

# Golden Rules for PhD Supervision

## About this document

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# Background

A PhD trajectory is a multi-year project that requires commitment from both the PhD candidate and the supervisor(s).

The supervisors have overall responsibility for the PhD trajectory, and have specific duties pertaining to this role. The PhD candidates should, however, also be aware of their responsibilities.

This 'Golden Rules' document is initially set-up by [Leiden University](#) and adapted by the VU Faculty of Science.

Some notes on the 'Golden Rules':

1. We are aware that there is a lot of information to share with PhD candidates and supervisor(s). At the same time, we want to 'keep it simple' enough to be digestible for a PhD candidate who is 'just starting'.
2. Therefore, we keep the 'golden rules' relatively simple, and refer to the [PhD webpage of the VU](#) and the [PhD webpage of the Faculty of Science](#) for detailed information and documents, e.g the Supervisors starting page and an informative table on what PhD candidates can expect from their supervisor(s), and what supervisors can expect from their PhD candidates, with advice on communication, set up by Sophie van der Sluis in line with the 'Golden rules'.

## Golden Rules for PhD Supervision - Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science is dedicated to creating a supportive environment and a successful experience for all our PhD candidates. To realize this objective, we recommend working along the so-called 'golden rules for PhD supervision', which intend to support both PhD candidates and their supervisors to jointly travel the PhD trajectory in an inspiring and productive way. In every step of the PhD trajectory both the supervisors and the PhD candidate can use these combined 'Golden Rules and Roadmap' as a starting point for their conversation, no matter the issues at hand.

We sincerely hope these suggestions and points of attention are helpful to all, and we appreciate any feedback!

	Supervisors	PhD Candidate
<b>Be professional</b>	<p>Be aware that all PhD candidates are unique human beings with their own individual story, culture, competences and needs.</p> <p>Being a supervisor is a demanding job. There is no template for supervision. Keep an open mind and adapt to the PhD candidate, in every phase of the PhD trajectory: moving from instructing to supporting and from only</p>	<p>Be aware that all supervisors are unique human beings with their strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>You will need to adjust to certain ways of behaving and, if something bothers you, address it. You are not a student anymore, but an employee of the VU. From that come rights and obligations and the said professionalism.</p>

	<p>scientific to also impact skills related support. All supervisors are required to follow the training course 'Begeleiden van promovendi'. Check the <a href="#">Learning and Management System</a> for information on this course, and an overview of other courses for improving your supervision skills. Be aware that you are not only a scientific supervisor, but also a manager.</p> <p>Co-supervision can be difficult. Ensure that you come to a joint view on the process so that the PhD candidate is not left in a quandary.</p>	<p>It may be the case that you are struggling in finding ways to talk to your supervisor about things that bother you. Check the conversation tool from the go/ no-go procedure, and use the Golden Rules as a starting point for conversation.</p>
<b>Be committed</b>	<p><b>Be aware that doing a PhD is a lengthy process that requires long-term commitment from both sides.</b></p> <p>PhD candidates need to feel that you care about the project's progress and outcome. Even if the project is meant to develop the candidate's competences, you are also involved in this journey, and your input on the project, topic or execution is essential. Take responsibility for the project. Be up-to-date, and collect material with which you can give your PhD candidate valuable scientific input.</p> <p>Ask for feedback and help from peers if your PhD candidate is struggling.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that the PhD journey will be lengthy and not always easy, and that your initial motivation can be hard to maintain.</b></p> <p>Every PhD trajectory has highs and lows, and inevitably there will be tough periods. Being honest with yourself and your supervisor about the issues you are having can help get you through these times. Should that not be enough, then there are a number of other resources available to help you - see the <a href="#">Helpmatrix</a> for a guide on where to look for the support that you need. You can also discuss your situation with the PhD candidate advisor.</p>
<b>Be available</b>	<p><b>Be aware that your regular availability is key to the success of the project.</b></p> <p>As part of your responsibility as a supervisor, you should take initiative in planning regular, preferable bi-weekly, supervision meetings.</p> <p>You are also expected to, in general, be sufficiently available to the PhD candidate in a way that is mutually beneficial, as well as professional. You should consider that, due to personal circumstances, individual PhD candidates may have different needs/ restrictions, e.g., in terms of meeting hours. You should consider how many PhD candidates you can supervise at the same time.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that the success of your project is a joint responsibility.</b></p> <p>Be aware that it is <u>your</u> PhD-project and it is also your responsibility to arrange meetings with your supervisors.</p> <p>Be well-prepared when meeting with your supervisors and ensure that your supervisors can be prepared, too.</p> <p>Make sure that you get the time you need from your supervisors, while being aware of their time constraints.</p>
<b>Be consistent and clear</b>	<p><b>Be aware that the (perception of) research progress should be addressed. It is crucial to be open about your expectations from each other.</b></p> <p>Doing research is, by definition, charting unknown territory. Thus, it is unavoidable that the research evolves, including the supervisors' view of what the next step(s) should be. Be honest about this, and show ownership of your changing views. Remember what you say and advise.</p> <p>Expectations can relate to the number of publications, teaching duties, supervision support, time management, and other tasks.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that being honest about your progress and your expectations is key to the success of your project. Use wisdom and tact to address possible issues.</b></p> <p>Be clear and honest about your research progress and struggles. For instance, prepare the meeting with your supervisors by sending them -a list of discussion points beforehand. Use the meeting with your supervisors to clarify your research problems. Make notes of the discussion and what next steps to take.</p>

