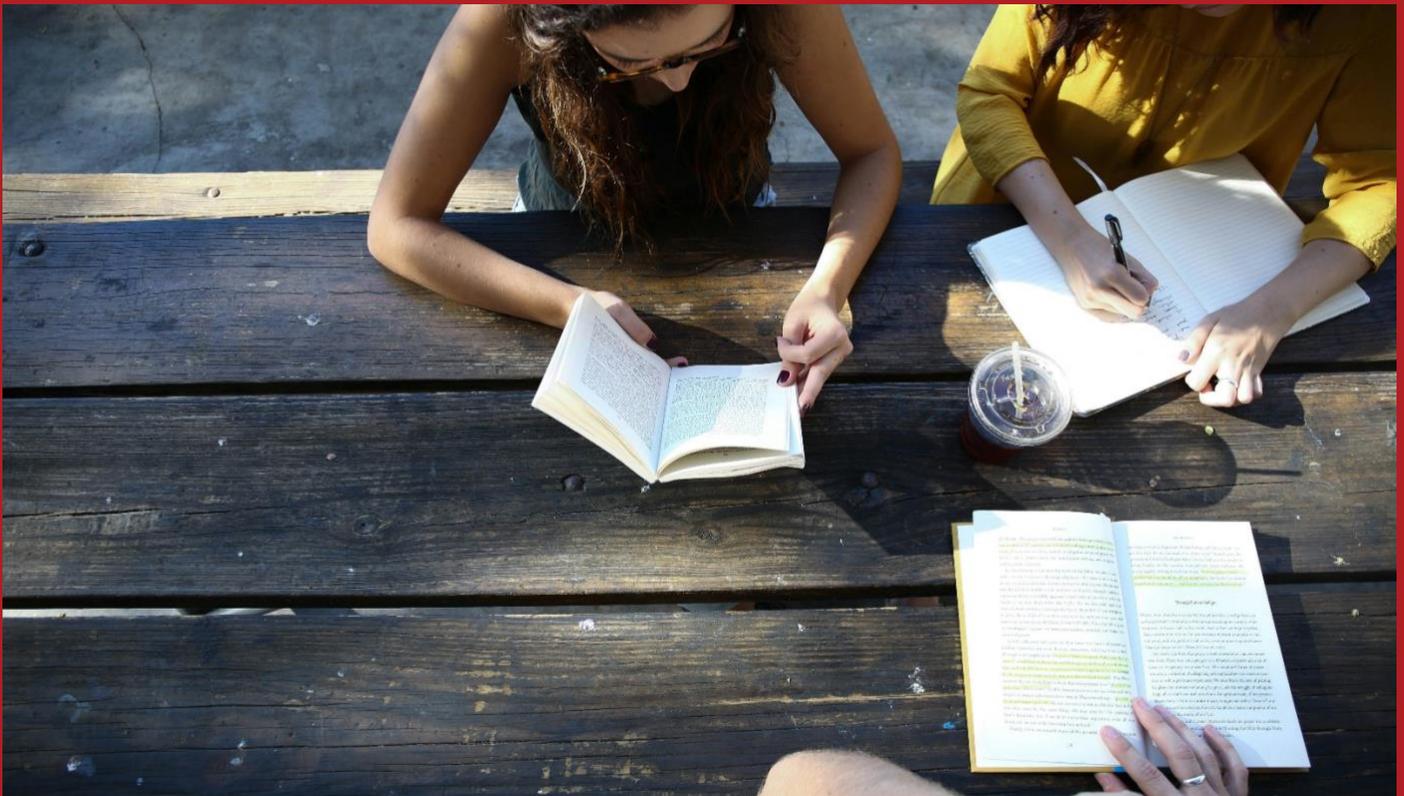


Graduate Supervision Handbook

YORK 



Graduate Studies at York University

A Place Where Knowledge is Made!

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The York University Graduate Supervision Handbook:

EMPOWERING RELATIONSHIPS, ELEVATING EXCELLENCE

Land Acknowledgment

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.



Graduate Studies: A Place Where Knowledge is Made

The mission of York's Faculty of Graduate Studies is to enhance the academic and professional experiences of the largest group of active researchers and scholars in the university.

Founded in 1963, the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) at York University welcomed its first cohort of just 11 students the following year. What began as a bold step into the future of higher education has grown into one of Canada's most dynamic and diverse graduate communities.

Recently, we proudly celebrated our 60th anniversary, marking six decades of advancing transformative research, interdisciplinary thinking, and inclusive pedagogy. Today, FGS offers over 100 full- and part-time academic and professional degree and diploma programs, helping graduate scholars build expertise and shape fulfilling, impactful careers. With a network of over 35,000 alumni worldwide, our influence continues to grow.

Graduate education is at the heart of York University's mission—a space where ideas are tested, knowledge is created, and futures are shaped. At FGS, we have always understood knowledge as a collaborative pursuit, where scholars, supervisors, and communities come together in the spirit of collective inquiry. This approach has defined our past and will guide our future.

York has led the way in challenging traditional boundaries—launching Canada's first PhD in Women's Studies, accepting doctoral dissertations in Indigenous languages, and pioneering research rooted in equity, decolonization, and sustainability. Our commitment to public engagement, social justice, and interdisciplinary collaboration continues to shape how knowledge is produced and shared.

As we look ahead to the future of graduate education, we face both urgent global challenges and bold new possibilities—from climate change and displacement to Indigenous data sovereignty and the ethical use of artificial intelligence. At York, our scholars and researchers are not only responding to these issues—they are leading the way. We remain committed to a graduate experience that is innovative, inclusive, and deeply human-supported by experiential learning, career and professional development, strong supervisory relationships, and award-winning services like the Graduate Wellness Consultation Service.

At York, graduate education is not just about advancing knowledge—it is about imagining and building a better world. It is a place where knowledge is made!

Dean's Welcome

Welcome to the York Graduate Supervision Handbook! This book represents our shared commitment to excellence in graduate research, scholarship, mentorship and training.

The supervisory relationship is the beating heart of graduate research pedagogy: a partnership that will shape a graduate student's academic trajectory, the research they undertake and the knowledge they produce, their future career prospects and their lived experience of graduate school. The right supervisor can make all the difference to a struggling Master's or doctoral candidate – providing guidance, inspiration, clear expectations, encouragement, and support—while a poor supervisory fit can leave students feeling discouraged and neglected, and supervisors frustrated and conflicted.

What makes for the right supervisor? Supervision as pedagogy is difficult to articulate in general terms because it is *relational*. The shape of any given supervisory relationship (what makes it productive or stifling, expansive or restricting) depends on the interplay between individual student and supervisor involved—as well as the research project to which both are devoted, the disciplinary norms and scholarly conversations scaffolding that project, and the broader context in which their joint work takes place (whether that context is primarily scholarly, creative, oriented towards industry or to public service). At the same time, there are core values that constitute any healthy supervisory relationship: shared curiosity, mutual respect, understanding, reciprocity, clear expectations on both sides and a commitment to meet them, where and whenever possible.

Conversations about good supervision must be contextual, caring and attentive to the needs and capacities of individual teachers and students, the demands of research methodologies and critical frameworks, and the possibilities of new practices and processes—while always remaining mindful of both student and supervisor as whole, very human people in a given social and material context. A good supervisor cares for their supervisee as both a researcher and a student, and shepherds the project that student undertakes as both new knowledge and as a meaningful milestone in the student's own trajectory. Teacher, collaborator, project manager, exemplar, advisor—and sometimes counsellor: a good supervisor will find themselves wearing many hats.

In these pages, you will find best practice guidance to support you as you take on this important role. Supervisory styles, pedagogy, and guidance reflecting central aspects of supervision are included to equip you as you develop and refine your supervisory practice. Serving as a companion to the Graduate Supervision Toolkit, this handbook touches on salient aspects related to graduate supervision including styles of supervision, a best practice framework, characteristics of effective supervision, roles and responsibilities, communication, and fostering wellbeing.

On behalf of all of us in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Dean's Office, thank you for your commitment to graduate supervision. Through this pivotal role, you are contributing to our ongoing mission of creative and courageous socially engaged research and to the next generation of world-class scholars.



Dr. Alice MacLachlan.
Vice-Provost and Dean,
Graduate Studies, York University

Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook, for graduate supervisors, reflects the York University Faculty of Graduate Studies' commitment to supporting graduate supervision as both an intentional pedagogical strategy of graduate faculty and an academic relationship of mentorship and mutuality. Serving as a companion to the [Graduate Supervision Toolkit](#), graduate supervisors will find inside curated guidance to support the enactment of supervisory best practices.

