

Graduate Student Tip Sheet

Questions to consider for selecting an advisor:

- What is the process and criteria used for matching advisor and student in your department?
- Is the advisor's personality appealing and compatible with your own?
- What kind of relationship do you imagine yourself having with your advisor?
- How many advisees does the person have? How many students finish? How quickly?
- What is the person's reputation as an advisor? What do other students in the department have to say about him/her?
- What is the advisor's work style? What does he/she expect the work style of students to be?
- What is the advisor's communication style? What is the frequency and quality of the interactions?
- What are the competing demands on the advisor's time? How frequently is the advisor out of town?

Tips for establishing a good relationship with your supervisor from the beginning:

- Have a conversation with your supervisor about both of your expectations for the relationship.
- Create a communication plan with your supervisor. Decide how the two of you are going to keep in touch. If it is important to you to have some regular face to face meetings be sure to make this preference known.
- Establish some ground rules for how the two of you will work together keeping in mind the need to be flexible where possible.
- Develop a plan with your supervisor for addressing for addressing issues/problems as they arise.

Tips for getting things back on track when things go wrong:

- Resist the temptation of dealing with problems over email. Issues have a better chance of being resolved during face to face meetings where there is less opportunity for misunderstandings to arise.
- Plan in advance what you want to say – making some notes for yourself will help keep you focused on the problem at hand.
- Try to separate the person from the problem. Conflicts are often about issues and/or clashes of personality style. Don't focus on personal styles; rather focus on the specific issues.
- Listen to the other person's side carefully and respectfully. Don't argue your position without knowing "why" your advisor is asking/telling you to do certain things that you think are unfair. Asking "why" and "why not" will help you to understand where he/she is coming from and can help develop a common incentive for resolution based on having both sets of interests satisfied.
- Before you leave the office, restate what you have heard. This is an important way to make sure that the two of you are on the same track and have heard the "same conversation." Also, determine a date for a follow-up meeting.