

Supervision: Strategies for Artistic Research Students

Supervision Models

Supervision is at the core of any doctoral journey. Often, this will be the first time the student and the supervisor work together. The following is a summary and a reflection on the Supervision Seminar delivered by Michaela Glanz, who is leading the project [Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates](#). Glanz points out key issues to consider:

- **Who are your supervisors?** Consider what their background and activity is: are they artists, humanities scholars, artistic researchers, theorists? Their research background influences their approach to your project and impacts what kinds of support you might expect from them. You may now want to think: do I need a supervisor with a distinct background? It may be possible to bring a new member to the team from another university for example.
- **What is the supervision model at your institution?**
 - *One-to-one* – a common model which may not be suitable for interdisciplinary projects.
 - *Supervisor / co-supervisor* – the main supervisor takes responsibility for the research; the co-supervisor supports the student often in a particular area of expertise. You will likely meet individually, with one or two team meetings a year.
 - *Team supervision* – supervision and meetings take place as a team effort.

These models are not prescriptive. Often due to agendas, time constraints and personal preferences the process may follow alternative formats.
- **What kinds of support will enable me to develop the project?** Considering your institution's supervision arrangements, define what you require as a candidate, and what you can expect from the institution. Distinct projects will have different needs, and a suitable approach may vary throughout the course of your studies. Consider what kinds of hybridity your project requires. You can then work with your institution and supervisory team to adapt existing arrangements to your project needs.

The *Visioning the Future* seminar 'Supervising Artistic Research PhDs. Guest Speaker: Michaela Glanz' expands on this fully:

[Supervising Artistic Research PhDs. Guest Speaker: Michaela Glanz](#)

I'm really lucky, I have two supervisors, one is academic, and one is artistic. My artistic supervisor is very much the sky is the limit, do as much as you can, here is all these crazy ideas. And my academic supervisor is very much like, now there are the rules and regulations. And make sure you do this and this, very organised. (...) So having that kind of both sides they kind of guided me through the process of what to do. But they didn't really tell me how to do it. They just facilitated it. They listened to my problems and then made some suggestions on things I could try. (PhD student, 2020)

Principles for Successful Supervision

The supervisor [must be] first and foremost an expert on supervision who is aware of the difficulties of the process. (Andrea B. Braidt, Pedagogies and Strategies of Artistic Doctorates in Film, Visioning the Future Seminar, 2020)

- **Define the terms of your working relationship.** Agree on how you can best work together: when and how you meet, how you contact each other; how, when and how often materials are submitted and feedback is expected, what kinds of feedback, etc. See the *Supervision Agreement* (further down) for more detail. This is important to clarify expectations for both parties.
- **Manage the relationship.** Like any other human relationship, this one also needs to be managed. Check in regularly, be pro-active, be mindful of your communication and ask for clarification when you need it.
- **Information is power.** Know the regulations, protocols and requirements in your programme. Most courses have an Annual Review, which might include presentations, progress report, a chapter, a performance / screening / exhibition, or other submission materials. Find out what you need to deliver by which date and include these on your working schedule. Check in with your supervisor with any questions well in advance.

- **Take ownership of the process.** As a research student, you are working towards developing your research autonomy. Discuss an overall plan for the project with your supervisor, and then be pro-active in setting up well spaced supervision meetings with clear agendas. At the end of each meeting, review what you agreed regarding next steps, and schedule the next session. This will create a commitment in everyone's diaries, give structure to your time, and a deadline to work towards.
- **Prepare.** To take the most out of each supervision meeting, prepare an agenda with the topics you are concerned with, need clarification on and wish to discuss including any questions you have.
- **Document.** After each meeting, write down what you discussed, what you agreed on, and what the next steps are. Make this useful and rich, you will most likely come back to these notes. Take time to reflect. A lot of thinking happens during supervision, and some ideas might need digesting or rethinking. In some institutions it is a requirement to document each supervisory meeting on a form which is then submitted.
- **Act.** Reviewing your notes from the meeting, make a plan for what you need to do next. You can use your supervision notes as anchor points in your progress.
- **Think of the project as a whole.** There may be moments when you focus on the research question, the methodology, a chapter, a film, a performance, a creative process. They are all interlinked strands of a larger picture, and throughout your doctoral journey you will be zooming in and out of the various elements of your project. Keep track of how they relate to the overall research.
- **Involve your practice.** Make space in the supervision process for your artistic practice. For example: invite your supervisor(s) to attend the last part of a rehearsal and show them what you are working on; set up work on a wall/table to see and discuss; project video work or video documentation of work in progress; perform; have a studio visit. The shape of this will be determined by your practice. Will your supervisor see, experience, do? Think about the kinds of feedback you need and set up productive ways for you to involve your supervisor(s) to get that feedback – as an audience member or workshop participant for example.