The Beating Heart of Graduate Studies: Supervision

The supervisory relationship is the beating heart of graduate studies: a partnership that will shape a graduate student's academic trajectory and experience of graduate school. Through this role, supervisors guide students from being consumers of knowledge to creators of knowledge.

Graduate supervision is a professional, academic and fundamental mentoring relationship in which a graduate faculty member guides a graduate student's scholarly, research and/or creative intellectual growth in a thesis-based graduate program. This relationship helps students develop scholarly potential, produce original scholarly, research and/or creative works, and navigate their academic milestones successfully.

While efficacious supervision requires sound disciplinary, pedagogical, methodological and content-specific knowledge, it hinges upon the establishment of an effective working relationship through clear communication, mutual respect, and an ethics of care. Ensuring students receive support in research skills, critical thinking, project management, and career development is key. Both the student and supervisor share responsibility for effective communication and maintaining high standards, with the supervisor providing expertise, mentorship, and support for research and career development.



Principles Guiding Graduate Supervision at York University

Principle One: Dignity	Principle Two: Respect
The shared recognition of each person’s history, background and inherent worth.	The acknowledgement of each person’s right to a supportive working supervisory relationship built on earned trust, partnership and open communication.
Principle Three: Mutuality	Principle Four: Efficacy
The enactment of positive interactive relationships grounded in cooperation and shared goals, contributing to a beneficial and enjoyable academic journey for all.	The enactment of best practices to achieve the responsibilities attached to graduate supervisory roles including those attached to goal-directed learning and student progress.
Principle Five: Accountability	
Holding oneself accountable to the highest standards of supervisory, intellectual, academic, research and relational integrity as related to graduate education.	

Supervision as an Intentional Pedagogy

The pedagogy of graduate supervision is a complex and collaborative approach to teaching and mentoring that centers on a student's long-term development and scholarly growth, going beyond simply imparting knowledge. It involves intentional efforts to teach students requisite academic literacy skills, disciplinary-based conventions, and aspects associated with proposing and enacting a scholarly enterprise aimed at knowledge creation. Understanding that teaching is not telling, while it may appear informal given its often conversational style, supervisory pedagogy is best supported with the establishment of planned teaching and feedback sessions in support of the student’s growth and development adapting to disciplinary norms and individual strengths and growth areas. The graduate supervisor enacts a pedagogical style that is flexible, adapting to the learning styles of the student, their evolving needs as they sojourn through their degree, and the programmatic degree level expectations, aiming to cultivate independent scholars, researchers, and professionals who create and/or enhance knowledge in material ways.

Supervision as Mentorship

Supervision is best understood as an academic mentoring relationship. The [International Council on Graduate Schools 2022 International Summit](#) (pdf), outline principles related to mentorship in graduate studies stating that mentorship is most effective when it:

>	Focuses on the 'whole' student, making room for each student's scholarly and career aspirations and cultural background.
>	Is viewed as a collaborative process between student and mentor, where each has a role to play.
>	Respects the student's need to maintain positive mental health and well-being, and the need to balance the demands of research with personal interests and commitments.
>	Allows students to take intellectual risks and develop new scholarly paradigms and products.
>	Encourages all parties to embrace career diversity.
>	Is appropriately supported, but not replaced, by technology.
>	Encourages students to use scholarly paradigms and methods to generate new knowledge for public benefit.

Graduate supervisors or committee members who embrace their role as a mentor:

>	Commit to using practices of self-reflection and personal development, both to model this concept to mentees and to improve one's mentoring practices.
>	Seek out training and other professional development opportunities to improve understanding of effective mentoring practices and ability to use appropriate technologies.
>	Develop and communicate transparent expectations for student mentees and encourage mentees to clearly communicate their own learning and career goals.
>	Consider using Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and mentorship contracts as a framework for making expectations transparent.
>	Develop awareness of differences in cultural backgrounds of students, including students from underrepresented backgrounds and international students.
>	Encourage all students to prepare for careers inside and outside the university by developing a CV and a resume.
>	Encourage and support advisees in seeking out mentors outside the primary mentoring relationship, such as peers, employers, and other faculty.
>	Help mentees understand that developing relationships with a range of trusted advisors is a skill that will help them achieve greater independence and develop a lifelong skill in relationship building.

Supervision Styles

Most assuredly, a one-size-fits-all approach in graduate supervision does not work. Supervisors are diverse. Students are diverse. Programs and disciplinary conventions are diverse. As shown in Figure 1, Gatfield's (2005) framework illustrates four supervision styles based on varying levels of structure and support.

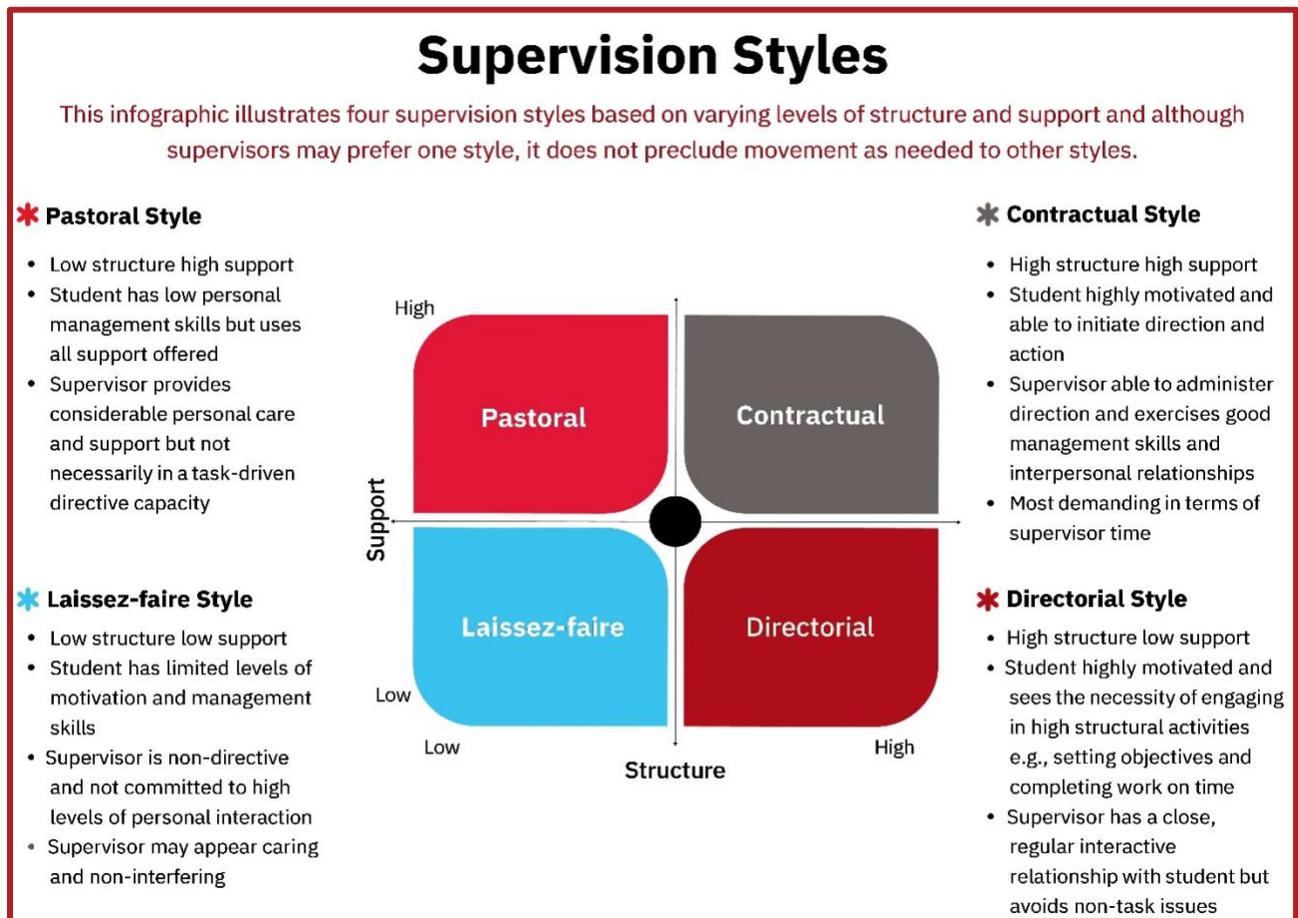
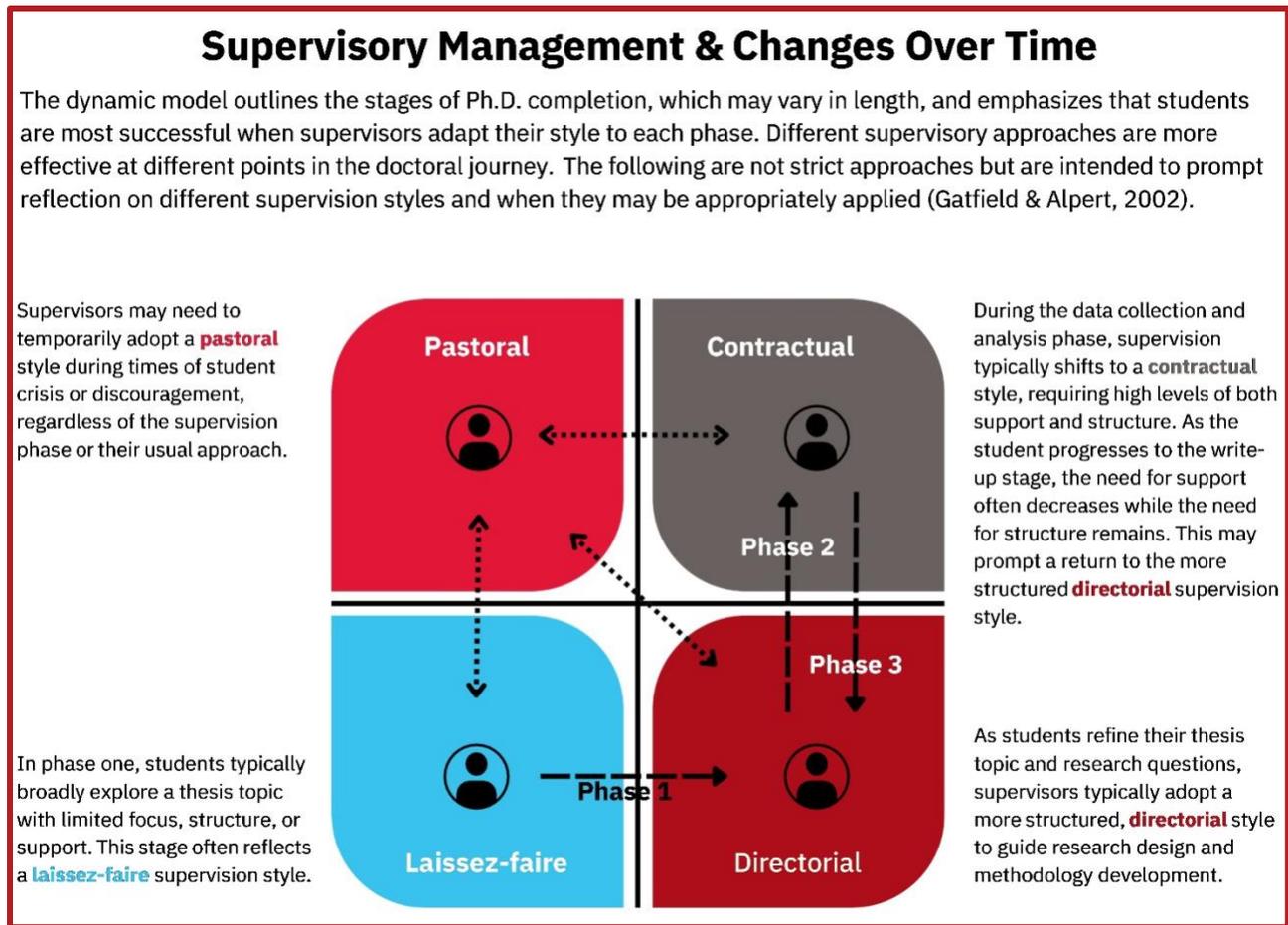


