

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**  
GRADUATE WRITING CENTER



# **QUESTIONS TO OPTIMIZE THESIS ADVISING**

**A WORKBOOK FOR  
THESIS ADVISORS & STUDENTS**



## USING THIS WORKBOOK



### Who Can Use This Workbook?

This workbook was designed for flexible use by both students and faculty. Students and advisors can use some or all of the worksheets during a conversation to set expectations, or they can share their questions and answers by exchanging the document electronically.

Students or advisors might also use the workbook on their own to help clarify questions they wish to ask or information they wish to share as they begin their advising relationship.

### How To Use This Workbook

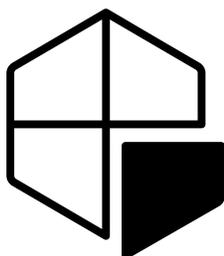
When shared by students and advisors, the workbook is best used at the beginning of the advising relationship while setting expectations to help all parties get on the same page.



The design supports adaptable use. While users may want to ask and answer all of the questions, they may alternatively select only those questions they find particularly helpful. The checkboxes next to each question may be used to select a subset of questions to share.

The fields at the top of each page can also facilitate the circulation of the document to multiple members of a writing and advising team.

### What Does this Workbook Include?



The workbook is divided into several themes. Within each theme, questions are targeted at **students**, **advisors**, or both. The themes are:

- Strengths and Challenges
- Personal Factors
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Feedback

To view all the themes and questions on one page, see **Questions at a Glance** on the next page.

# OPTIMIZE YOUR ADVISING RELATIONSHIP

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT: \_\_\_\_\_  ADVISOR:  CO-ADVISOR:  2ND READER:

## QUESTIONS AT A GLANCE

### STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

<b>For Student</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your strengths as a researcher and writer?</li> <li>• What challenges do you expect to face as a researcher and writer?</li> <li>• At what stages do you think you'll need the most support? The least?</li> </ul>
<b>For Advisors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your strengths as an advisor?</li> <li>• What challenges do you see most often with your thesis students?</li> </ul>

### PERSONAL FACTORS

<b>For Student</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your primary goals and motivations for your thesis?</li> <li>• Do you tend to procrastinate? If so, why?</li> <li>• Are there any personal factors that may affect your thesis work?</li> </ul>
<b>For Advisors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you find most rewarding about advising theses?</li> <li>• What other obligations do you expect will affect your advising on this thesis?</li> </ul>

### COMMUNICATION

<b>For Student</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do firm deadlines help you?</li> <li>• (<i>for both</i>) What communication formats and technologies work best for you?</li> </ul>
<b>For Advisors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideally, how frequently will you meet?</li> <li>• How will you respond if a student does not communicate for a while?</li> <li>• Do you want regular status updates from your student? If so, how often?</li> <li>• If a student hasn't heard from you in a while, how should they respond?</li> </ul>

### COLLABORATION

<b>For Student</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much autonomy do you prefer?</li> <li>• How assertive are you in requesting help?</li> <li>• Do you plan to use the Graduate Writing Center (GWC)? If so, how?</li> </ul>
<b>For Advisors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How involved do you tend to be as an advisor?</li> <li>• What roles and responsibilities apply to advisor and second reader, or co-advisors?</li> <li>• Who do you recommend students approach for additional thesis support?</li> </ul>

### FEEDBACK

<b>For Student</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type and style of feedback works best for you?</li> <li>• What feedback format is most helpful for you?</li> </ul>
<b>For Advisors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What feedback format(s) do you use and prefer?</li> <li>• At what stages of thesis development do you prefer to review chapter drafts?</li> <li>• How many times do you expect to review each chapter?</li> <li>• What kind of turn-around time can your student rely on for your feedback?</li> </ul>



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## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES



Question for the **student**: What are your strengths as a researcher and writer?

### Example answers:

- I'm a strong writer.
- I'm a skilled problem solver.
- I have valuable research experience under my belt.
- I work steadily on complex projects.
- I have excellent organization and follow-through skills.

### Your answers:



Question for the **student**: What challenges do you expect to face as a researcher and writer?

### Example answers:

- I lack skills or knowledge that I know I'll need.
- I feel uncertain about methods, theories, and doing research in my field.
- I think it will be challenging to execute this kind of project in so little time.
- I struggle with aspects of writing.
- Academia has different expectations than those I have faced in professional roles.

### Your answers:



Question for the **student**: At what stages do you think you'll need the most support? The least?

### Example answers:

- I need help to get started, frame the project, and make a plan.
- I have the vision, and the plan! But I'll need support to communicate effectively.
- I know thesis research can sometimes encounter roadblocks—I'll want guidance if that happens.

### Your answers:



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## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Question for the **advisor**: What are your strengths as an advisor?

### Example answers:

- I give detailed, regular input and feedback.
- I help students get and stay organized.
- I direct students to resources they need.
- I set students up for success by emphasizing good planning at the proposal stage.
- I proofread and copyedit.