Proposals for Action: Supervision Agreement

A supervision agreement is most relevant at the beginning of the doctoral journey but equally helpful along the way. Both candidate and supervisor can reflect on the following points and agree together how they would like to proceed. You can adapt this template to create your own agreement appropriate to your needs. Check each bullet point and decide what is appropriate for your circumstances. Keep a written record: this can be an informal email stating what you agreed, or a record of minutes which you share. Treat it as an organic process which may evolve as things progress.

Working together

The candidate should take responsibility for the research and instigate meetings, and the supervisor should ensure that they take place regularly. Agree on the following:

- The best way to communicate and if there are particular days/times that you are not usually available.
- How regularly will you be meeting, where, and for how long.
- If you have preferences for meeting days/times.
- When should materials be submitted, in what formats, and when feedback is to be expected.
- What kinds of feedback to expect / would be useful for you. What do you feel you need most support with?

After each meeting, it is good practice to summarise the discussion, decisions made, and the next steps. This allows you to digest the discussion and plan your work. The supervisor is also able to check the summary to ensure no misunderstandings took place. Some institutions have a 'supervision record form' for accountability and to record student progress. If your institution does not have one, create one for yourself and email it to your supervisor after each meeting.

Ensuring progress

Agree with your supervisor an outline schedule for your doctoral degree. See [Road Mapping](#) for help with this. Having an overall idea of how the work progresses and what the next steps are is helpful to provide direction and evaluate progress. review and update your plan once a year with your supervisory team.

Expectations

Clarifying expectations is essential to ensure a good working relationship. The supervisor responsibilities are often described in the course regulations, which gives students a sense of what to expect from their supervisor. Discuss:

- **Candidates:** what specifically do you need support with, and how can your supervisor provide that support?
- **Supervisors:** what do you expect of your doctoral candidate in terms of behaviours, attributes and skills, and how can you support them to develop those they identify as more challenging?

Developing Practice

- When might it be appropriate to meet in the studio / rehearsal space / projection room to experience practice, to see work- in-progress? Build those moments into the process.
- Consider alternative modes of supervision. For example, do you want to invite your supervisory team and a critical friend to a sketch of a performance?

In this [excerpt](#) of the *Visioning the Future* seminar *Supervising Artistic Research PhDs*, Michaela Glanz discusses the supervision agreement.

Resources

- The [Advancing Supervision Mind Map](#) is a tool for both supervisors and candidates to gain a better understanding of what supervision is and the types of processes that it can involve. Explore the tool to clarify what it means to supervise in your context.
- Erasmus+ Project [Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates](#).
- [Artistic Doctorates in Europe](#), led by Vida Midgell has several resources on Artistic Research in performance and movement contexts, which are applicable to other Artistic Research domains. Some resources explore alternative modes of supervision, such as [Reconsidering Research and Supervision as Creative Embodied Practice](#).
- The chapter ‘Choosing Your Supervisor(s)’ in *The Postgraduate Research Handbook* by Gina Wisker (2001, 2008) outlines key points on what to expect from the supervisor and how to make the most of the relationship. This general text for all disciplines provides clear guidance on expectations and duties of both supervisor and candidate. Other generic texts offering insights on the doctoral journey include *Planning your PhD* (2010) and *Completing your PhD* (2011).