<p><b>Be time aware</b></p>	<p><b>Be aware that realistic planning is essential for a PhD candidate.</b></p> <p>Obviously, the plan as initially foreseen, will change during the course of the project. Be prepared for a change by thinking about a plan B, when the original plan needs revision. Set short-term goals and celebrate the successes with the PhD candidate. Make certain that the PhD candidate knows what, in terms of thesis content, is sufficient to graduate.</p> <p>Registering the PhD candidate in Hora Finita is important to keep track of the progress of the education program.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that planning is one of the harder things to do in research, and that the original plan is almost certainly going to change.</b></p> <p>Keep track of the time you spend on a particular issue. On a regular basis, discuss this with your supervisors and what next steps to take. Discuss short-term goals with your supervisors and celebrate your success together.</p> <p>Keep also track of the courses you (want to) follow and plan which conference you want to visit.</p>
<p><b>Be willing to receive feedback</b></p>	<p><b>Be aware that for any professional relationship to work, feedback must be a two-way exchange.</b></p> <p>You should expect feedback from the PhD candidate just as the latter expects it from you. Be open to the feedback you receive, and take it seriously. If no feedback is given, ask for it. You are encouraged to do so a couple of times a year, but in any case, during the yearly progress interview with the PhD candidate. An important question that should be on the table is 'how can I help you succeed and progress'. Stimulate your PhD candidate to indicate what kind of feedback they need in their phase of the writing process. Remember that your reaction on the feedback will have an impact on the openness of your discussions with the PhD candidate.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that receiving feedback is very helpful for your progress.</b></p> <p>Keep in mind that feedback is meant to help you, and is not targeted against you as a person. Feedback is needed to advance your project. If it is not forthcoming, ask for it, and use the feedback to your best advantage. Don't be afraid to ask for feedback in an early stage; this prevents you and your supervisors from going in separate directions. If you experience the feedback as unhelpful, reflect on it for a while (with others), and discuss it with your supervisors in a professional and inoffensive way. When your supervisors have helped you, or have been complimentary, show your appreciation.</p>
<p><b>Be willing to give feedback</b></p>	<p><b>Be aware that a PhD candidate needs regular feedback that must be professional, objective, constructive, and balanced.</b></p> <p>Feedback may have a large (emotional) impact on the PhD candidate, thus you should be cautious in choosing on which topic, and when to give feedback, especially when the feedback is person-oriented and would not benefit others.</p> <p>You should be aware of the cultural/ethnic/gender/etc. variation in the research group, and should employ language that is inclusive and not hurtful to people with different backgrounds and traditions. Always support your PhD candidate and stand up for them. If you observe inappropriate behavior towards your PhD candidate (e.g. #MeToo behavior, angry behavior), discuss this, and take action.</p> <p>Positive feedback is as important as critical comments.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that feedback on supervision can always be helpful.</b></p> <p>Supervising a PhD candidate is a hard job. You can help your supervisors by giving open feedback about their supervision, always with respect and consideration.</p>

<p><b>Be aware of stressors</b></p>	<p><b>Be aware that, as a supervisor, you are a role model for the PhD candidate, and should set a good example in terms of stress management.</b></p> <p>Be aware that your (potentially unhealthy) work attitudes are easily seen as a professional standard. Stimulate the PhD candidates to take breaks. Be aware that the PhD candidate's personal life story can affect their work. Make sure that PhD candidates feel welcome from the start, and make them feel part of the team.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that your life involves more than your work.</b></p> <p>Manage your stress level and respect your boundaries. Also talk to your colleagues and peers about their struggles with doing research; sharing the experiences helps to manage the difficulties of life as a PhD candidate. Balance could also be restored by participating in social activities.</p> <p>Maintain communication with your supervisors and remember that your supervisors have followed the same path before you, and can also help you to put things in perspective .</p> <p>If the stress that you are experiencing is (too) overwhelming and holding you back in your daily functioning, please consult your PhD candidate advisor or check the <a href="#">Helpmatrix</a> in order to see which help is available at the VU.</p>
<p><b>Be future-oriented</b></p>	<p><b>Be aware that a PhD candidate might need stimulation to think about their career after graduation.</b></p> <p>Many PhD candidates do not think much about their next career step before their last year in their PhD trajectory, nor do they know much about what comes after the PhD, especially outside academia. Having no prospects for future career development triggers and increases stress. Thus, it is very important to timely discuss this point with your PhD candidate. Make your professional network available to your PhD candidates.</p>	<p><b>Be aware that you need to think about your career after graduation.</b></p> <p>There are very few jobs in academia. Take this into account. Most PhD candidates start thinking about their next career step during the 3rd or 4th year of their PhD trajectory, which is late. Spend some dedicated time on this issue already in your 2nd year.</p> <p>The person who knows you best professionally (in most cases, your supervisor) can advise you. Work on your network. Let the outside world know who you are. Don't underestimate the time this takes.</p>