- [Graduate College Shop Talks](#) (recorded and/or live), e.g., Formatting Your Thesis and Dissertation (offered each semester), Copyright Issues for Graduate Students, Graduate-Level Research Writing, Strategies for a Successful Thesis/Dissertation
- Graduate College Thesis and Dissertations [Guides, Templates, and Videos](#)
- [Library workshops](#), e.g., “Copyright in 15 Mins.: Public Domain: What is it and How do I Use It?”, “Author’s Rights, Copyright, & Plagiarism”

### *General Support and Resources*

- [The Writing Center](#) offers one-on-one appointments and workshops.
- Graduate College [New Graduate Student Orientation](#) Canvas Site: It’s not just for new students! There are many excellent resources on writing and reading at the graduate level. In particular, refer to the modules, “Key Advice from Graduate Advisors” and “Finding Support Throughout your Studies.”
- Graduate College list of [Student Support Services](#)
- Graduate College Internal and External [Funding Opportunities](#)
- Graduate College [Graduate Student Handbook](#)
- Texas State [Counseling Center](#) (individual and group counseling; the Center often offers group counseling for graduate students only)
- [COMM Lab](#) for advice and support in delivering presentations, e.g., thesis and dissertation defenses, conference presentations; COMM Lab offers individual appointments with students from all departments and programs

## Resources on Writing and Productivity for Thesis and Dissertation Students

Advisors can share these resources on program websites, in your graduate student handbook, on your program's Canvas site, and/or simply have them at your fingertips to share with student advisees. Note that some of these resources discuss tips for *faculty* writing and/or *doctoral student* writing but all of the resources are applicable to master's and doctoral graduate students' writing and productivity.

Amicucci, Ann. N. and Sarah E. DeCapua. December 7, 2021. "[No Time for a Writing Group?](#)" *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Belcher, Wendy Laura. 2019. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Belcher's excellent tips are applicable to theses and dissertations! [Available in Alkek Library](#).

Calarco, Jessica McCrory. 2020. *A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. This book is especially useful for first-generation and underrepresented students who might be less familiar with academia, particularly the thesis and dissertation process and timelines, how to identify a thesis or dissertation chair and committee, etc. Available as an [ebook](#) at the library.

Choina, Alicia and Rebecca McInroy. February 28, 2014. "[How to Crush Writer's Block](#)." *KUT*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Fleming, Robert S. and Michelle Kowalsky. 2021. *Survival Skills for Thesis and Dissertation Candidates*. New York, NY: Springer. [Available in the library](#).

Lupton, Deborah. November 28, 2012. "[30 Tips for Successful Academic Research and Writing](#)." *LSE Impact Blog*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

MacPhail, Theresa. December 10, 2014. "[The Revise and Resubmit Series, Part 1: Coping with Criticism](#)." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021. This "revise and resubmit" series discusses writing for publication but applies to writing your thesis or dissertation. Think of your committee chair and members as "reviewers."

MacPhail, Theresa. January 23, 2015. "[The Revise and Resubmit Series, Part 2: Deciphering Reviewer Comments](#)." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

MacPhail, Theresa. February 27, 2015. "[The Revise and Resubmit Series, Part 3: Techniques for Easier and Faster Revisions](#)." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Roberts, Carol M. 2019. *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. [Available at the library](#).



Rockquomore, Kerry Ann. August 3, 2016. "[How to Finish Your Dissertation](#)." *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Rockquomore, Kerry Ann. July 6, 2016. "[Stuck in a Writing Rut](#)." *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 15, 2021.

Silvia, Paul J. 2019. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. [Available at the library](#).