

## Wageningen Graduate Schools “Golden Rules for PhD Supervision”

Wageningen Graduate Schools has adapted the *Golden Rules for PhD Supervision* from Leiden University to suit the specific needs of the PhD programme at Wageningen University.

### *Why the Golden Rules?*

Responsible supervision underpins responsible research. The quality of supervision is a key determinant of the success of PhD trajectories.

In 2018/2019, a Leiden University project group developed the Golden Rules for PhD Supervision. The rules emerged from extensive discussions with stakeholders, which revealed that the absence of a clear job description for PhD supervisors makes it difficult to understand what is required and expected of everyone involved. The aim was to create a concise document that increases transparency for both sides, enabling supervisors to focus on their responsibilities while encouraging PhD candidates to take initiative and seek the support they need.

The Golden Rules offer guidance for building a productive working relationship between supervisors and PhD candidates. They describe what Wageningen Graduate Schools expects from both supervisors and PhD candidates, emphasising that the working relationship is a shared responsibility. Open and regular communication, clear expectations, and giving and receiving feedback are key in this two-way process. Successful supervision depends on mutual respect, appropriate attitudes, and constructive behaviour from everyone involved. With these guidelines, Wageningen Graduate Schools aims to foster professional, respectful and collaborative relationships between supervisors and PhD candidates.

### 1. EYES ON THE CLOCK

Supervisors	PhD candidate
Create a <i>realistic and doable</i> plan <i>within the allotted time period</i> , balancing the research work, including time to redo failed experiments, writing, and training & development. Also, ensure time is reserved for reflection and synthesis.	Balance your ambitions and the available time period, including time for setbacks, a healthy work-life balance, and holidays in the planning.
Jointly set short-term, longer-term and end goals, including indicators and milestones, to be able to discuss progress.	Keep track of how you spend your time and take the initiative to discuss delays and adaptations of the plan with your supervisors.
Jointly develop a strategy or a plan B in case of setbacks and calamities.	Plan meetings and reading time for your supervisors, stick to your deadlines or communicate a change early.
Inform the PhD candidate about your availability (e.g. holidays, sabbaticals, intense teaching periods).	Inform your supervisors about your holiday and course planning, and about sick leave and personal situations which can cause delays.
Check in frequently, do not skip regular meetings with the PhD candidate, avoid long periods with no contact, and avoid responding slowly.	Check in frequently, actively approach your supervisors and talk about failures and setbacks immediately.
Plan the dates of the go/no-go evaluation and the annual Progress & Development meetings.	Remind your supervisor that you are interested in having annual Progress & Development meetings if these are not being planned.

### 2. TRANSPARENCY ABOUT EXPECTATIONS

Supervisors	PhD candidate
Regularly discuss your mutual expectations using the WGS worksheet " <a href="#">conversation about expectations</a> " and make clear agreements.	Regularly discuss your mutual expectations using the " <a href="#">conversation about expectations</a> " and make clear agreements.
Discuss your style of supervising and cultural differences, if applicable.	Be open about your wishes and needs for the process and the collaboration.
Be open about the limits of your expertise and the involvement of others.	Discuss the available network of experts, also outside the supervisory team.
Be clear about your expectations for a go decision and explain the procedure towards this decision.	Discuss and agree on how you organise meetings and feedback.
Discuss the expected thesis format; see the <a href="#">guidelines</a> for thesis requirements. Discuss quality criteria and the Academic Board's <a href="#">rubric</a> for the final evaluation of the thesis.	Be firm about your ideas regarding your thesis, and check with your supervisors whether you have the same expectations.
Discuss research integrity, publication ethics and co-authorship. See the <a href="#">Code of Conduct</a> , the <a href="#">Integrity policy WUR</a> , and the <a href="#">authorship guidelines</a> . Discuss applying for ethical approval if needed.	Put agreements regarding co-authorships and involvement of others on paper, and seek ethical clearance from the relevant ethical committee, if applicable.
Keep track of and discuss progress.	Keep track of, and be honest about progress.
Discuss involvement in teaching & supervision and the PhD candidate's learning objectives, given the <a href="#">WUR teaching rules</a> .	Discuss involvement in teaching & supervision, and your learning objectives, given the <a href="#">WUR teaching rules</a> .

