
Supervision statement: master and PhD projects

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The purpose of this document is to briefly outline how I approach supervision of master's and PhD thesis projects, including what you can expect from me as a supervisor and what I expect from you as a thesis student. My approach is based on supervision of more than 20 master's thesis project and 10 PhD projects.

I supervise master's and PhD project that are linked to my research field (in a broad interpretation). The specific focus of your project can be one that I propose, one that you propose - or a combination. It is important (e.g., for motivation) that we identify a thesis topic that matches your skills and interest. Furthermore, I expect you to take ownership of the project, i.e., act as project leader and be heading the project. In that respect, my role as a supervisor should be viewed more as that of a consultant (primarily master's projects). If you are a PhD student, we will most likely be doing joint research work. In this case, we become more of research co-workers, but the thesis project itself still remains your responsibility.

At the beginning of the project, we schedule a fixed one hour weekly/biweekly meeting which takes place in my office. At the end of each meeting, we will decide what the focus of the next meeting should be. In addition to this, you may contact me on demand via email. For PhD students, we will typically schedule additional meetings on demand, in order to discuss more specific, technical elements of your work. I strongly recommended you to take notes during the meetings and review these after the meeting. If you expect me to read documents prior to a meeting, then I must receive these two days in advance (by email and in PDF format).

The first document/product you are to produce is a thesis proposal. The thesis proposal is a document of typically 5-10 pages that provides a brief introduction to the topical field of your thesis, an initial presentation of the research question(s) that you intend to address, methods to be used, an initial literature list, a synopsis for the final thesis (master projects)/list of potential research papers (PhD project), and a work plan for the entire project period. The work plan must include a specification of when you plan to write the individual chapters/papers, and ensure that you write the chapters/papers from very early on in the project (in parallel with the technical work of your thesis). The thesis proposal is the result of a sequence of initial meetings, where we brainstorm on the content and the specific focus of your thesis work. The thesis proposal serves as an important instrument in ensuring focus and progress in the project – and we will revise the work plan as the project progresses to monitor progress. Usually, you will be making 2-3 iterations/revisions on the thesis proposal based on our initial discussions. I will provide you with examples of thesis proposals that you can use for inspiration when writing your thesis proposal. In addition, I will provide you with examples of earlier theses so that you get a concrete feeling for what is expected in a thesis.

My supervision consists of three main elements: feedback on chapters/papers that you have written, technical supervision, and general supervision concerning the process of thesis writing (e.g., to avoid common pitfalls). I typically read 2-3 versions of each chapter of your thesis, and provide you with detailed feedback. The first version of a chapter will usually be an early draft. I will also be reading the entire final draft of your thesis. I expect you to carefully take into account the comments I provide when you revise your text, and I expect you to learn from your “mistakes”. I comment on the English writing, presentation, technical content, and organization. Do not panic if you get back text full of red marks – use it constructively.

Keep in mind that ultimately the external examiner of your thesis will be reading only what you have written in your thesis (and may not be a domain expert). Hence, the importance of the quality of your writing cannot be overestimated and this is why the thesis supervision will be very document-driven. Most student struggle with the writing – but you can only overcome this by actually start writing and acknowledging the fact that good writing requires multiple iterations on the text. If you are a PhD student, we may be writing joint research papers. In this case, I will also be contributing the actual writing of the paper (to justify co-authorship).