Figure 1 Gatfield's (2005) Supervision Styles

Understanding one's preferred or default approach to supervision builds self-awareness regarding supervisory style and student impact. Knowing additional approaches to be considered based on the student's preferred learning climate and where they are in their program trajectory assists the supervisor's efficacy. As they progress, the graduate student's needs change, and so must the approach of the effective supervisor. While supervisors may prefer a particular style, best practice involves remaining flexible and adapting to other approaches in response to student needs. Gatfield invites supervisors to recognize that no one style is to be considered disadvantageous. Only when supervisory strategies do not match the needs of the student, might they become potentially ineffectual.

Figure 1 Gatfield's (2005) Supervision Styles



Characteristics of Effective Graduate Supervision

Much has been written pertaining to the most desired characteristics of effective graduate supervisors. Additionally, research has delved into what supervisors articulate as markers of efficacy. Jacobsen et. al (2025) explored Canadian graduate students' views on 'ideal supervision', highlighting:

➤	Personal characteristics, i.e. being approachable, available, open and supportive.
➤	Relational trust, i.e. personal regard for others, respect, integrity and competence.
➤	Teaching and mentoring, i.e. acting as a role model, balances direction and guidance, clear and high expectations appropriate to level, provision of disciplinary and methodological expertise, feedback and guidance, promotes independence and provides resources.

➤	Academic support, i.e. related to milestones, process and progressions, regulations, and rules.
➤	Professional support, i.e. facilitating networking, opportunities for leadership, professional development and career guidance.

Below are best practice characteristics of effective supervision inviting York’s graduate faculty to contemplate the enactment of these through the [Characteristics of an Effective Supervisor](#) (pdf) self-assessment tool.

1.	Understands the qualities associated with graduate level research, scholarly and/or creative works in their discipline, and communicates these to the student.
2.	Gives time and thought to the selection and acceptance of graduate students for purposes of graduate supervision.
3.	Establishes and collaboratively maintains a positive, professional, objective relationship with the graduate student and recognizes issues of equity, individual circumstances and power imbalance.
4.	Clarifies expectations and milestones throughout the graduate studies journey as well as inspires and motivates the student toward completion.
5.	Discusses and assists the graduate student with financial and external funding deadlines, policies and guidelines, and with navigating and directing the student to appropriate financial resources.
6.	Supports the conceptual development of the research, scholarly and/or creative work and all subsequent phases.
7.	Helps the graduate student create and modify a timetable for completion of various phases and guides the timing and sequencing of lab/project activities.
8.	Meets regularly with the graduate student (no less than once per term) and is reasonably accessible at other times throughout the supervisory journey.
9.	Informs the graduate student of and makes suitable arrangements for any absences, leaves or sabbatical in advance.
10.	Convenes meetings of the supervisory committee; evaluates and reviews graduate student progress and completes necessary records and reports for progression.
11.	Acknowledges intellectual property, authorship and student contributions.
12.	Provides constructive and thorough feedback of submitted work within 3 weeks or as agreed upon between supervisor and graduate student.
13.	Identifies and addresses potential academic and/or interpersonal conflicts and difficult situations in transparent, timely and open conversation with the graduate student and/or supervisory committee members.

14.	Anticipates problems and assists the graduate student's adaptation of their research, scholarly and/or creative work.
15.	Advises, and enforces where necessary, the academic and research standards of the graduate program and degree requirements.
16.	Encourages and advises the graduate student on appropriate professional development and preparation for diverse knowledge dissemination.
17.	Encourages and models healthy work-life balance.
18.	Assists, with the Graduate Program Office, the graduate student with their preparation of the thesis, dissertation, MRP and/or creative work for defence and ensures awareness of program requirements and standards to which the work is expected to conform.
19.	Actively guides the graduate student's preparation for their post-graduate career.
20.	Is aware of and responds to the changing relationship with the graduate student over time, and especially the balance between structure and independence.
21.	Gives sufficient time to the responsibilities of a graduate supervisor.
22.	Invests time in their own professional development as a graduate supervisor.

Roles and Responsibilities

Supervision involves several layers of intentional support, including roles for students, supervisors, members of the supervisory committee and the graduate program the student is enrolled in.



Roles of the Supervisor at York University

The supervisor's principal task consists of helping students realize their scholarly potential. This can only be accomplished in a relationship that offers insights born of experience, and furnishes the requisite challenges, stimulation, guidance and genuine support. The student has a right to expect expertise, accessibility and support from the supervisor. The supervisor must offer substantive and procedural assistance with the design, planning and conduct of feasible research projects, introduction to the network of scholars in the area of specialization, and support for the presentation and publication of research results. At the same time, the supervisor must ensure that the scholarly standards of the university and the discipline are met in the student's work.

Given the importance of the supervisory role, taking steps to consider a wide range of aspects ahead of agreeing to supervise is essential. Supervisors are invited to consult the [Questions to Consider Before Accepting a Graduate Student](#) (pdf) supervisory tool.

