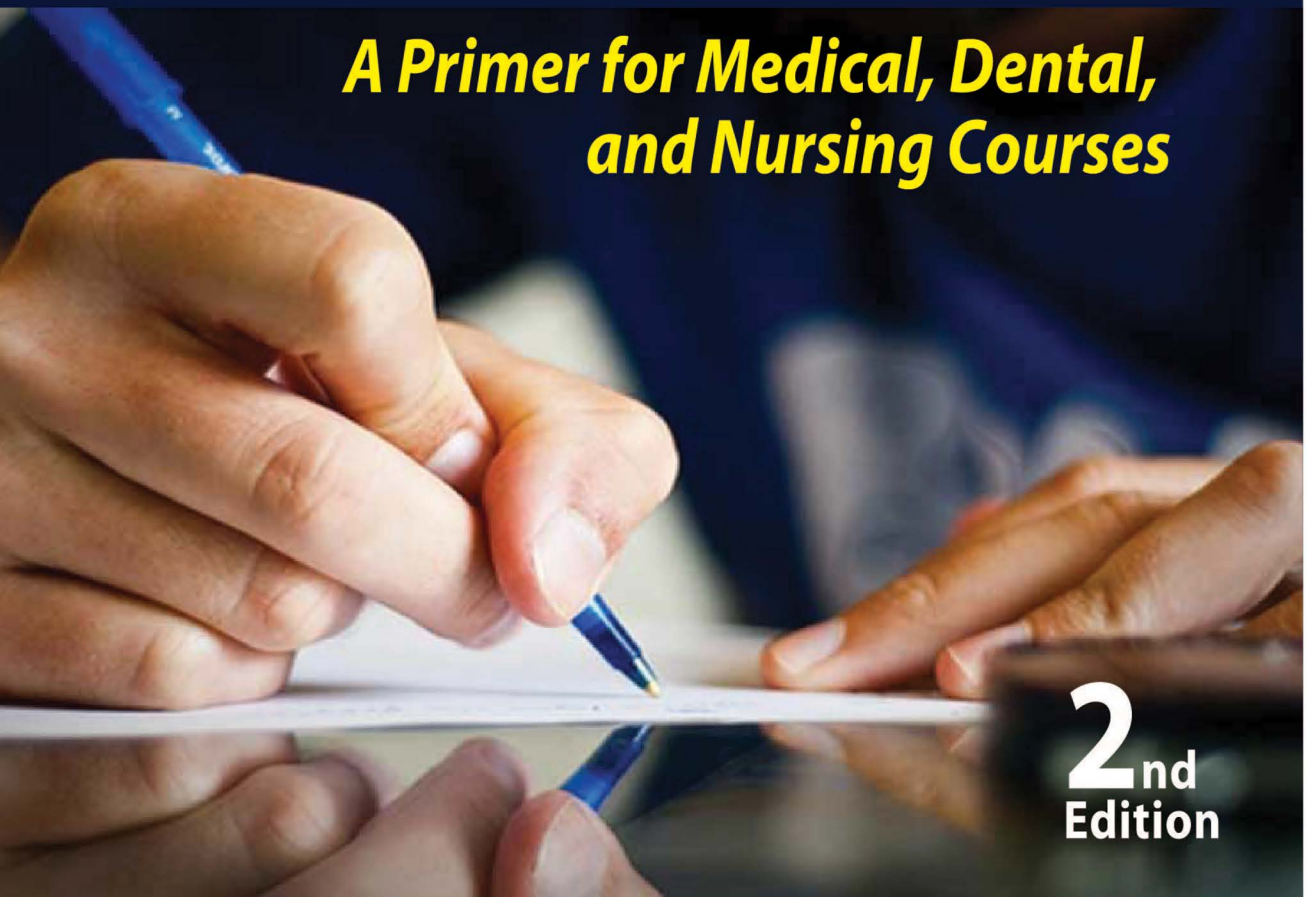




# How to Write the Thesis and Thesis Protocol

*A Primer for Medical, Dental, and Nursing Courses*



**2<sup>nd</sup>**  
Edition

**Piyush Gupta**  
**Dheeraj Shah**



# Contents

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|                                                                      |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1. Rationale for Thesis and Research in Postgraduate Courses</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <i>Siddarth Ramji</i>                                                |           |
| <b>2. Dealing with the Supervisor: Mentor–Mentee Relationship</b>    | <b>5</b>  |
| <i>Sahiba Kukreja, Tejinder Singh</i>                                |           |
| <b>3. Process of Thesis Writing: Plan it Well</b>                    | <b>10</b> |
| <i>Alpana Raizada, OP Kalra</i>                                      |           |
| <b>4. Thesis: The Essential Elements</b>                             | <b>18</b> |
| <i>Nitin Agarwal</i>                                                 |           |
| <b>5. Formulating a Research Question/Hypothesis: The First Step</b> | <b>26</b> |
| <i>Bhupendra Kumar Jain</i>                                          |           |
| <b>6. How to Select the Study Design</b>                             | <b>33</b> |
| <i>Aashima Dabas, Devendra Mishra</i>                                |           |
| <b>7. Framing a Suitable Title</b>                                   | <b>45</b> |
| <i>Piyush Gupta</i>                                                  |           |
| <b>8. Electronic Search of the Literature</b>                        | <b>51</b> |
| <i>Romit Saxena, Jaya Shankar Kaushik</i>                            |           |
| <b>9. Writing Aim and Objectives: Getting Clarity</b>                | <b>60</b> |
| <i>Upreet Dhaliwal</i>                                               |           |
| <b>10. Writing the Introduction: Justifying Your Research</b>        | <b>66</b> |
| <i>Naveen Sharma</i>                                                 |           |
| <b>11. Review of Literature: Recalling the Past</b>                  | <b>69</b> |
| <i>Sanjay Gupta</i>                                                  |           |
| <b>12. Material and Methods: How will I do it?</b>                   | <b>76</b> |
| <i>Dheeraj Shah</i>                                                  |           |
| <b>13. Sample Size Estimation</b>                                    | <b>85</b> |
| <i>Amir Maroof Khan</i>                                              |           |
| <b>14. Ethical Issues in Thesis and Conducting Research</b>          | <b>97</b> |
| <i>Kirtisudha Mishra</i>                                             |           |

|                                                                                   |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>15. Preparing a Case Record Form: Get, Set, and Go</b>                         | <b>106</b> |
