

Guide to good supervisory practices for directors, co-directors and thesis supervisors

Purpose of the guide

This guide aims to promote high-quality doctoral supervision, based on scientific rigor, integrity, social responsibility, and a focus on the individual. It serves as a common framework for thesis supervisors, fostering professional development, reflection, and continuous improvement of practices.

1- The role of the thesis supervision

Supervising a thesis involves supporting a scientific project while contributing to the training of an autonomous, responsible and professional doctoral candidate.

Thesis supervisors generally assume the following responsibilities:

- to guarantee the scientific and methodological quality of the work;
- to ensure a clear, safe and respectful working environment;
- to support the development of skills and autonomy of the doctoral student;
- to ensure compliance with institutional, ethical and regulatory rules;
- to promote the success of the doctoral journey and professional integration, academic or non-academic.

Thesis supervision involves ongoing responsibility, from defining the project to post-defense.

2- Co-direction and co-supervision of thesis

Co-direction and co-supervision are increasingly common forms of supervision, which can enrich the doctoral journey through the complementarity of perspectives, provided they are explicitly organized and coordinated.

Thesis supervisors ensure that:

- clarify, from the outset, the respective roles between main management, co-management and possible co-supervision;
- specify the areas of scientific responsibility for each person;
- identify the relevant contacts according to the topics discussed;
- formalize (if necessary) these elements in a shared framework document.

Effective co-management relies on:

- regular coordination between supervisors;
- the consistency of the messages addressed to the doctoral student;
- anticipating and regulating scientific disagreements.

The doctoral student should never be placed in the position of an arbiter between supervisors.

3- Starting the thesis on solid foundations

The first few months of the PhD are crucial for the rest of the process. Thesis supervisors make sure to clarify these points from the outset:

- scientific objectives;
- the expectations regarding production;
- the supervision arrangements (pace, availability, operating rules, etc.) by explicitly specifying the type of supervision it proposes (e.g., more or less directive);

Thesis supervisors ensure the quality of doctoral candidate recruitment, verifying the suitability of the project, the candidate's profile, and the conditions for successful doctoral completion. Particular attention is paid to the recruitment and work arrangements of part-time doctoral candidates.

A clear framework helps to reassure the doctoral student and prevent misunderstandings.

4- Daily management role

Quality supervision relies on a balance between structure, high standards, and trust. Generally speaking, thesis supervision:

- organize regular and planned exchanges;
- provide reasoned, constructive feedback focused on scientific work;
- adapt their level of supervision to the degree of autonomy of the doctoral student;
- establish a relationship based on respect, clarity and gradual progress.

5- Scientific and methodological support

Thesis supervision includes:

- the progressive structuring of the research problem;
- methodological rigor throughout the thesis;
- planning and prioritizing tasks;
- the development of scientific initiative and creativity.

They also ensure that the doctoral student takes ownership of the subject:

- accepting that this appropriation may differ from their own approach;
- by giving real space to the ideas and initiative of the doctoral student;
- by being attentive to the specificities of interdisciplinary theses;
- by considering, where necessary, additional training.

6- Relational and organizational support

In addition to regular scientific supervision, thesis supervisors establish an annual meeting specifically dedicated to the progress of the thesis. This meeting allows for a structured discussion of:

- the organization of work, the conditions for completing the thesis and any necessary adjustments;
- the quality of relationships and the operating procedures;
- the skills developed and those to be strengthened;
- identifying areas for improvement in the coming period.

Thesis supervisors also ensure that:

- regularly discuss the organization of work and deadlines;
- review the deadlines in consultation with the doctoral student;
- encourage the doctoral student to express their difficulties to the thesis supervisor.

The doctoral school office makes available [two annual review grids](#) (box « Links and documents to download »), which the thesis supervisor and the doctoral candidate can, if they wish, complete before the annual follow-up meeting. These grids serve as a basis for dialogue and can be adapted according to the specificities of the scientific field or the conditions under which the thesis is being carried out.

7- Doctoral training and skills development

Doctoral training is a key driver of professional development. Thesis supervision:

- are familiar with training obligations and systems;
- help to build a coherent training path;
- combine scientific, cross-disciplinary and professional training;
- they conduct an annual review dedicated to training courses completed and those planned for the future.

8- Doctoral portfolio and competency-based approach

A doctorate is a journey of skills development that goes beyond mere scientific output. The use of a doctoral portfolio, combined with a competency-based approach, makes these achievements visible and supports the doctoral candidate's reflection.

Thesis supervisors ensure that:

- recognize and legitimize the skills-based approach;
- encourage a reflective approach to the skills developed: scientific; organizational; communicational; ethical and professional; etc.
- use the portfolio as a support for dialogue, particularly during reviews, monitoring committees or post-thesis preparation.