As part of their appointment to FGS, graduate supervisors are expected to:

➤	Be reasonably accessible to the student for consultation and discussion of the student's academic progress and research problems. The frequency of such meetings will vary according to the discipline involved and the stage and nature of the student's work, but should normally occur once a month, and never less than once each term.
➤	Give timely response to submitted written work, with constructive and concrete suggestions for improvements. This normally means within 3 weeks or as agreed upon between supervisor and student.
➤	Make satisfactory arrangements in advance with the approval of the Graduate Program Director (GPD) for the supervision of the student when on leave or sabbatical, or on extended absence from the university.
➤	Convene an annual meeting of the supervisory committee, normally in the spring, to evaluate the student's Report on Progress, and submit a copy of the completed Report to the GPD after the meeting. Apart from highlighting the student's academic progress thus far, the Progress Report (pdf) should also clearly identify the challenges, if any, facing the student, including considerations for students with disability.
➤	In conjunction with the Graduate Program Office, ensure the student is aware of University, Faculty and program requirements and standards to which the thesis/dissertation is expected to conform.

➤	Assist the student with attempts to acquire external funding, including meeting appropriate deadlines, and to engage in scholarly development (e.g., conference presentations and publications).
➤	<p>Offer supervision and advice appropriate to the stage of the student's work, helping the student to establish and modify a suitable timetable for completion of the various stages of the thesis/dissertation project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at the proposal stage, assist the student with selection of a suitable and manageable topic and approach • at the research stage, assist the student with initial research design and subsequent modification, with alleviating current and anticipated problems, with interpretation and analysis of findings, and with bringing the project to completion • at the writing stage, assist the student with appropriate and timely feedback on individual draft chapters, and with revision to the draft thesis/dissertation as an integrated whole • at the oral defence stage, advise the student on preparation for the examination and assist the student to interpret and comply with any changes recommended by the examining committee.
➤	When the final draft of the thesis or dissertation is complete, ensure that all members of the committee have read the document and are agreed that it is ready to proceed to an oral defence. Suggest possible members of the examining committee to the GPD (i.e., outside examiner, external examiner). Ensure that a master's thesis is sent to the examining committee at least 15 business days prior to the date of the examination, and a doctoral dissertation at least 20 business days prior to the date of the examination.
➤	Appropriately acknowledge in published material the contributions of the student, including consideration of joint authorship of publications. Where the student's research comprises a component of the supervisor's research program, and joint publication is envisaged, it must be recognized that the responsibility for use of data and for publications is held jointly by the supervisor and student. Endeavour to clarify at the outset of the supervisory relationship expectations regarding the responsibility and publication credit for work initiated, designed and researched by the student, but supported financially or otherwise by the supervisor.
➤	Conform to basic principles of academic integrity and professionalism in the development of a mature and objective relationship with the student. It must be recognized that there is a power imbalance in the supervisory relationship and that any form of harassment or exploitation of students is unacceptable.

➤	Conform to the graduate program and Faculty processes in the event of a supervisory relationship which is unsatisfactory for any reason or in situations where there is a change of supervisors for any reason.
➤	Even though a graduate student has ultimate and final responsibility for meeting academic honesty requirements, it is incumbent on the supervisor to ensure, to the extent that it is practicable in the circumstances, the academic integrity of primary research data, and the consistency with academic integrity and practice of interpretations relating to such data.

Roles of Supervisory Committee Members at York University

Supervisory committee members are learned scholars chosen for their content and/or methodological expertise. Facilitating the graduate student’s intellectual growth and contribution to a field of knowledge, providing guidance, consultation, and advice on a student’s research are integral roles for committee members. Additionally, their role is to support the supervisor's main task to assist the student's growth and development and successful completion of their graduate thesis, dissertation and/or creative work.

As part of their appointment to FGS, supervisory committee members are expected to:

➤	Read the thesis/dissertation in a timely fashion and make a recommendation to the GPD regarding the oral defence.
➤	Review a student’s research proposal and recommend its approval to the appropriate GPD and the Dean not less than three months prior to the date set for the oral examination.
➤	Review the student’s progress from time to time, normally every six (6) months and never less than once each year. Reports to the GPD of unsatisfactory progress may require a student to withdraw from a program of studies or withdraw from the graduate program in which the student is enrolled.
➤	Meet annually with the student, normally in the spring, to evaluate the Report on Progress submitted by the student and submit a completed copy of the Report on Progress to the GPD after the meeting.
➤	Read the thesis/dissertation in a timely fashion and make a recommendation to the GPD regarding the oral defence.

Roles of Graduate Programs

The role of the Graduate Program Office (GPO) in supporting graduate student supervision is an important one. The GPO is responsible for setting program expectations, ensuring that graduate students have a clear understanding of how to successfully fulfill their degree requirements in a timely manner, and assisting in resolving difficulties.

Programs differ across Faculties and disciplines and therefore operate in different ways. The GPO role in supervision may include:

>	Assisting students in confirming a supervisor.
>	Reviewing the student's progress from time to time and reminding students of important deadlines.
>	Reviewing and approving supervisory committee composition.
>	Reviewing and filing annual progress reports (pdf), with input from both supervisors and students.
>	Reviewing, approving and scheduling oral defences.
>	Assisting and supporting students with personal difficulties impacting their progress.
>	Participating in the resolution of any supervisor-student conflicts.

Roles of Graduate Students

By entering a graduate program, the student has made a commitment to devoting the time and energy necessary to engage in research and writing a thesis or dissertation which constitutes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge in a field. The supervisor has a right to expect from the student ability, initiative and receptivity to feedback. In many programs, students are responsible to secure a supervisor. In order to do this, students can make use of the [Smart Questions, Strong Matches: Navigating the Search for Graduate Supervisors](#) (pdf) document.



It is the responsibility of the student to:

>	Become informed about and conform to University, Faculty and graduate program requirements and procedures for completion of the graduate degree, such as degree milestones, research ethics, registration and graduation requirements, thesis/dissertation style and quality standards and year-end evaluations.
>	Advise their supervisor if they are a student with a disability and discuss recommended academic accommodations and possible impact, if any, on the program.
>	Develop, in conjunction with the supervisor and supervisory committee, an intended timetable for completion of all stages of the thesis/dissertation, and work to realize that timetable, meeting appropriate deadlines.
>	Meet regularly with the supervisor to review progress. The frequency of such meetings will vary according to the discipline involved and the stage and nature of the student's work, but should normally occur once a month, and not less than once each term. Interact with other members of the supervisory committee as appropriate.
>	Keep the supervisor and graduate program office informed of where the student may be contacted and respond appropriately to all communications received.
>	Prepare a Report on Progress for an annual meeting with a supervisory committee.
>	Give serious consideration to and respond to the advice and feedback received from the supervisor and the supervisory committee.
>	Recognize that the supervisor and other members of the supervisory committee may have other teaching, research and service obligations that may preclude immediate responses.
>	Recognize that where the student's research comprises a component of the supervisor's research program, and joint publication is envisaged, the responsibility for utilization of data and for publications is held jointly by the supervisor and student. In such cases, the thesis/dissertation, or draft papers, together with a copy of the raw data, shall be made available to the supervisor prior to submission for publication.
>	Conform to the graduate program and Faculty processes in the event of a supervisory relationship that is unsatisfactory for any reason or in situations where there is a change of supervisors for any reason.
>	Conform to basic principles of academic integrity and professionalism in the development of a mature and objective relationship with the supervisor, the supervisory committee, and other scholars.

A Framework for Good Supervisory Practice

Supervision scholar, Stan Taylor's (2019) [Framework for Good Supervisory Practice](#) (pdf) is instructive for York University graduate faculty. The following 10 components may be considered best practice for planning and enacting your important role.

✘ Recruitment and selection

- › Consider publicizing your areas of supervisory expertise.
- › Interview prospective applicants and invite them to interview you.

✘ Supervisory relationships with candidates

- › Establish clear expectations from the start, including how these are going to be met.
- › Be aware of supervisory styles and their impact on students.
- › Recognize that relationships change over time, as does the nature of the support they require from supervisors.

✘ Supervisory relationships with co-supervisors

- › Clarify roles with co-supervisors and students at the start.
- › Clarify expectations associated with the student's work.
- › Regularly review the co-supervision arrangements.

✘ Supporting candidates' research projects

- › Advise on a choice of topic, research proposal and overall plan.
- › Advise on aspects of research ethics and integrity.
- › Advise and assist on research skill development.

✘ Encouraging candidates to write and giving appropriate feedback

- › Encourage students to write from the start of their studies.
- › Support the development of their academic writing.
- › Give timely, constructive and actionable feedback.