| <i>Pankaj Kumar Garg</i>                                                          |            |
| <b>16. Planning the Statistical Analysis</b>                                      | <b>109</b> |
| <i>Pankaj Kumar Garg</i>                                                          |            |
| <b>17. Results: Fruits of the Labor</b>                                           | <b>124</b> |
| <i>Rehan Ul Haq</i>                                                               |            |
| <b>18. Converting Results to Text, Tables, and Graphs: Represent the Findings</b> | <b>131</b> |
| <i>Amir Maroof Khan</i>                                                           |            |
| <b>19. Discussion: The Most Read Part of the Thesis</b>                           | <b>138</b> |
| <i>SV Madhu, Dheeraj Shah</i>                                                     |            |
| <b>20. Writing the Conclusion: Bringing Down the Curtains in Style</b>            | <b>143</b> |
| <i>Nidhi Bedi, Pooja Dewan</i>                                                    |            |
| <b>21. Summary: The Essence of Thesis</b>                                         | <b>148</b> |
| <i>Pooja Dewan, Nidhi Bedi</i>                                                    |            |
| <b>22. Writing References</b>                                                     | <b>154</b> |
| <i>Piyush Gupta, Amir Maroof Khan</i>                                             |            |
| <b>23. Publication Misconduct and How to Avoid it</b>                             | <b>165</b> |
| <i>Sharmila Banerjee Mukherjee</i>                                                |            |
| <b>24. Elements of Writing Better English</b>                                     | <b>175</b> |
| <i>Navjeevan Singh</i>                                                            |            |
| <b>25. Showcasing Thesis through an Effective PowerPoint Presentation</b>         | <b>185</b> |
| <i>Pooja Dewan, Piyush Gupta</i>                                                  |            |
| <b>26. Writing the Thesis Protocol</b>                                            | <b>197</b> |
| <i>Dheeraj Shah, Navjeevan Singh</i>                                              |            |
| <b>27. Converting Thesis into a Scientific Paper</b>                              | <b>202</b> |
| <i>Dheeraj Shah</i>                                                               |            |
| <b>28. Manuscript-based Thesis: A New Paradigm</b>                                | <b>208</b> |
| <i>Somashekhar Nimbalkar</i>                                                      |            |
| <b>Annexure: Case-Record Form</b>                                                 | <b>212</b> |
| <b>Index</b>                                                                      | <b>213</b> |