The portfolio is a real tool for showcasing the skills acquired during the doctorate and prepare for further career, particularly in the socio-professional world, by making visible the strengths and expertise developed during the thesis.

9- Internationalization of the doctorate

Internationalization contributes to scientific quality and professional development. Thesis supervisors ensure that:

- encourage international mobility, networks and publications when relevant;
- adapt the level of internationalization to the stage of the thesis and to the situation of the doctoral student;
- maintain active supervision during periods of mobility;

10- Writing scientific articles

Writing articles is a core skill for researchers. Thesis supervision:

- define a progressive and realistic publishing strategy;
- discuss the schedule, the choice of journals and the order of signatures;
- provide educational and structured feedback;
- accompany the management of rejections, revisions and editorial exchanges.

They can also:

- organize or encourage participation in writing workshops or training courses including article revision;
- take the time to explain the corrections during the proofreading;
- warn the doctoral student upstream of the iterative writing process (multiple versions, first version often extensively reworked, etc.).

11- Oral presentation at conferences and scientific communication

Oral presentations at conferences are a key component of the doctoral program. Thesis supervision:

- accompany the choice of congresses and formats;
- help to clarify the central scientific message;
- take an active part in the preparation of oral presentations;
- encourage repetition and reflective feedback after presentations.

12- Writing the thesis manuscript

Writing a thesis is often a sensitive phase. Thesis supervision:

- anticipate the drafting phase as early as possible;
- encourage progressive writing;
- define clear review procedures;
- support the doctoral student during this formative period;
- jointly develop, if necessary, a detailed plan of the manuscript.

13- Prevention of difficulties, fatigue and mental workload

A doctorate exposes one to risks of cognitive and emotional overload. Thesis supervision:

- regularly clarify priorities and expectations;
- help to regulate workload;

- are attentive to signs of fatigue, isolation or discouragement;

They can also:

- ask the doctoral student to identify the main sources of stress;
- reorganize the work or adjust the objectives to limit these sources;
- refer to psychological support services (occupational medicine, student health services, etc.).

14- Ethics and scientific integrity

Thesis supervisors ensure that:

- to transmit the principles of scientific integrity;
- anticipate intellectual property and signature issues;
- to guarantee a respectful, safe and non-discriminatory working environment;
- Encourage doctoral students to take the 2 mandatory MOOCs on these topics from the start of their PhD (first year).

15- Open Science

Thesis supervision:

- inform about the principles and obligations of open science;
- accompany open access to publications;
- govern the management and sharing of data;
- help to arbitrate between openness, protection and enhancement.

16- Environmental transition and research responsibility

Thesis supervision:

- question the environmental impact of research practices;
- encourage restrained methodological and organizational choices;
- integrate these issues into scientific and ethical thinking.

17- CIFRE theses

CIFRE theses require particular attention. Thesis supervisors ensure that:

- to ensure the scientific quality of the doctorate;
- clarify the roles and expectations between academic and non-academic partners;
- to closely coordinate the supervisors;
- anticipate the administrative procedures for contracting and agreements with the relevant departments (ANRT, ED, Research and Development Contract department, etc.);
- anticipate the challenges of confidentiality, publication and workload;
- to secure working time (between each institution) and the doctoral status of the doctoral student.

18- Individual Monitoring Committee

The thesis monitoring committee is a central mechanism for ensuring the success of the doctoral program. Thesis supervisors:

- recognize the CSI as a support tool;
- contribute to its preparation and smooth running;
- respect its independence;
- take into account the recommendations made.

19- Preparation for professional integration (academic and non-academic)

Thesis supervision:

- from the very beginning of their doctoral studies, they address the question of what happens after the doctorate;
- encourage the development of an explicit career plan;
- value all possible trajectories;
- accompany both academic and non-academic pathways;
- directing them towards the appropriate systems, networks and contacts.
- integrate the portfolio as a tool for showcasing the skills developed during the doctorate and for preparing for further career advancement.

20. Preparation and support for the thesis defense

Thesis supervision:

- anticipate the different stages of the defense and ensure compliance with scientific, regulatory and administrative requirements;
- accompany the finalization of the manuscript and the preparation of the oral presentation;
- prepare the doctoral student for exchanges with the jury and for the discussion of the results, limitations and research perspectives;
- ensure that the defense allows the work carried out and the skills developed during the doctorate to be valued;
- they place the defense within a broader reflection on the valorization of research results and the continuation of the professional career.

Conclusion

Supervising or co-supervising a thesis means committing to a demanding, responsible and collaborative process, in service of:

- of the doctoral student,
- of scientific quality,
- the mission of research in society
- and the professional integration of the doctoral student.