✘ Keeping the research on track and monitoring progress

- › Support and motivate students to progress in their studies.
- › Build in monitoring as part of typical supervisory meetings.
- › Assist the student to complete on time.

✘ Supporting candidates' personal, professional and career development

- › Discuss and role model work-life balance.
- › Connect students with disciplinary networks and activities.
- › Support your students, while knowing your boundaries.
- › Support the development of employment-related skills.

✘ Supporting candidates through completion and final examination

- › Work with students to finalize their thesis/dissertation/creative work.
- › Assess and advise on readiness to proceed to defence.
- › Be knowledgeable of relevant policies, timelines and outcome scenarios and demystify for your student.
- › Support the student to prepare for defence & afterwards.

✘ Supporting candidates to disseminate their research

- › Model the process of publication/dissemination.
- › Encourage candidates to publish/disseminate as they go.
- › Consider co-publishing.

✘ Reflecting upon and enhancing practice

- › Supervision is a pedagogical practice that benefits from both reflection and evaluation. Through intentional efforts, a supervisor can determine their strengths and weaknesses.
- › Undertake initial and continuing professional development.
- › Reflect on your practice and seek feedback from supervisees.
- › Consider contributing to the development of other supervisors.

Growing a Positive Mentoring Relationship

Relationship is central to the health and well-being of graduate supervision. Attending to healthy relationship building is the shared responsibility of students, supervisors and committee members. Candid conversations related to expectations, learning styles, supervision approaches, communication and goals are a best practice in growing a positive academic supervisory relationship. Supervisors are asked to make use of FGS' [Strong Start to Supervision Checklist](#) (pdf) continually with all graduate students.

The Academic Relationship

The academic relationship between graduate student and supervisor has at its core the goal of sharing knowledge and building the capacity of the graduate student with the ultimate aim of successful completion of the graduate degree. Systematically and intentionally assessing the

needs and strengths of the graduate student is an essential component of building the academic relationship. Understanding their goals, knowledge, skills and growth areas at the outset, serves as the beginning of a teaching and learning action plan for the supervisor. Using the FGS [Graduate Student Skills Inventory](#) (pdf) can help guide this conversation with your student. In collaboratively discussing requisite skills to aid in the development of graduate student capacity, you and your student can map out a plan to augment student skills in meaningful and timely ways.

Fostering a Growth Mindset

A growth mindset asserts that we can grow our talents, abilities and intelligence through intentional learning, goal setting and effort. Rather than an assumption that capacity is fixed, a growth mindset maintains that one’s abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication, effort and seeking growth through feedback. Carol Dweck (2009) suggests that this mindset gives way to the belief that we can grow and improve throughout our lives and in this case, throughout our graduate school journey. Furthermore, a growth mindset is accompanied by a deep belief that we can learn from 'failure', and that we should embrace challenges, while emphasizing small indicators of improvement.

In fostering a growth mindset, supervisors can:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explain that skills can be improved through work and practice i.e. neuroplasticity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reframe feedback as opportunity versus a definitive judgement of one’s ability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Value effort, explaining it as a positive path to capacity building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Focus on learning, where the goal is scaffolded growth in understanding.

Supervisors can encourage students to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set high but realistic goals and standards. ➤ Prioritize self-awareness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Value effort and seek feedback. ➤ Develop a sense of purpose.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Prioritize the process versus the result. ➤ Try different learning strategies. 	

Encourage your students to value effort, develop new skills and refine current ones as this is central to a growth mindset, where feedback is actively sought and constructive criticism is welcomed. To foster a growth mindset in graduate supervision, supervisors should model this mindset themselves. A growth mindset can be a healing tonic to feelings of inadequacy and

when creating a safe environment for your students to strive for growth, assist them to look for and appreciate constructive feedback, viewing growth areas as opportunities versus innate failings.

Set and Maintain Boundaries

The graduate supervisory dyad is a close working relationship, but that does not mean your graduate student is your friend. You are a senior scholar entrusted with the key task of teaching, supporting and guiding a graduate student through their academic milestones while connecting them with other scholars in the field. As outlined in the Council of Ontario Universities' [Principles for Graduate Supervision at Ontario's Universities](#) (pdf), although graduate students are partners in the university research enterprise, the graduate supervisor is the senior partner. While it is important to be friendly and approachable, take care to establish boundaries early on and be clear that the relationship is a professional one.

Communication, Feedback and Progress Monitoring

Attending to healthy communication is the shared responsibility of students, supervisors and committee members. Second only to relationship, communication is the fundamental make-or-break aspect of effective supervision. Found consistently in graduate supervision research, and in FGS' surveys of graduate students over the past decade, the provision of clear, helpful, timely and caring communication is imperative.

In graduate supervision communication, there is the 'what' to discuss, and then 'how' we discuss. The 'how' of discussion can be related to our style of supervision, as well as our general approach to communication. Both may or may not be effective with our students, thus necessitating transparent discussions related to communication styles and approaches that work best for both members of the supervisory dyad. Considering cultural, generational and other aspects of communication is critical.



Starting Strong

The [Strong Start to Supervision Checklist](#) (pdf) represents a curated list of key discussion topics to be discussed during regular supervisory meetings. The checklist helps facilitate open dialogue to clarify roles, preferred styles and programmatic milestones. As a communication tool, the checklist can proactively address potential mismatches in expectations and responsibilities, ensuring both parties have discussed and gained sufficient clarity to proceed well together.

Setting Expectations

Setting expectations in graduate supervision involves regular, proactive discussion between the student and supervisor to establish a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, communication methods, timelines, and research goals. This conversation should cover the scope of the scholarly, creative, or research project, intellectual property, use of AI, expected dates for smaller components of the scholarly or creative project, publication or exhibition plans, feedback style and timing and meeting frequency, often documented in a letter of understanding or summary memo.

Supervisors should be ready to help students select, refine and plan a manageable and well-defined research and/or creative project. The thesis or dissertation topic a supervisor approves should be able to be successfully completed in a reasonable timeframe.

Supervisory dyads are strongly encouraged to discuss their roles and responsibilities to prevent assumptions or misunderstandings. Some dyads agree that the supervisor will guide more of the early discussions pertaining to methodologies or study design, but that the student will take the lead on subsequent drafts when feeling more confident. Expectations can shift and are not necessarily absolute. Additionally, we invite supervisory dyads to navigate the [York University Guide to Discussion Topics to Inform Supervisory Relationships](#) (pdf), to assist in clarifying expectations.

As the student sojourns in their graduate program, priorities, experiences and expectations may change. It is important to check in regularly, including at a minimum during the annual progress report meeting.

Feedback

We constantly exchange feedback, both explicitly through speech and writing, and implicitly through gestures and tone. It is important to distinguish feedback from evaluation. Feedback is a formative tool that uses descriptive, constructive, and nonjudgmental language to support growth. Evaluation is summative and judges performance against a standard.

Feedback is an essential part of the learning process and therefore it is important for supervisors to:

 <p>Point out positive features as well as areas for improvement.</p>	 <p>Provide detailed feedback in an organized and timely manner.</p>
 <p>Offer formative, actionable, timely, and constructive feedback, focusing on clarity and content rather than sentence-level grammar.</p>	 <p>Provide examples as a helpful strategy.</p>

Supervisors play a key role in guiding students on academic writing and presentation. Effective guidance includes both positive feedback and constructive criticism. Students grow more when supervisors focus on what to do rather than what to avoid. Sharing examples such as a proposal, literature review, or theses/dissertations can help clarify expectations.

Provide written feedback in stages rather than all at once. Begin with comments on the research question and proposed methodology. Schedule a follow-up meeting to address structure, clarity, flow, and conciseness. Avoid overwhelming students with excessive critique all at once, and ensure strengths are acknowledged with specific examples.

At York University, supervisors are required to offer supervision and advice appropriate to the stage of the student’s work, helping the student to establish and modify a suitable timetable for completion of the various stages of the thesis/dissertation project:

Proposal Stage:	Research Stage:
Assist the student with selection of a suitable and manageable topic and approach.	Assist the student with initial research design and subsequent modification, alleviating current and anticipated problems, interpretation and analysis of findings, and bringing the project to completion.
Writing Stage:	Oral Defence Stage:
Assist the student with appropriate and timely feedback on individual draft chapters, and revision to the draft thesis/dissertation as an integrated whole.	Advise the student on preparation for the examination and assist the student to interpret and comply with any changes recommended by the examining committee.

FGS guidelines at York allow up to 15 business days for supervisors to provide written feedback. When possible, follow up with a one-on-one meeting for clarification and guidance. Effective feedback depends on a supportive supervisor–student relationship. Supervisors should regularly invite student feedback to adapt their approach and better meet individual needs.