### Your answers:

Question for the **advisor**: What challenges do you see most often with your thesis students?

### Example answers:

- Students don't ask for help early enough.
- Students misinterpret my feedback.
- Funding and resources may be late in coming.
- Students underestimate the time needed for drafting, revising, and polishing.
- Some students can't invest the time needed.

### Your answers:



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## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES



For **student** and **advisor**:

### STUDENT:

Assess the following challenging aspects of thesis research and writing. Rank each, using 1 where you expect to **need the least support** and 5 where you expect to **need the most support**.

Finding or constructing sound research questions

Least 1 2 3 4 5 Most

Designing research methodology

1 2 3 4 5

Dealing with unexpected challenges (e.g., data is unavailable, interview subject cancels)

1 2 3 4 5

Finding academic and/or technical sources

1 2 3 4 5

Writing a well-organized literature review

1 2 3 4 5

Structuring the thesis (e.g., number of chapters, organization of information within chapters)

1 2 3 4 5

Interpreting and explaining my results and/or findings

1 2 3 4 5

Managing the writing process (e.g., when to write different parts of the thesis, outlining, revising)

1 2 3 4 5

Polishing the final product (e.g., proofreading and copyediting, formatting in the thesis template, correcting citations)

1 2 3 4 5

### ADVISOR:

Assess the following areas of support needed by thesis students. Rank each, using 1 where you generally **provide the least support** and 5 where you tend to **provide the most support**.

Helping students find or construct research questions

Least 1 2 3 4 5 Most

Helping students design research methodology

1 2 3 4 5

Helping students face unexpected challenges (e.g., data is unavailable, interview subject cancels).

1 2 3 4 5

Recommending academic and/or technical source material.

1 2 3 4 5

Providing guidance on writing a well-organized literature review

1 2 3 4 5

Offering input on structuring the thesis (e.g., number of chapters, organization of information within chapters)

1 2 3 4 5

Helping students interpret results and/or findings

1 2 3 4 5

Guiding the writing process (e.g., when to write different parts of the thesis, outlining, revising)

1 2 3 4 5

Polishing the final product (e.g., proofreading and copyediting, formatting in the thesis template, correcting citations)

1 2 3 4 5



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## PERSONAL FACTORS



Question for the **student**: What are your primary goals and motivations for your thesis?

**Example answers:**

- I'm most interested in my development as a person and a professional.
- It is important to me to deliver a high-quality finished product that meets the standards of my academic field.
- I'm most interested in making an impact for the military and/or my professional community.
- I just want to graduate.

**Your answers:**



Question for the **student**: Do you tend to procrastinate? If so, why?

**Example answers:**

- I care so much about this project that sometimes it is paralyzing.
- I really care about the final product, but I can force myself to "let it go" when I need to.
- I can prioritize, and I can work steadily even when I don't feel like it.

**Your answers:**



Question for the **student**: Are there any personal factors that may affect your thesis work?

**Example answers:**

- Medical issues
- New baby or baby on the way
- Illness in the family
- Family challenges
- Workload
- Other career demands

**Your answers:**



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## PERSONAL FACTORS



Question for the **advisor**: What do you find most rewarding about advising theses?

**Example answers:**

- I enjoy discussing ideas that matter deeply.
- I love helping students reach their potential.
- Teaching research methodology is fun and rewarding.
- I am excited by what I can learn from my students.

**Your answers:**



Question for the **advisor**: What other obligations do you expect will affect your advising of this thesis?

**Example answers:**

- I may be travelling frequently. Let's plan around that.
- I'm finishing a book.
- I'll be presenting research at a conference next quarter; it will limit my availability for a time.
- I'll be an advisor on several theses in addition to this one.

**Your answers:**



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## COMMUNICATION



Question for the **student**: Do firm deadlines help you?

**Example answers:**

- Firm, established deadlines motivate me and keep me on track.
- It is good to have a target, but I may need wiggle room.
- Strict deadlines make me panic and procrastinate; I do better with timelines and targets.

**Your answers:**



Question for **student** and **advisor**: What communication formats and technologies work best for you?

**Example answers:**

- Use email to schedule a face-to-face meeting.
- Emails are ideal for updates or feedback; make the Subject Line clear.
- I prefer Zoom to Teams (or vice versa).
- Send me a text or call me.
- Share files with me on SharePoint (or Box, or email, or hard copy under my office door).

**Your answers:**



Question for the **advisor**: Ideally, how frequently will you meet?

**Example answers:**

- My door is open, 24/7.
- Let's set up weekly meetings.
- I'd like to meet once or twice a month.
- Let's plan on a monthly conversation.
- I'm really busy. Email me when you need to meet and we'll set up a time.

**Your answers:**



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## COMMUNICATION



**Question for the **advisor**:** How will you respond if a student does not communicate for a while?

**Example answers:**

- I'll email to check up if I notice they've been out of touch.
- Students are responsible for keeping in touch; if they don't reach out, I don't either.
- I assume no news is good news.
- I am sometimes so busy that I don't notice.

