

# Best Practice in Supervisor Feedback on Student Thesis Writing

Synthesising the work of Lee (2012) with Bitchener, Basturkmen, East and Meyer (2011).

In 'Best Practice in Supervisor Feedback to Thesis Students' data was collected in New Zealand from 35 supervisors and 53 students spread between humanities, sciences and maths and commerce. They issued questionnaires, carried out follow-up interviews and reviewed written scripts. For the original document see

<http://akoatearoa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-1659/best-practice-in-supervisor-feedback-to-thesis-students.pdf>

## WHAT STUDENTS ARE SEEKING

Functional	Enculturation	Critical Thinking	Emancipation	Relationship Development
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Timely and clear feedback.</li> <li>2. Help with structure and organisation.</li> <li>3. Help with grammar, spelling and punctuation.</li> <li>4. Supervisor provides an overview and then more detailed comments on the script.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supervisor to demonstrate genuine interest in their work. Consistent feedback.</li> <li>2. Help with finding literature</li> <li>3. Help with appropriate language eg 'this language is too informal'</li> <li>4. Help with appropriate methodology</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balance critique with constructive comments</li> <li>2. Help with identifying irrelevances or condensing material</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recognise that the work is the student's responsibility</li> <li>2. Make suggestions but don't be too directive</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A partnership of equals, not a manager/employee relationship</li> <li>2. Provide written feedback first then meet to discuss</li> </ol>

### How do we know if our feedback is attended to?

1. The student asks more questions, is willing to say if feedback is unclear or if they disagree
2. The student takes notes during our meeting
3. Resubmissions are made
4. Second drafts make the corrections referred to
5. The student understands that criticism is helpful – look for the affective response.
6. Don't expect perfection in response, improvement in writing is 'an evolution'.

### Supervisors experiences of students reaction to feedback

1. It takes 2 or more attempts – so expect an iterative process
2. Micro issues continue to annoy
3. Subsequent drafts reflect corrections
4. Some comments often ignored
5. 'That should be quick to fix'

A working document created by © Dr Anne Lee 2015 using the framework from 'Successful Research Supervision' Routledge. 2013.

### WHAT SUPERVISORS OFFER

	Functional	Enculturation	Critical Thinking	Emancipation	Relationship Development
<b>Type of feedback offered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Advice on correct grammar.</li> <li>b. Linguistic advice: eg <i>'to bring the meaning of messages'</i> corrected to <i>'to accurately reflect..'</i></li> <li>c. Provide a summary sheet and/or track changes and/or handwritten comments.</li> <li>d. Don't try to correct too much at once.</li> <li>e. Keep records of feedback given</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Referencing and genre-type advice eg <i>'advice on not using such colourful descriptions'</i>.</li> <li>b. Identifying theoretical gaps or omission of key point.</li> <li>c. Too much literature included or suggestions for including more literature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Cohesion: <i>'unfortunately 'a' differs from 'b', and 'things are a bit jumbled in this chapter'.</i></li> <li>b. Lack of conceptual depth</li> <li>c. Identify theoretical gaps.</li> <li>d. Identify absence of transitions eg: <i>nice but does it really lead to your conclusion?</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Lack of independent thinking.</li> <li>ii. Perspective – too small?</li> <li>iii. Supporting student finding their own voice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Send written comments to students before meeting.</li> <li>b. Prompt feedback.</li> <li>c. Meet to discuss written feedback. Check student's understanding of feedback given. Give reasons for giving feedback</li> <li>d. Meet to discuss what the next stage should be.</li> </ul>
<b>Aims of feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>To meet the demands of the stage a student is at.</b></li> <li>ii. <b>To provide direction.</b></li> <li>iii. <b>To ensure a completed thesis.</b></li> <li>iv. <b>To help create clear expression (<i>'but we are not editors'</i>).</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>To represent the research well</b></li> <li>ii. <b>To provide direction</b></li> <li>iii. <b>To develop structure</b></li> <li>iv. <b>To help L2 with language issues</b></li> <li>v. <b>To help with technical accuracy</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>To provide a frank appraisal</b></li> <li>ii. <b>To encourage critical thought</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Aims to help student achieve full potential</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. <b>Aim to foster academic independence.</b></li> <li>iii. <b>To encourage, be supportive and respectful.</b></li> <li>iv. <b>Take into account the educational, cultural and psychological background of student.</b></li> </ul>