KEY POINTS:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Improvement is more likely when supervisors articulate what to do rather than what not to do when responding to student work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Guide the student to articulate the contents of their work and the roadmap they will follow before they begin the writing journey.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Provide feedback to written work in stages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Offer opportunities for the student to orally explain their work, including practicing delivering presentations and tailoring their presentations to specific audiences.

Adapted from University of Alberta (2018) Supervisory Guide

Motivating and Monitoring Progress

PLANNING FOR SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION MEETINGS

The relationship between students, supervisors and members of a supervisory committee plays a pivotal role in the academic and overall wellbeing of graduate students. The impact of your supervision role, outlined in the FGS guidelines for supervision, cannot be understated. Mentoring meetings continue to serve as the fundamental way that strength-based and capacity-building guidance occurs.

A successful supervisor-student meeting requires preparation from both parties, including developing a co-constructed agenda with space for follow up from past meetings. The meeting should include time for an informal check-in and have a set start and finish time. Helpful agenda items can include the provision of progress updates from the student, establishing or refining next-step goals, programmatic and FGS milestone timelines, and where work has been submitted in advance of the meeting, the provision of oral constructive feedback to augment written feedback. Additional elements for a successful meeting include bringing specific requests for assistance, being prepared to discuss challenges, establishing trust, demystifying policies, linking to resources and ensuring a professional and respectful environment where both parties can openly discuss needs and ask questions.

Since the conclusion of the global pandemic, many graduate faculty and students continue to meet for the purposes of graduate supervision, in part, via remote modalities. FGS' [Guidelines for Remote Supervision](#) (pdf) provide supervisors with practice recommendations associated with isolation, structure, boundaries, relationships and careful communication. Meeting with students in person, when possible and when mutually desired, continues to be a best practice.

Supervisory dyads are encouraged to make use of the [Meeting Agenda Template](#) (docx) and [Meeting Notes Template](#) (docx). Ensuring congruence in what was discussed, and next steps contributes to the wellbeing of the student and supervisor.

MINIMUM MEETING FREQUENCY RECOMMENDATIONS

At York, graduate supervisors are expected to be reasonably accessible to their student for consultation and discussion of the student's academic progress and research problems. The frequency of such meetings will vary according to the discipline involved and the stage and nature of the student's work but should *normally occur once a month* and never less than once each term. Additionally, supervisors should encourage supervisory committee members to meet with the graduate student to discuss their specific areas of contribution to the student's work. Supervisors can assist graduate students to secure these meetings and in setting agenda items.

Supervisory committee members are often chosen for their specific area of contribution, including but not limited to, content expertise, methodological expertise, and 'fit' with a student. Given that, best practice is to avail oneself to the student for mentorship and guidance along their degree trajectory. At York, committee members are required to review the student's progress from time to time, normally *every six (6) months* and *never less than once each year*. Members of a supervisory committee are expected to read the thesis, dissertation (or creative work) in a timely fashion, (including chapters and components along the way, providing feedback) and make a recommendation to the supervisor and GPD regarding the work and the student's readiness for the oral defence.

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS

It is clearly established that completion rates are enhanced and average completion and withdrawal times reduced if supervisory committees meet regularly. For the express purpose of annual progress discussion and reporting, supervisory committees must meet at least annually with each student, usually in the spring, and carefully evaluate the student's activities and progress, with the understanding that any delays may stem from disability-related needs, and should therefore be met with flexibility, care, and inclusive support. Therefore, supervisors should convene an annual meeting of the supervisory committee and submit a signed copy of the completed report to the GPD after the meeting. Apart from highlighting the student's academic progress thus far, the [Progress Report](#) (pdf) should also clearly identify the challenges, if any, facing the student, including accommodation considerations for students with disabilities. Supervisors are asked to check with each student's program, to determine the specific form or online platform in use for annual [Progress Reports](#) (pdf).

THE INDIVIDUALIZED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

York University's [2022 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey \(CGPSS\)](#) results revealed a significant desire amongst students for “resources for job searching, resources for exploring research positions, and resources for exploring career options (within and outside academia).” This finding illustrates that many students are seeking more opportunities for continued career-oriented professional development support. The IDP can be used to provide a framework to support your students during their studies and help frame discussions about the job market and career prospects.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies' IDP is a tool to assist graduate students, with the help of their supervisor, to identify and develop program and career goals during their time at York. When creating an IDP, students can enhance their professional growth and skills by:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Setting and communicating goals related to teaching, research, and/or professional development with supervisors, faculty colleagues, or other mentors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Identifying ways to learn or improve academic and professional competencies. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">› Identifying strengths, talents, and passions, as well as opportunities to use them during their studies or future professional life while building an effective support network. | |

The [IDP Guide for Supervisors/Faculty Members](#) (pdf) provides supervisors with an overview of graduate professional skills programming and is intended to encourage productive dialogue between supervisors and students around career planning and exploration.

Fostering Academic Integrity, Research Ethics and Research Integrity

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage (ICAL, 2021). While each student has final responsibility for her or his academic honesty, it is incumbent on the supervisor to ensure, to the extent that it is practicable in the circumstances, the academic integrity of primary research data, and the consistency with academic integrity and practice of interpretations relating to such data. Planning for regular conversations related to academic integrity and assessing comprehension is important.

RESEARCH ETHICS

A key supervisory role is guiding students in developing feasible scholarly, research and/or creative work that meets degree requirements, while also ensuring they understand ethical research practices. Graduate students, along with their supervisors are required to review:

- The [Senate Policy on Research Involving Human Participants](#) and its [guidelines](#) for Research with Human Participants
- The [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#) as well as [Scholarly Skills Workshop: Navigating the Ethics Approval Journey in Graduate Studies](#) (video)

In assisting your student to complete the necessary steps associated with gaining research ethics approval, the [Guiding the Graduate Student Research Ethics Process](#) (pdf) checklist is meant to be used in conversation with your students.

Research Integrity

Research integrity, understood as different than research ethics, refers to appropriate conduct of all researchers at York University, reflected through behaviour and practices throughout the entire research cycle. A breach of research integrity involves, for example, plagiarism, the falsification or fabrication of data, the misuse of research funds, and the mismanagement of a conflict of interest. The Council of Canadian Academies expert panel's report [Honesty, Accountability & Trust: Fostering Research Integrity in Canada](#) (pdf) is instructive.

Research integrity is a standard expected of everyone at York University who conducts or supports research activities, including the work of our graduate students. Fostering research integrity in the work of one's graduate student is a supervisory responsibility requiring oversight. The [Responsible Conduct of Research](#) is governed by the Office of Research Ethics, and supervisors must ensure their own comprehension of these requirements while subsequently ensuring the graduate student research they oversee is also in compliance. Supervisor-led conversations regarding honesty, fairness, truthfulness, respect and responsibility in research, scholarly and creative work are necessary. Both FGS and the Office of Research Ethics have guidance resources for graduate students and supervisors in this area.

Questions to Consider Before Accepting a Graduate Student

Graduate supervision and its related teaching and mentorship require a significant investment of time and effort. When approached by graduate students or graduate programs to serve in a supervisory role, graduate faculty are invited to first consider several interrelated aspects. In balancing supervisory responsibilities and supervisor wellbeing, faculty can read the FGS guide [Questions to Consider Before Accepting a Graduate Student](#) (pdf) to assist in making a decision.

✘ Capacity and Availability

- › Do I have sufficient time to supervise this student effectively without compromising my capacity to support my current students' progress?
- › How many graduate students do I already have and where are they in their trajectory?
- › Do I anticipate being away and unavailable for any extended absences?
- › Am I available for regular meetings?
- › Am I able to provide timely, thorough and constructive feedback?
- › What challenges, or time constraints, or commitments, or administrative responsibilities am I facing now and in the near future that may impact being able to supervise this student effectively?

✘ Expertise and Fit

- › Is the student's proposed research within my area of expertise? Am I connected enough to the student's topic to mentor them in all phases of the research endeavour? If not, can I help the student build a committee with complementary research expertise to assist me?
- › Can I provide the necessary guidance, resources, or contacts to support their research?
- › Am I genuinely interested in the student's proposed research question/topic?
- › Would my own research programme and background support the stated needs of the prospective graduate student?
- › Does my current skill set align with what the student may need to get through the process? If not, am I willing to acquire the skill set needed to help this student?
- › Do I have the necessary knowledge to supervise in the stated area of scholarly/creative focus?