# Dealing with the Supervisor: Mentor–Mentee Relationship

*Sahiba Kukreja, Tejinder Singh*

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Preparing a thesis is one of the major stressors of a student's life. We all have experienced it during our studies. How we wished that the supervisor showed us the path to tread rather than just shoving the papers back to us and saying, "write it again."

Fortunately, things are changing. There is a growing realization that "children must be taught how to think, not what to think." It can be achieved through mentoring program, rightly described as "a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction" by John Crosby. The intellectual, trusted, highly regarded, and an experienced individual who has the ability to guide is referred to as a **Mentor**, while the person who is being guided is referred to as the **Mentee**.

## ■ ORIGIN OF MENTORSHIP

The origination of mentorship program has historical roots. Mentor was mentioned in the Greek mythology as a person who taught the son of Odysseus after he left for the Trojan War. The way he taught was later conceptualized and modified to give rise to the mentorship program.

Mentorship program was once a part of the earlier Indian education system of *gurukuls*. This system of education included a *Guru*, who acted as the mentor for the budding *Shishya* or the mentees. This system helped the mentees rise to become an individual with utmost achievements. Let us try to extrapolate some concepts of this relationship to the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

## ■ MENTORSHIP IN POSTGRADUATE COURSES IN MEDICINE

Mentorship program is important in almost all the educational fields, besides medical education. There are several issues faced by individuals enrolled in medical education. Some of these issues are difficult education system, difficulty in handling patients, and issues in further career advancements. Though both undergraduates and postgraduates in medical education require comprehensive mentorship program, the requirement is more crucial for the postgraduate students. Mentoring postgraduates is usually a completely different task, in contrast to the undergraduates. Let us look more closely at it.

## ■ THESIS SUPERVISOR AND SUPERVISEE (CANDIDATE)

The success of postgraduate students hangs on a thin thread balanced by an exemplary supervisor. Unfortunately, this relationship has deteriorated over time due to rising competition, increased expectations, and lack of trust. Strong and directional efforts are necessary for ensuring a fruitful relationship. The supervisor is expected to provide personal and administrative support to the student. Studies have shown that a balance is necessary between the role of supervisor and expectations from a student. Stok-Koch et al. pointed toward the importance of practicing with the student and being a role model for developing a lifelong relationship.

Dobbs et al. focused on the expectations of supervisee from their supervisors. The study highlighted that the supervisor is expected to be approachable, ethical, assertive, willing to walk the extra mile, knowledgeable, experienced, helpful, available, and resourceful. Another study by Woolhouse concluded the expectations of a supervisor from their supervisee. The supervisee, in general, is expected to show motivation and to take initiative in research and to carry out independent research. The student is expected to be committed, thoughtful, focused, honest, and realistic. **Table 2.1** lists the expectations from a supervisor and a supervisee (student). Many problems between

supervisor and supervisee arise when either or both tend to fall short of the expectations.

### Supervisor as a Mentor

The need of the hour is to convert the supervisor–student relationship to mentor–mentee relationship. The scholarly review by Mellon and Murdoch-Eaton highlights the key factors necessary for the supervisor to transform into a mentor. The supervisor is required to discuss the career ideas of the student, help the student in exploring possible options, challenge the current assumptions, providing new information source, encouraging commitment, review progress, treat the student as a peer, support and promote the mentee, act as a friend, and help in pushing the mentee to achieve new heights and face new challenges.

Mentees often refrain themselves while discussing with the mentor. The most common topics discussed among mentor and mentee are often limited to education, future career, role as a doctor, and balancing work with personal life. It is important to understand that topics regarding professional and private issues faced by the mentees are discussed less.

*Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.*

**TABLE 2.1:** Expectations from a supervisor and student.

| Supervisor                      | Student         |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Approachable                    | Motivated       |
| Ethical                         | Take initiative |
| Assertive                       | Show commitment |
| Knowledgeable                   | Be focused      |
| Experienced                     | Honest          |
| Helpful                         | Realistic       |
| Available                       | Thoughtful      |
| Willing to walk that extra mile | Knowledgeable   |

### Relationship and Challenges

Supervising a postgraduate student is a colossal task teeming with several lacunae. A report by Wadesango and Machingambi highlighted that both students and supervisors often face several issues while working with each other. The students often feel that their supervisor is unable to provide ample quality time. The feedback provided by the supervisor is often considered conflicting, infrequent, and lacking in depth. The level of commitment and interest shown by the supervisor are considered unfulfilling. The cosupervisors of thesis often have conflicting perspectives, thus building tension among them. The most common problem faced by the students is poor communication and disagreement regarding

the research. Other issues of the students are selfishness, disrespectful nature, and lack of knowledge about expertise of the supervisor.

It is important to understand that issues are also faced by the supervisors. Some of the common issues have been described in literature by Mafa et al. They reported that students pose challenge related to thesis work. They underestimate the importance of research in their career. The students tend to follow unethical measures in their research work such as plagiarism and stealing data from others. They feel that the students lack knowledge, are unwilling to gain new knowledge, and lack research experience and the competency to achieve it.

### Do's and Don'ts of Relationship

Mentor plays a crucial role of giving advice to the assigned mentee. There are several important qualities that are required in a true and able mentor. A mentor has to be enthusiast for working with the mentee. A mentor is considered as unfitting if he/she is selfish in providing time, lacks in mentoring skills, and wishes for all the glory without providing any acknowledgement to the mentee. A mentor must never exploit the mentee, and instead promote the academic and personal development of the mentee. The individual personalities of the mentee have to be nurtured, without influencing it with personal bias (Table 2.2).

### ■ ADVANTAGES TO MENTEE AND MENTOR

Both mentor and mentee can be positively benefited from this relationship.

#### Advantages to Mentee

The mentee may receive someone who can act as a role model and boost the confidence and self-esteem of the individual. The mentor can provide the mentee a shoulder to lean on during

**TABLE 2.2: Making most of mentoring.**

| Mentor                                                                             | Mentee                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Have a clear understanding of your motivation to mentor                            | Have a clear understanding of your motivation to be mentored                      |
| Agree to be a mentor based on a realistic assessment of your skills and experience | Use the relationship on a pre-established criterion relevant to your career goals |

stressful situations. Open communication and fruitful discussions can improve the personal and professional life of the mentee. The career aspect is also improved due to quality publications, research, and improving teaching skills of the mentee.

Mentor is considered as an individual who would be supportive and will provide new and improved knowledge to the mentee. Mentees feel that mentor provides emotional support to them, besides guidance. Majority of students feel that the mentorship helped in improving their knowledge and critical thinking.

#### Advantages to Mentor

Mentorship program is often considered as a “give and give” relationship where mentor provides knowledge and guidance to the mentee, and nothing is being offered to the mentor in return. However, this is not entirely true. Mentorship program is a great initiative for reinforcing the current knowledge. It is important to understand that we can teach others only when we have thorough knowledge regarding the concept. It provides rejuvenation to the concepts and knowledge of the mentor. Mentor gains new perspectives while dealing with their mentee. Mentor develops the skills of empathy and sensitivity toward other individuals. The professional relationships and contacts are further enhanced when the mentee enters the profession. And the biggest reward for the mentor is when the mentee excels in life and career and gains recognition.



## ■ EXPECTATIONS OF SUPERVISOR AND SUPERVISEE

The relationship between supervisor and a student is crucial for any academic success. A positive relationship between the two can benefit the institution they work in. In order to understand the relationship between the supervisor and a supervisee, an investigation was conducted that involved interviewing supervisors and supervisee. During the interview, the participants were asked to elaborate on the expectations that they have from each other in the working environment. **Box 2.1** summarizes what not to expect from the mentorship program.

