



**& College
Senior Tutors**

Supervisions: what you need to know.

What is a supervision?

'Supervision' is the name given to a small-group teaching session, usually lasting one hour, where you discuss a piece of work or explore a topic in depth. The number of supervisions you have in a week and the sizes of your supervision groups will depend on your subject. As well as promoting your understanding of a given topic, supervisions also serve to extend your knowledge beyond the lecture course. They offer freedom in learning; you can work at your own pace and pursue your own particular interests; they are your time to develop your learning in ways that accommodate your individual needs.

How are supervisions organised?

Colleges appoint Directors of Studies (DoS) for each subject: they are normally fellows at your college who teach in the subject but they can be from another college. Your DoS should discuss your interests and long-term plans with you, and use these as a basis to offer advice on the options available to you, depending on your course. Your DoS is responsible for finding supervisors and even if supervisions are organised by the faculty or department, your DoS should still check that appropriate arrangements are in place. You should contact your DoS if you have any problems with your supervisions, whether this is with their organisation or other issues. Your DoS will be able to talk to supervisors on your behalf about any issue, or make alternative arrangements for you if the current ones are not suitable.

What should you do if your supervisions aren't organised?

You should email your DoS to check what arrangements have been, or will be, made. If supervisors are not found, you should mention this to your Tutor or Senior Tutor as soon as possible. If you need to organise your own supervisions, email the course organiser or lecturer to ask for contact details of a supervisor and/or ask other students about their supervisors.

What should you expect from a supervision?

In a supervision, you should have the opportunity to participate fully. Your opinions should be respected, and questions or problems dealt with thoroughly and effectively. Equal time and encouragement should be given to all the students in your group. Supervisors should not make you feel uncomfortable or undermine you, neither should they be disinterested in your work.

Supervisions should:

- be held regularly, and any other arrangements should be made well in advance;
- be held in a suitable room;
- be, as far as is possible, a full hour's teaching in a group of manageable size.

Supervisors should:

- set a reasonable amount of work that is relevant to your course and should make it clear how much work they expect, how long it should be, and by when/how it should reach them;
- mark the work you have handed in before the supervision and comment on it in detail in understandable writing;
- give you an idea of how you are doing and their comments should help your understanding as to how you can develop further;

- put each piece of work in its intellectual context and make clear how each piece of work relates to your exams at the end of the year;
- take into consideration how much work you are being set by other supervisors (in order to do this, you will need to communicate to your supervisors what is your overall work load);
- clarify with you how many supervisions you will be having and whether it will be possible to have extra supervisions if you need them;
- give reasonable notice if they have to cancel a supervision and should warn you if they are going to be absent during term;
- be reasonably easy to contact by telephone or email.

What is your role in supervisions?

Give your supervisor reasonable notice (at least 24 hours) if you cannot attend a supervision. Aim to complete and hand in your work on time so that it can be reviewed prior to the supervision. If you find any part of the supervision work difficult, contact your supervisor and ask for some assistance. Also let your supervisor know if your workload isn't manageable, whether that is because of personal problems, difficulties with the work or having too much to do.

- Be prepared for the supervision.
- Think about what topics or issues you want to discuss or get some help on (you might want to let your supervisor know beforehand so that they can be fully prepared).
- Review all the material that has been covered in lectures since your last supervision.

In the supervision:

- ask questions if you don't understand something;
- be prepared to contribute with your ideas and opinions. It's not only important whether or not they are 'correct', it also is relevant to show how you are thinking;
- respond to comments made on your supervision work and check with your supervisor to see if they think you are making progress;
- let your supervisor know (or your Tutor or DoS if you prefer) if you find that aspects of your supervision teaching do not suit you or make you feel uncomfortable.

At the end of each term, you should receive a supervision report through CamCORS (www.camcors.cam.ac.uk) from each supervisor, which will give you more idea of how you are doing and where improvements could be made. Discuss these with your DoS and use them as a basis for ideas as to how you can improve your work even further. It is very important that you let your college know how you are finding supervisions, so that your Senior Tutor or DoS is aware of any issues that might have to be addressed or know what it is about supervisions you find particularly useful. You can give your feedback through forms that your college will ask you to fill in during the year, through discussions with your DoS or through discussions with your Tutor. Your college JCR officers should also be an avenue through which you can provide feedback to the College.

Where can you get support and information?

If you have any problems with supervisions, (e.g. organisation, teaching style, how you get on with your fellow supervisees or your supervisor or simply, the workload), it is important that you speak to someone, whether it's your DoS, your Tutor or Senior Tutor, as appropriate. You can also speak to the CUSU Education Officer (education@cusu.cam.ac.uk or 01223 333313), who is available to offer confidential support and information to any student on academic-related issues.

Your college, faculty and department websites should have useful subject-specific information on supervisions and there is general information on the CUSU website: www.cusu.cam.ac.uk.