✘ Recruitment and Selection

At times, supervisors actively recruit graduate students, necessitating proactive activities. Supervision scholar Stan Taylor (2019) recommends:

- › Publicizing the areas of research within which they have supervisory capacity.
- › Participating in recruitment campaigns, including from under-represented groups.
- › Assessing applicant research proposals for feasibility.
- › Interviewing applicants, contributing to final decisions and giving feedback.

Agile Supervision: Accommodate, Adapt and Align

With most situations, a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. While supervisors may have preferred styles and approaches, when possible, it is important to be responsive to the needs

and preferences of graduate student learners. Given the close pedagogical nature of the graduate supervisory relationship, supervisors who adapt their supervisory approaches and practices to align with the specificities of their student's backgrounds, life contexts and learning styles is considered nimble supervision and a best practice. FGS has developed various guides for supervisors working with diverse students, which are found on the supervision toolkit.

The [Principles for Graduate Supervision at Ontario Universities](#) (pdf) requires supervisors to consider issues of equity and the different individual circumstances of graduate students in providing supervision. This includes working to support students who, due to personal or social circumstances, may face obstacles or historical challenges to their graduate student success (e.g., considering accommodations for family responsibilities such as child or elder care, mental health, cultural challenges as a newly arrived international student or historical oppression of Indigenous communities).

Senate policy stipulates that York University, including the Faculty of Graduate Studies, shall make reasonable and appropriate accommodations and adaptations to promote the ability of students with disabilities to fulfill the academic requirements of their programs. The nature and extent of accommodations shall be consistent with and supportive of the integrity of the curriculum and of the academic standards of programs or courses. For students registered with York University's [Student Accessibility Services](#), or would benefit from such an arrangement, the supervisor is subsequently guided by the necessary accommodations laid out in the student's accommodation documentation as well as [FGS' Accommodation Procedures](#).

Wellbeing

At the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the wellbeing of graduate supervisors, committee members and graduate students is a central thrust of our commitment to support graduate supervision. The dignity, inherent worth and valuing of all members of the group gives way to establishing healthy working relationships where the experiences of all members matter. The five principles informing graduate supervision at York University, i.e. dignity, respect, mutuality, efficacy and accountability are intended to foster student and supervisor wellbeing.

Supervisor Wellbeing

Being a graduate supervisor is a responsible, time consuming job with memorable highs grounded in pride of your students' accomplishments. Supervisory wellbeing is an important component of graduate supervision and as a supervisor, you matter. While supervising graduate students can bring much enjoyment and scholarly enrichment, many supervisors report high stress associated with this role. Given the time and productivity pressures experienced by many faculty, strategies to help build resilience and foster wellbeing in supervisors are important.

Graduate students bring many strengths and capacities to their degree journey, with some facing challenges impacting wellness and progression. While your student's well-being matters, your wellness is equally important. Taking steps to consider your own wellbeing can result in improved role satisfaction, both intellectually and personally.

CONTRIBUTORS TO SUPERVISORY STRESS

Research into supervisory experiences demonstrates several common sources of stress that may impact supervisor wellbeing including the following:



STRATEGIES FOR SUPERVISORY WELLBEING

Now that you know the common sources of stress related to graduate supervision, we invite supervisors to take proactive steps to ameliorate the impact and consider the following strategies adapted from Wisker & Robinson (2016).

	Communication and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss communication styles and expectations early with students in an attempt to avoid difficulties. ➤ Establish regularity in meetings, co-developing agenda items and a forward-moving plan of scaffolded sub-milestones.
	Capacity and Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider your overall workload when considering requests for additional supervisions. ➤ Establish a healthy cap that prioritizes your wellbeing, your availability to your students, and your other responsibilities. ➤ Know, establish and maintain boundaries related to your role with students. ➤ Stick to the set hours you have established for responding to students and encourage your students to do the same.
	Wellbeing and Sustainable Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take breaks aimed at positive work-life balance. ➤ Monitor for compassion fatigue and when appropriate, learn of and refer students to appropriate mental health, social or financial services or professionals.
	Student Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work proactively with your students towards the achievement of small milestones. ➤ Give constructive and actionable feedback, encouraging your student to increasingly take more responsibility for their work and progress. ➤ Connect your students to relevant regulations, other mentors and communities and assist with establishing peer support networks.
	Community Engagement and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider professional development opportunities related to supervision. ➤ Engage in dialogue about supervisory strategies to support success. ➤ Join a supervisory community where you can share experiences and strategies.

Student Wellbeing

The decision to enter graduate studies often occurs during a life stage when adult learners are navigating complex personal living circumstances. This fact is supported by numerous provincial and national surveys of graduate students over the past several years. Understanding this should be a cue to the supervisor to, at the outset, foster a working relationship that is attuned to student stress and stressors. Graduate studies are only one part of their lives, which is another reason it is important to understand the goals of your student and where this degree and your role in its' completion fits overall.

Aligned with the York University academic plan's commitment to living and working well together, FGS takes the wellbeing of graduate students seriously. The key role of the graduate supervisor as it relates to student wellbeing involves co-creating a healthy supervisory relationship based in dignity, mutuality and respect. While the growth and forward progression of the graduate student is a shared responsibility, keeping student wellbeing central in these efforts is vital. Asking students for feedback on your supervisory style may provide clues about approaches better appreciated by a student, thus fostering a working relationship grounded in their preferences.

Supervisors should maintain professional boundaries, not take the role of counsellor, and work towards recognizing emotional distress warning signs to help create a culture of care while connecting students with resources and support. Supervisors are advised to refer to the [Responding to Graduate Students in Distress Guide](#) (pdf) and to reach out to [Graduate Student Wellness Services](#) with any questions.

Navigating Conflict

At times, despite best intentions, conflict may arise within the graduate supervisory relationship. As a best practice, students and supervisors are encouraged to address and resolve conflicts promptly and informally. The [Quick Tips for Difficult Conversations](#) (pdf) tool can guide supervisors and students on how to approach difficult conversations.

In the event of a conflict that resists immediate resolution through careful dialogue between yourself, and your student, the student and/or the supervisor may approach the GPD for advice and support. While not obligated, the GPD may consider recommending a course of action aimed at moving the relationship in a healthy direction. If conflicts continue to persist exceeding program resolution, any party may seek the advice of FGS' Associate Dean Students. Consult the Faculty of Graduate Studies' [Conflict Resolution Regulations](#) to understand the process.

Supervisory Relationship Breakdown

If mediation at several levels is unsuccessful or inappropriate, and the Associate Dean Students determines that the supervisor-student relationship is beyond repair, both parties and the GPD will be informed of this determination, which is not punitive but a practical

necessity to preserve the well-being of one or both of the parties. The GPD will attempt in good faith to work with the student to find alternative supervision within the unit and will keep FGS apprised of these efforts. The original supervisor may be enlisted in the effort, though responsibility for finding alternative supervision rests with the program, with the support of FGS, to make diligent efforts in securing alternate supervision. In cases where the GPD is the student's supervisor, another member of the program executive will assume this responsibility. Additionally:

 <p>If the student refuses to accept the supervision provided, or if no supervision can be secured after diligent efforts are made, then the student is not fulfilling the academic requirement of having a supervisor and, on academic grounds, may be withdrawn.</p>	 <p>Patterns of unsatisfactory supervision (e.g., repeated supervisory breakdowns, alternative supervision arrangements, and/or increased student withdrawals) may result in a review of a supervisor's appointment to the graduate program as per the graduate program's appointment criteria.</p>	 <p>Conflicts related to graduate supervision may connect to, or be informed by, university policies and procedures. Depending on the nature of the concern, other university and provincial regulations may apply. In all instances, parties can contact FGS' Associate Dean Students for assistance navigating relevant policies and supports.</p>
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Towards Degree Completion and Beyond

Graduate studies can be demanding and as a supervisor, your role is to support and guide students through each phase of their program, including at degree completion and beyond.

Consistent check-ins on your student's academic progress and overall wellness are vital to helping them achieve timely program completion. Scheduling regular meetings provides an opportunity to review the quality and advancement of their work, offer constructive feedback, and provide support and guidance. These meetings also enable you to identify any challenges they may be encountering and direct them to appropriate resources or support services. These practices have supported your student's progress to this important stage of preparing for completion.

Gearing up for Defence



Congratulations! Your student’s work is ready for the final milestone of their graduate studies degree. Whether referred to as the ‘defence’, the ‘oral exam’ or the ‘viva’, the necessity of your mentorship at this stage cannot be understated. While it is an examination of the written work and their oral engagement with scholarly questioning as well as a collegial discussion, the supervisory necessity to prepare the student is well supported in the literature.

