



Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Framework for Supervision Letters of Understanding¹

The primary goal of a PhD is for the student to become an independent researcher; as such, the supervisory relationship will change over time.

Setting out mutual expectations between a supervisor and supervisee, and revisiting those regularly (e.g., annually), is essential to ensuring the success of a graduate student.

CHOICE OF WORDS

It is important to be intentional about your choice of words in the letter: A letter of understanding is not a contract or an agreement, but rather a tool to facilitate a shared understanding of both the supervisor and supervisee’s expectations.

Language to use	Language NOT to use
We/ I expect	We/ I agree
We/ I understand	
Letter of Understanding	Letter of Agreement Contract

CONTENT

According to the [Policies and Guidelines on Student Advising and Supervision](#), supervisors should:

- uphold and transmit the highest professional standards of research and scholarship
- provide guidance in all phases of the student’s research
- meet with their students regularly
- provide prompt feedback when work is submitted, including drafts of the thesis, and
- clarify expectations regarding collaborative work, authorship, publication and conference presentations.

And supervisees should:

- inform themselves of program requirements and deadlines
- work within these deadlines
- communicate regularly with the supervisor and committee, and
- submit annual progress reports to the supervisor and committee.

With the above responsibilities in mind, the following are examples of topics that can be included in your letter of understanding, as relevant to the program and discipline.

1. Supervisory meetings (e.g., how often)
2. Communication between meetings (e.g., email; frequency)

¹ This framework is meant to guide the development of individualized letters of understanding.



3. Feedback expectations (e.g., how often; turnaround times)
4. Expectations for written work (e.g., submitting chunks or large sections; submitted electronically)
5. Student funding
6. Teaching/ Teaching Assistant responsibilities
7. Research responsibilities (e.g., hours in lab; lab etiquette; safety training)
8. Publication and intellectual property
9. Authorship policies
10. Professional development (e.g., conferences; writing courses; workshops)

The letter must be dated and signed by all parties (e.g., supervisor, co-supervisor, committee member, and supervisee). It should be revisited every 12 months or as needed, as it is expected that the supervisory relationship changes as the student progress towards the degree.