

The PhD Journey – How to Identify a Fantastic Supervisor

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Entering graduate school to complete a doctorate degree is one of the most important decisions in an academic's research career. This decision requires a logical evaluation of one's long-term career path. Before beginning a PhD course, some key aspects should be decided:

- 1) Choosing your niche of interest
- 2) Selecting an excellent supervisor

It is certainly easier to pursue your career when you [identify a research problem](#) that interests you. In addition, having shared interests with your mentor/supervisor will help build working relationships. It is wise to outline your interests first and then align it with those whose ideals reflect yours. There are [plenty of examples in academia](#) where the

working relationship has suffered due to poor mentorship. Furthermore, in academia, poor mentorship is the unfortunate norm and not the exception, although academics are now actively raising awareness publicly. We have addressed some of these concepts previously that include –

1. Dealing with a bad [student-advisor relationship](#)
2. Managing [work relationships with an advisor](#)
3. Dealing with [unfair authorship claims](#)
4. Obtaining [academic support](#) for researchers

In this article, we outline a guide to selecting a good PhD supervisor – perhaps even a fantastic one.

Selection Criteria

In a recent review, researchers tapped their own experience on [how to approach a supervisor](#) for research opportunities. It is important to acknowledge your [research plan](#), capacity for independent funds, and the type of supervision you seek. A supervisor will take on a variety of different roles (mentor, adviser, editor, and boss) in a 3-4 year PhD course. However, their [primary task](#) remains to provide you with resources and a sound research platform to advance your career.

Lab Rotations

Organize to meet your supervisor in person. This could be a primary visit to discuss the research potential or an expansive visit that includes visiting their research facility. Supervision is a partnership; learn and be willing to be guided constructively. There are [some dos and don'ts](#) that may assist you in the process right from the beginning of your PhD to thesis submission.

Healthy Work Partnership

Maintain continued interests in the research area. Furthermore, always maintain brief and productive communication as finding a supervisor is a personal choice. Maintain professional courtesy, while [creating a healthy work partnership](#). A strong work relationship is mutual, always be mindful of what you contribute and receive in return.

Discussions with Present and Previous Lab Members

It is perhaps **most vital**, to ensure that a supervisor of interest has a good background both [professionally and personally](#). Existing problems in academia arise mostly due to personal conflicts, rather than professional differences. If research on your potential employer's background results in allegations, restart your search.

Ideal Supervision

The concept of an ideal supervisor varies across academic disciplines and can be a personal viewpoint as well. The University of Calgary has an entire [e-book](#) published on this subject. Although the search for an ideal supervisor is tedious; a few [databases](#) offer options to delineate the process. A reasonable research supervisor must:

- Mentor graduate students,
- Train students in research and
- Train students in writing publications/grants.

Lab Attrition Rates and Lab Placements

Choosing [a research supervisor in the life sciences](#) specifically is a bit more complicated than in other disciplines. Key reasons include funding rates, lab attrition, and ensuring first-author research publications for career advancement. This process can be facilitated by contacting the senior Faculty for general information. Alternately, you can also check your eligibility to receive independent funding as a graduate scholar through an affiliated public University. Once you decide that an individual meets the key criteria in your checklist, consider making a formal application with that fantastic researcher. Good luck.

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