A student’s performance in the defence reflects the clarity and quality of the written dissertation as well as a student’s capacity to explain the work and field questions from learned scholars. One thing is certain, graduate students need their supervisors to explain the role and rigor of the defence, ensuring they understand the necessity of scaffolded preparations as well as the possibility of revisions after the exam. Below are some aspects you will be involved in as they gear up for defence.

>	Ask questions and assess their emerging readiness to proceed to defence.
>	Ensure you as the supervisor, and the committee have reviewed and provided formative feedback on each chapter and their subsequent revisions.
>	If the student or the work is not ready, it is best to plan an oral exam when the work and the student is at their best.
>	Know all timelines and work backwards proactively.
>	Explain the intent and process of the oral exam.
>	Assist students to develop and practice their presentation.

>	Host mock defences, invite other students to give feedback.
>	Ground and reassure your student on the day of the exam.
>	Support your student post-defence; assist with revisions.

Review [Preparing your Graduate Student for Defence: Guidance for Graduate Supervisors](#) (pdf).

More than a Reference: Supporting your Student for Post Graduation

As a supervisor, you play a key role in your students' professional development not just by supporting research, publications, and conference presentations, but by helping shape their future careers.

The [Graduate and Postdoctoral Professional Skills](#) (GPPS) program at York offers tools students need to succeed within and beyond the academic world, informed by reflection and intentional planning through the Faculty's [Individualized Development Plan \(IDP\)](#). The GPPS program is divided into six areas to connect students to opportunities and resources that will help them develop and meet professional plans and goals:



In helping your students prepare for their future, supervisors should encourage graduate students to attend the events and programs offered by the [Faculty of Graduate Studies](#) and the [Career Centre](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

The FAQs, while not exhaustive, are organized to reflect the graduate supervision journey, with guidance and links to resources for supervisors.

✘ Getting Started: Deciding to Supervise

Where the relational commitment begins

› Where can I find all things related to graduate supervision?

The York University [Graduate Supervision Toolkit](#) offers comprehensive resources to enhance supervisory pedagogy and guidance through best practices.

› I have been approached to supervise a graduate student. What should I consider?

Graduate supervision and its' related teaching and mentorship require a significant investment of time and effort. Prospective supervisors are invited to consult the guide [Questions to Consider Before Accepting a Graduate Student](#) (pdf).

› I am new to supervision. Is there a checklist of items to discuss with my students?

FGS' [Strong Start to Supervision Checklist](#) (pdf) is designed for supervisors and students to use collaboratively. You may also consider reading the [Golden Rules for Supervision](#) (pdf).

› What are my responsibilities? My student's? The committee members?

Responsibilities are outlined in [York's FGS Supervision Guidelines](#) (pdf) as well as the [Principles for Graduate Supervision at Ontario Universities](#) (pdf).

✘ Supervision Across Modalities and Contexts

Meeting students where they are with intentional care

› I am supervising an international student. Is there guidance?

Yes, read the [Strong Start to Supervision: An International Graduate Student Companion Guide](#) (pdf). The guide, structured around the phases international graduate students navigate, helps build shared awareness of cultural differences and commonalities, fostering more inclusive, effective, and culturally competent supervisory practices.

› What should I consider when providing supervision remotely?

Since the conclusion of the global pandemic, many graduate faculty and students continue to meet for the purposes of graduate supervision, in part, via remote modalities. FGS' [Guidelines for Remote Supervision](#) (pdf) provide supervisors with practice recommendations associated with isolation, structure, boundaries, relationships and careful communication. Meeting with students in person, when possible and when mutually desired, continues to be a best practice.

✘ Ethics and Boundaries

Holding integrity in structure and research

➤ Are there intellectual property considerations in graduate education?

Intellectual property (IP) considerations in graduate studies necessitate early and ongoing conversations between graduate students, their supervisor and the supervisory committee. Supervisors and students are asked to collaboratively review the [IP Checklist for Graduate Students and Supervisors](#) (pdf).

➤ What is my role in student ethics protocol development?

Although your graduate student will have had a research methods-type course, it is crucial for the supervisor to support the development of the student's research proposal and related ethics documents. Read [Guiding the Graduate Students Ethics Process: A Supervisory Checklist](#) (pdf) with your student to discuss all aspects of the responsible conduct of ethical research.

➤ What Conflict of Interest aspects must I consider when planning for comprehensive and oral exams for my students?

In graduate studies, the most important conflict of interest consideration is ensuring examiners are at arm's length from both the supervisor and the student.

✘ Student Wellness, Accommodations and Support

Honouring realities and affirming access

➤ I am concerned about my graduate student's mental health. Is there guidance or support?

The mental health of graduate students is an important consideration of the supervisor. Understanding what is and is not your role, as well as knowing where to turn for support is key. Supervisors can consult the [Supporting Students in Distress: A Response Guide for Graduate Supervisors](#) (pdf).

➤ I want to understand how to accommodate my graduate student. Who do I speak with?

The best place to start is with your student ascertaining whether they have formal accommodations in place with [Student Accessibility Services](#). Then, you can ask your student for permission to discuss with their SAS contact how best to accommodate them for proposals, comprehensives and the oral exam for example. Supervisors can also speak confidentially with the FGS Associate Dean, Student Affairs regarding a duty to accommodate.

✘ Navigating Conflict and Change

When the supervisory relationship requires recalibration

➤ **What if my student wants to change supervisors?**

Sometimes students change their scholarly focus and realize there may be a colleague better suited to guiding their project. Other times, there may be a change in preference or the realization that ‘the fit’ is just not there. For supervisors, it is best to discuss their reasons openly and then assist them to work with the GPD to make this change.

➤ **What happens if there is conflict within the supervisory relationship?**

FGS has procedures in place for [navigating conflict in graduate supervision](#). The [Quick Tips for Difficult Conversations](#) (pdf) may be helpful for you and the student.

➤ **Who do I speak with if there is conflict or role enactment concerns on the supervisory committee?**

The GPD has oversight related to programmatic coherence and rigor, and this includes supervisory appointments and the enactment of supervisory and supervisory committee member roles. While best to discuss concerns directly with the colleague, if that transparent discussion is insufficient, supervisors are asked to consult with the GPD.

✳ **Milestones, Examinations, and Career Support**

Preparing students for defence and life beyond

➤ **How do I prepare my student for oral exam?**

Read [Gearing up for Your Defence](#) (pdf) for students and [Preparing your Graduate Student for Defence](#) (pdf) for supervisors.

➤ **What is my role in assisting my student prepare for a career post-graduation?**

The [Graduate and Postdoctoral Professional Skills](#) (GPPS) program at York offers tools students need to succeed within and beyond the academic world, informed by reflection and intentional planning through the Faculty’s [Individualized Development Plan \(IDP\)](#).

➤ **Are there professional development opportunities for supervisors?**

Yes, starting in the Fall of 2026, the Faculty of Graduate Studies has asynchronous online modules to support the professional development of graduate supervisors.

➤ **I am a seasoned supervisor. How can I best support faculty new to supervision?**

Inviting newly appointed graduate faculty to join relevant supervisory committees is one helpful way. Asking junior colleagues to serve as a committee member with support from an experienced supervisor or establishing co-supervision models where a junior colleague acts as the primary supervisor with behind-the-scenes mentorship are two examples of effective supervisory capacity-building.

In Summary: You've got this!

Once we understand the layered responsibilities and considerations involved in graduate supervision, the role can be seen as both complex and deeply rewarding. Starting slow with intention and seeking out informal mentorship fosters strong practice and supervisory wellbeing. Expecting perfection of oneself or basing one's practice on the limited experience of *being* supervised, can yield less than enjoyable experiences. Once you understand the best practices and golden rules, you can proceed with confidence knowing that your supervisory practice is grounded in solid evidence and research.

The [Canadian Association for Graduate Studies](#)' best practices for graduate supervision sum things up well:

➤ A supervisor should be identified in a timely fashion.	➤ The supervisory committees should be established early.	➤ Expectations, roles and responsibilities of graduate students and supervisors should be made clear.
➤ Supervisors should be readily accessible to students and ensure regular monitoring and feedback.	➤ Student-supervisor relationships should be professional.	➤ Intellectual debate and challenge should be encouraged and supported.
➤ Supervisors should be mentors.	➤ Issues of intellectual property and authorship should be made clear.	➤ Conflicts should be resolved at the lowest level possible.
➤ Continuity is important in graduate supervision—for supervisors and students.	➤ Students have substantial responsibilities for managing their own graduate education.	➤ Alternative supervision should be available.

You've got this! The Faculty of Graduate Studies is here to support you on your journey to the satisfying experiences involved in graduate supervision. [Reach out anytime!](#)

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