



Hi graduate friends,

Did you know that effective communication with your supervisor is an important factor in determining your success in graduate school? Assertive communication is a style of communication where you express yourself effectively and confidently while respecting the perspective or opinion of another individual. Even if your supervisor's personality differs vastly from your own, using assertive communication can lead to more interesting research discussions, higher levels of productivity, and most importantly can create a relationship of mutual respect.

Developing a good working relationship with your supervisor can take some effort as assertive communication skills do not necessarily come naturally, so consider these suggestions:

1. **Remain Factual.** If discussing a research-related problem with your supervisor, be direct and state the facts. Focus on work-related issues and present your concerns objectively and factually. Allowing personal opinions to enter into the discussion may create tension and make finding a solution more challenging.

2. **Clarity.** Be clear about your thoughts and what difficulties you are experiencing as challenging or disruptive to your research. Are you worried the experiments are being completed incorrectly? Is it taking more time than expected? Are you finding it difficult to get along with another student in the lab? Do you feel your scope of the study has shifted too far from your original idea?

3. **Focus on solutions (rather than problems).** Before meeting with your supervisor, develop potential ideas for how issues can be resolved. Ask your supervisor for their feedback and solicit any suggestions or solutions that you might have overlooked. You might ask, "Does this seem reasonable to you?", "Is there anything I have missed?" or "Would you have any suggestions regarding this issue?"

Be Proactive

It's important to remember that your supervisor is likely an extremely busy individual. They teach, speak at conferences, write research grants and proposals, and typically supervise a number of students. Your own research is most important to you; however, your particular work may be one of many tasks on your supervisor's to-do list. Take this into consideration so you can make the most of your time with your supervisor.

Listed below are some suggestions for your next meeting:

Prepare.

Be prepared with a list of tasks or issues that you would like to discuss with your supervisor. If time is limited, prioritize these issues and seek resolutions to problems that will help you move forward. Remember your supervisor may not be aware of where you are in your research, so providing an update and reminder will be helpful.

Ask.

Don't be afraid to ask questions, even if they seem simple. Also, be sure that you are clear on each issue that you have discussed. If you are still having trouble with a particular issue, ask for clarification.

Share.

Remember, your supervisor may know a lot about the research domain; however, you might be the expert on the specific experiment or research process. Share this knowledge with your supervisor as it may help them understand the issues you might be experiencing.

Specificity.

If you would like your supervisor to review a draft of a chapter, look at an outline or provide specific feedback, leave clear instructions about what you need their help with and what questions you have.

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Happy New Year from all of us in Learning Development &Success!



Aldean Ellis (he/him), from your [Learning Development & Success](#) team!

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