### Expectations of a Student from the Supervisor

*Here are the view of two students:*

*Student 1:*

- I expect my supervisor to show some positive and a cooperative attitude toward me. I wish my supervisor can be more aware regarding his professional duties.
- My supervisor should communicate and guide me in such a way that the necessary information reaches well to me.
- I would like my supervisor to be open for discussions and to listen to my perspectives patiently.
- I wish my supervisor could understand that the negative imposing attitude can undermine my performance and credibility.
- I would like my supervisor to provide a comfortable and safe environment to me

so that I feel safe enough to talk about my personal issues when necessary and not take advantage of it.

*Student 2:*

- I wish my supervisor could provide me safe affection and trust as a parent rather than a boss. An environment of mutual trust creates a comfortable situation for me and I will be able to focus more on my work.
- I feel that my communications with my supervisor must be kept confidential and the information must not be shared with any other members of the group.
- I would like to receive a positive feedback and appreciation for my efforts from my supervisor.
- I also feel that moral support from my supervisor would encourage me to work hard and be productive.

### Expectations of the Supervisor from Student

*Here are the views of a Supervisor:*

- I expect my postgraduate students to select a topic that is within the area of interest so that the student can be responsive and focused.
- I believe that positive interest from my student would boost my own enthusiasm toward them.
- I wish my students could come up with novel ideas and to reach at certain findings on their own rather than waiting for me to spoon-feed the same.
- I would like the student to submit their written material on time without any reminders.
- I wish my students could approach me freely without any apprehensions in mind. I believe that if the students could come to me during the early stage of postgraduate studies, it would build a stronger bond with me.
- I would like the student to give at least three presentations during the research, in the beginning, middle, and the in end, so that the track of their progress can be ensured.

#### Box 2.1: What mentoring does not mean.

##### Mentoring is not:

- A guarantee of advancement
- An unlimited tap on resources
- A means of bypassing seniors
- A mechanism for taking unfair advantage
- A way of working outside the system

## ■ CHANGING TRENDS

There have been many changes in the recent times regarding the roles of mentors and mentees. While the traditional view was for the mentor to initiate the process, the contemporary view is that mentee should initiate the process. The interactions should be specific goal-oriented rather than being of a general nature. What it means practically is that mentee should not always wait for the supervisor to call him for thesis related work rather he should himself take the initiative. Please do not forget that ultimately it is mentee's career that is going to be affected.

Interest is also being generated in the concept of peer mentoring, where students can help each other for many things, rather

than depending on one supervisor only. This is especially true for issues such as literature search, data entry, and statistical methods.

## ■ CONCLUSION

Mentorship program is more or less like a roller coaster ride with several ups and downs during its course. But once the individuals involved in this process get a hang of it, the ride becomes much more fun and beneficial as well. This program is in continuation with the traditional concepts of education system. Mentorship provides professional and personal support to both of them. It opens new realms of learning where newer concepts and skills are learnt.

### KEY MESSAGES

- Mentoring offers benefits which go beyond the traditional academic exchange.
- Both mentor and mentee have defined roles and responsibilities.
- Mentor can only show the path: To walk therein is the responsibility of the mentee.
- Mentoring is not a means to work outside the system rules and regulations.
- Mentoring relations are beneficial for both the mentor and the mentee.

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# How to Write the Thesis and Thesis Protocol

## *A Primer for Medical, Dental, and Nursing Courses*

### **Salient Features**

- Writing a thesis is one of the most important components of postgraduate studies and a potential area where the students are challenged by the lack of structured guidance.
- This book not only provides useful tools to write a thesis, but also identifies the typical problems that arise while writing a thesis and suggests improved solutions for the same while especially highlighting the ways of maintaining consistent quality within the thesis work.
- The text is organized into 28 chapters which follow the sequence of events in engaging with a thesis. The chapters also explain in detail the content and submission requirements that all students writing a thesis must follow.
- The language is simple, and the style is conversational and easy to follow.
- This book provides basic information about the thesis preparation as well as the technical parameters within which all the students must work.
- A unique feature is the numerous examples in each chapter illustrating what to do, and often, what not to do.
- A bibliography is provided at the end of each chapter for those wishing to delve further into the intricacies of biomedical research.

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