Professor Helene Marsh conducted a supervisor training workshop at the Singapore campus in October 2009. The following notes are representative of responses that five of the attendees received during interviews conducted with experienced supervisors. I have collated responses according to themes but have also included some unique responses verbatim.

The workshop attendees were required to work separately or in pairs to devise a set of questions to ask of experienced supervisors. These questions were intended to elicit information that would be valuable to those of us who are newly arrived (or at least relatively so for some) at the supervisory stage of our careers. Five major themes are apparent in the questions, so the first section details these thematic responses. The five themes are Experience, Expectations, Challenges, Effort (time requirement) and Advice.

1. Experience

The trainee supervisors were interested in how much and what type of experience their interviewees have had to date. Three of the respondents have been supervising research since the early 1990s, and this has included research projects at the fourth-year, Masters, Professional Doctorate and PhD levels in the fields of Education or Psychology. One of the interviewees chose to focus on clinical supervision only. The number of theses supervised to completion ranged between 13 to 30.

2. Expectations

Trainees were keen to learn about supervisor expectations of research students, and the experienced supervisors listed these according to motivation, effort and skills. Supervisors expected students

- To be self-motivated, self-directed learners who are capable of working independently and maintaining the necessary momentum. “I am a supervisor not an instructor.”
- To have a desire and willingness to learn and explore. “Effort is easy; otherwise it’s all about the hours – 30 hours a week will get them there.”
- To allocate time and space to their studies, including scheduling meetings at mutually agreed upon times.
- To have a basic knowledge of their subject area. But also to “recognise that they are breaking new ground.”
- To be able to synthesize available knowledge and data and to create new knowledge.
- To have a sound grasp of grammar. “To become a good researcher, one has to read and write like his/her favourite researcher. In order to do that one can follow the style of the favourite researcher’s writing closely.”
- To get it finished!

3. Challenges

Experienced supervisors shared some of what they perceived as the most challenging aspects of research supervision. These challenges ranged from administrative matters, through to time management concerns, and finally to dealing with problem students. Some of the most challenging aspects of the supervisor role include

- Dealing with paperwork required for candidacy.
- Ensuring that students – particularly international students – have some form of income.
- Keeping up with the high supervision load, and finding time to supervise.
• Dealing with the limited English capabilities of ESL students.
• Editing student theses.
• Ensuring that students maintain momentum.
• Dealing with a “complete lack of understanding that [students] actually have to work on their thesis every work day, and they are often being paid to work on it 48 weeks of the year”.
• “One student who would argue that there was no need for a research design or even a research question”.
• Students who have difficulty synthesizing and conceptualizing well.
• “Finding that many people need more direct supervision than others and I’m starting to suspect that some are just unsupervisorable [sic]. They really don’t want to do a PhD they just don’t want to leave uni”.

4. **Effort – How Much Time?**

Experienced supervisors noted that meetings are often not as regular as required, but once a week or at least every two weeks was desirable and at times had to be enforced. One experienced supervisor clarified that the routine could vary depending on the stage of thesis progression, with daily meetings in the final stages and otherwise once a month.

5. **Advice**
• Write a contract
• Ensure students work independently and meet deadlines
• Ensure that students take the initiative to search for online forms, etcetera, and deal with the necessary “administrivia”
• Ensure the student does the work and not you
• Ownership of the work belongs to the student and not the supervisor
• Don’t try to control things that you can’t control
• Develop diverse responses and ways of supervising other than replicating supervisory experience. (i.e. Do not get nostalgic over your own supervision)
• “If a student tells you they really want to teach, run a mile. Research is likely to be an inconvenience to them. It’s a research degree!”

**Comments about ‘any other aspects of supervision’**
• Establish a ‘Graduate ethos’ with a collective body of students
• Establish a network amongst supervisees, past and present
• Make the thesis process familiar to students through regular meetings and talking about thesis work at these meetings
• Teach students how to use headings effectively to write a thesis, and for developing presentations and publications
• Encourage:
  o attendance at research seminars in the relevant field
  o presentation of students work to others at university seminars
  o conference attendance
  o publication of papers
• “Good teaching is to inspire young minds and let them know how important psychology is to life”
“In the last 18 years, students under my supervision are of the same cultural background. Only in recent 2 years, this has become an issue as I realize Singaporean students respond and react to supervision slightly differently where they are less likely to tolerate ambiguity (i.e. no right or wrong answers) regarding case conceptualization and plan of actions, they also expect step-by-step and concrete directives/instructions from supervisors. As such, my supervision style is much more directive than before.” [Note: this comment pertains to clinical supervision for trainee clinical psychologists]