**Your answers:**



**Question for the **advisor**:** Do you want regular status updates from your student? If so, how often?

**Example answers:**

- No need. Reach out when you need to talk.
- Yes, please send me a short email each week.
- Yes, keep me updated in a Teams chat.
- Yes, I need to either meet with you or hear from you via email at least twice a month.

**Your answers:**



**Question for the **advisor**:** If a student hasn't heard from you in a while, how should they respond?

**Example answers:**

- Green light. No news is good news. Keep forging ahead.
- Red light. If you're making big research or writing decisions, I need to review them. Make sure we talk!
- If you haven't heard back from me in 5 days, try again.
- Consider asking your co-advisor or second reader for input.

**Your answers:**



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## COLLABORATION

Question for the **student**: How much autonomy do you prefer?

**Example answers:**

- I prefer working independently and following my instincts, with occasional check-ins.
- I benefit from a balance of guidance and working on my own.
- I welcome as much support and collaboration as you can offer!
- I need plenty of advisor guidance on how things are done in this field.

**Your answers:**

Question for the **student**: How assertive are you in requesting help?

**Example answers:**

- I don't mind being a squeaky wheel. If I need help, you'll know.
- I try to solve problems independently first, but I don't mind asking for support.
- I worry about bothering busy people, so sometimes I don't ask for help when I need it.
- I'd benefit from regularly scheduled check-ins.

**Your answers:**

Question for the **student**: Do you plan to use the GWC? If so, how?

**Example answers:**

- I have a go-to writing coach I plan to work with while I'm writing my thesis.
- I usually just use the GWC for polishing.
- I go to the GWC at multiple stages of the writing process: brainstorming, outlining, and at each phase of revision.
- I don't plan to use the GWC. Should I?

**Your answers:**



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## COLLABORATION



Question for the **advisor**: How involved do you tend to be as an advisor?

### Example answers:

- I'm mostly hands-off, with a few check-ins.
- I adapt based on what the student seems to need—and if students don't communicate, it is hard to for me to know what they need.
- I'm more involved in certain aspects than others.
- I'm very involved and provide lots of oversight and guidance.

### Your answers:



Question for the **advisor**: What roles and responsibilities apply to advisor and second reader, or co-advisors?

### Examples:

- Advisors [and co-advisors] provide guidance on planning, research, and revising.
- Second readers help with finding sources and polishing near-final drafts.
- We have different areas of expertise, so we'll help you with different tasks.
- Advisors/readers review drafts in a set order.
- Advisors review all chapters before second readers review the thesis.

### Your answers:



Question for the **advisor**: Who do you recommend students approach for additional thesis support?

### Example answers:

- IGPO: English language support
- GWC: Coaching and/or workshops
- Librarians
- Peers or recent graduates
- Subject matter experts in the field
- Sponsors
- Freelance editors
- Free editor for international students (TPO)

### Your answers:



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## FEEDBACK



Question for the **student**: What type and style of feedback works best for you?

**Example answers:**

- If possible, focus on content (ideas) first, then address style (language) in a second review.
- I appreciate receiving a summary of needed changes along with more detailed feedback.
- Give me the good news first; feedback that feels harsh can demoralize me.
- Get out your red pen and be as blunt as possible—you can't hurt my feelings!

**Your answers:**



Question for the **student**: What feedback format is most helpful for you?

**Example answers:**

- Written comments are great: I can refer back to them later and take time to think.
- Meeting to discuss feedback helps me think, learn, and clarify what you want.
- A balance of in-person (or live) and written feedback is ideal.

**Your answers:**



Question for the **advisor**: What feedback format(s) do you use and prefer?

**Example answers:**

- Meeting in person (or via video conference) to discuss your early drafts saves us a lot of time and helps you learn.
- Generally, I provide a short email with key feedback in bullet points.
- I provide written marginal comments throughout the draft.

**Your answers:**



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## FEEDBACK



**Question for the advisor:** At what stages of thesis development do you prefer to review chapter drafts?

**Example answers:**

- I want to see and discuss outlines.
- I want to see your drafts before anyone else, including the GWC.
- It's okay if your draft is still pretty rough when I first see it. I want to make sure you're on the right track.
- Don't send me rough drafts; the grammatical errors are distracting.

**Your answers:**



**Question for the advisor:** How many times do you expect to review each chapter?

**Example answers:**

- About two or three times is reasonable.
- As many times as it takes to get it right.
- At least once, and well in advance of the thesis due dates.
- My email inbox is not a revolving door for your thesis chapters. Make each review count.

**Your answers:**



**Question for the advisor:** What kind of turn-around time can your student rely on for your feedback?

**Example answers:**

- It will probably take me a few days.
- You'll get it back within two weeks. Your writing schedule needs to accommodate those two weeks for each chapter.
- It varies. I'll let you know when you can expect feedback and what I recommend you work on while you're waiting.

**Your answers:**

