

Providing feedback during the writing process

We see the writing of an article as a series of complex tasks. It can best be approached in stages, and the supervisor can be most effective by providing feedback in various rounds. The supervision process follows the logical development of the work on the article: from finding a suitable magazine and establishing the goal of the publication to the rough draft of the discourse, to the specification of paragraphs, to style, language use and spelling. This checklist presumes that the PhD student first writes sections of the article and discusses them with the supervisor, after which the entire article gets written. The various rounds, as described below, discuss the feedback to the entire article. Preceding these rounds, the intention of the article and the supervision of said article should be discussed in an initial meeting.

This method of supervision has several advantages for PhD student and supervisor: it is clear for both parties when, at what stage and how each part will be discussed. For the PhD student it helps to lower the first hurdle in writing the article, as it is clear that the first stage does not require a perfectly written piece yet. It also helps the supervisor not waste time correcting language and style mistakes at an early stage but to save that for later, so that the pieces can be read in a more global fashion in the first rounds. A last benefit is that the article does not need to be read and discussed in its entirety so often that the enthusiasm of both parties.

1st meeting

At the first meeting the supervisor and PhD student jointly decide what the core message of the article will be and what type of article it will be (eg, a discussion of existing literature in the research field (review), a report of one or more experiments, a book review). They discuss which magazine the article will be written for and which requirements it needs to meet.

Besides matters concerning content, they also discuss the method the PhD student plans to use in writing the article (the sequence of sections for example), what aspects the PhD student expects to find difficult and in what way the supervisor is going to assist; one can think of the frequency of meetings, a regular date in the calendar or making an appointment when a certain section is finished, but also of the type of feedback the supervisor will provide in various stages. It is recommended that for each submitted section, the PhD student indicates which aspects he or she would appreciate feedback on, but also to indicate what type of supervision/assistance and feedback the PhD student may expect. The possibility of the PhD student taking a writing course may also be discussed.

Checklist for feedback during the writing process

1st Feedback round

Preparation

First page through the article without reading it. Pay attention to the structure, look at the contents and argumentation and then answer the other questions. Decide if the PhD student would possibly benefit from (additional) writing training or coaching.

Checklist

Structure:

- Are all parts present?
- How is the balance between the various parts?
- Are the number of headings, tables, graphs, lists and other structural elements appropriate?

Argument

- Is there a clear formulation of the research problem?
- Are the questions well detailed?
- Is the research problem sufficiently and clearly answered in the conclusion?
- Does the discussion contain sufficient reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the own research?
- Is the argumentation adequate and clear?

Other

- Have sufficient and relevant sources been referenced?
- Is the proportion of own work to other people's work appropriate?
- To what extent does the provisional article meet the desired publication's requirements?

Discussion

During your meeting, ask after any problems the PhD student came across during writing. Talk about possible solutions for these problems, the supervisor should let the PhD student suggest possible solutions without making any suggestions. Make precise agreements about what exactly has to be improved, elaborated or cut before the next meeting. The PhD student should indicate clearly in the second version where improvements have been made.

2nd feedback round

When the work is delivered, ask if the agreed changes have been made; discuss beforehand why or why not. Also discuss any new problems that have come up. If the changes have not been made, it is better to reschedule the appointment.

Preparation

Read the article and this time pay attention to completeness and logic. Particularly the improvements need to be looked at critically. It is important that the article is not edited at this stage either; only mark critical errors in spelling or style. Use the checklist from stage 1 again, supplemented with the questions below:

- Is each paragraph complete?
- Do the pieces of text follow each other logically? (Does each paragraph build on the previous one?)
- Are the texts unambiguous?
- Is the article too long?
- Are the paragraphs too long?
- Are there enough linking sentences and words that facilitate the transition between paragraphs?
- Is the PhD student using short and pithy arguments?
- Are enough arguments being presented to be able to follow the reasoning?
- Is the essence of each paragraph captured at the beginning or end of the paragraph?
- Are there enough sub headings to make the text easy to review?

Provide an example of a piece that has been successful in your opinion, or alternatively rewrite an example paragraph and use it to show which changes you want to see applied in the rest of the text.

3rd feedback round

Read the entire article carefully and this time pay special attention to style and writing.

- Does the article have a clear and appealing title?
- Are the paragraphs correctly titled?
- Are the paragraphs introduced appropriately?
- Is the article enjoyable to read?
- Is the article too long?
- Is there enough variation in sentence length?
- Are there certain words that are used too often?
- Is the right terminology and register being used?
- Are the tables and graphs tidy?
- Is the literature list correct? Evaluation Supervising PhD Students