### 3. PROFESSIONALISM IN COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIOUR

Supervisors	PhD candidate
Act with responsibility and commitment. There is a mutual dependency between you and the PhD candidate. Use your position and legitimacy in a way that makes the collaboration open, pleasant and fruitful.	Be active and open. Act with responsibility and commitment
Inform yourself about the <a href="#">doctoral degree regulations</a> , the <a href="#">authorship guidelines</a> , and the <a href="#">integrity policy</a> .	Inform yourself about the <a href="#">doctoral degree regulations</a> , the <a href="#">authorship guidelines</a> , and the <a href="#">integrity policy</a> .

Be self-reflective and seek advice and support if needed, from colleagues, peers or the graduate school PhD advisor.	Be self-reflective and seek <a href="#">support</a> if needed.
Be an academic role model, give sufficient autonomy and trust the PhD candidate.	Live up to your deadlines and agreements, learn how to deal with critical comments, be a pleasant colleague, help others, and speak up when necessary.
Set realistic requirements and remember what you say or advise (or put it on paper).	Prepare your meetings, set the agenda, make notes, put agreements on paper and send them to your supervisors.
Provide a safe environment: get to know the PhD candidate, be socially attentive, and stimulate. Be available in person and by email.	Get to know your supervisors and be available.
Be willing to give and receive feedback.	Be willing to give and receive feedback.
Be responsible for good teamwork. Do not involve the PhD candidate in personal battles with other supervisors or scientists.	Be responsible for good teamwork.
Jointly celebrate successes.	Jointly celebrate successes.

#### 4. LEARNING TRAJECTORY

Supervisors	PhD candidate
The PhD trajectory is a learning trajectory towards an academic degree. But as a supervisor, you also learn: it is a mutual learning process. Make sure the scientific output is not solely dependent on a successful PhD trajectory.	Actively take charge of your own learning process; think about what you need in terms of new experiences, knowledge and skills, and how you will acquire them. You have the freedom to choose courses for your TSP.
Discuss academic freedom. PhD candidates need a certain degree of freedom to develop the project into their own unique way, within certain boundaries. A PhD candidate is not an executive junior researcher following your orders (you'd better then hire a junior researcher).	You are entitled to the academic space to develop your own unique expertise within the aims of the project. Your major task is to do PhD research. Discuss your supervisors' responsibilities towards the project and the boundaries of your academic freedom with your supervisors.
Open your network for the PhD candidate.	Work on your network. Make use of the networks of your supervisors and chair group to meet other experts and present your work to the outside world.
Make use of the TSP: a useful tool to talk about expectations, keep track of the progress, evaluate learning and development, and discuss the career plan after the PhD.	Regularly discuss the adaptations of your TSP, you have the freedom to also choose courses to widen your knowledge or in light of your future career.

#### 5. STRESSORS and MOTIVATORS

Supervisor	PhD candidate
Be aware that you are a role model and that your work attitude may be seen as a professional standard for the PhD candidates in your group.	Expect good supervision; your supervisors' overly busy work schedules cannot be an excuse for insufficient supervision.
PhD candidates should not become the victim of your own stressors: discuss these with your own manager and solve them.	Be open to your supervisors about your worries and insecurities, talk to peers or your graduate school's PhD advisor. Discuss what makes you thrive and gets you inspired.
Inform the PhD candidate about their rights (HR regulations) and available help and support. You are the first contact, not a social worker or therapist. Refer the PhD candidate to the available <a href="#">support</a> structure if needed.	Inform your supervisors about any personal issues that may affect your PhD project, and contact the PhD advisor or others in the <a href="#">support</a> structure if necessary.
If you ask the PhD candidate to perform tasks outside the PhD project, discuss the consequences and be sure that you give them the space to say no.	Allow yourself the space to say no to requests for extra activities that have no relation to your PhD research (e.g. extra teaching, deliverables).