Individual strategies for research supervision

Below are some strategies experienced supervisors report using with their students.

Ask me a question every week

“...try to get my students to initiate; I tell them ‘if I don’t see you I am going to fill my time up. I’m going to forget about you’, so I want you to ask me one question that will tie me back into the project once a week.” (Lee, 2008).

Structuring writing feedback (adaptable to hard copy or audio exchange)

Kumar & Stracke (2006) suggest that while students might view feedback as 'error correction' supervisors generally see it as a teaching/learning process, hence supervisors can encourage students to view feedback in this more active and positive way by attending to whether the feedback is:

- Referential (i.e. editorial, organisational and content comments)
- Directive (i.e. suggestions for change, questions regarding change and then instructions for change)
- Expressive (i.e. praise, criticism and opinion)

Further, to facilitate this kind of analysis, ask students to email their writing (e.g. a draft chapter, review of an article, summary of a seminar, etc.) a week before the meeting when you will discuss it. Use word-processing editing tools to insert written or audio comments and return to the student a few days before the meeting, asking the student to read over the comments and be prepared to address them (including discussing contrasting points of view).

What did we decide? Tracking decisions and actions

In order to avoid misunderstandings and ensure clarity at meetings with researchers, provide, or ask the student to provide, within a few days of any meeting, a brief description of what was discussed, what was decided and what actions each individual is to take (see the downloadable Meeting Summary Template (on the Improving your supervisory practice page at http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/supervisor/improving). If anything has been overlooked or misinterpreted, it can be clarified quickly. This also provides an ongoing record when one wants to review progress or make formal reports.

See also:

