A student-supervisor relationship with good communication is the most beneficial to the postgraduate experience.

**Communicating with your supervisor**

Many difficulties can be overcome with clear and open communication on all aspects of the project. It is your responsibility as much as your supervisor's to build a positive relationship.

In your first meeting discuss a contract covering:

- Length and frequency of meetings
- The supervisor's availability
- Goals and deadlines
- The type of feedback to be given
- Contingency plans if something goes wrong.

To reduce uncertainty, be prepared to ask your supervisor questions such as:

- Do you think I'm getting enough work done between meetings?
- Are you satisfied with the way I use feedback and comments?
- Are you satisfied with my attitude towards you?

To avoid misunderstanding what your supervisor requires from you:

- Ask for explanation of anything you don't understand
- Take notes
- Email your supervisor after the meeting outlining your understanding of what you have agreed to do.

**Common sources of dissatisfaction with supervisors**

**Personality factors**

- Your supervisor neglects you
- Clash of personalities
- Personal differences in approach to the work
- Your supervisor makes unrealistic assumptions about your current capacity/skills base
- Your supervisor intimidates you
- You feel that your supervisor exploits you.

**Professional factors**

- Misinformed supervisor
- Supervisor with insufficient knowledge in the area
- Supervisor with research interests different from yours
- Inexperienced supervisor
- Reluctant supervisor.
Organisational factors

- Supervisor has too many students to supervise
- Supervisor’s administrative duties (e.g. Head of Department)
- You are isolated
- You have inadequate support services
- You have inadequate equipment/access to resources
- Supervisor takes extended sabbatical leave.

Cultural factors

- Communication difficulties due to different language backgrounds
- Communication difficulties due to different cultural backgrounds
- High power distance/low power distance.