

Webinar:
Choosing the right PhD supervisor,
and how to get the most of them
(Current PhD Perspective)

Josephine Walker
School of Biological Sciences
University of Bristol

How I picked my supervisor: Standard ways

- Luck/Coincidence
- Opportunity seized
- The project was interesting
- Good university
- The right location

How I picked my supervisor: Extra-picky ways

- Advising style
- Degree of input and independence
- Support for training courses or conferences
- Group/department culture
- Personality
- Ask your connections if they know them

What to expect and what they expect

- Postgraduate student handbook or university guidelines available but vague
- Every supervisor is different - don't be afraid to ask!
 - Working hours (lab vs field/modelling) and working away from the office
 - Frequency of meetings
 - How to track them down

When/how to approach your supervisor with a problem

- Regularly scheduled meeting?
- Send an email
 - Forces you to write the problem clearly
 - Keeps them in the loop even if they can't help right now
- Set deadlines for yourself to solve it
- Be specific about the guidance you need
- Suggest a solution or plan for their feedback

Other useful support mechanisms and resources

- Other students and postdocs in your group
 - Remember everyone is busy – don't make people feel obligated to solve your problems
 - These are/will be/should be your friends and colleagues, and they are probably happy to have a cup of tea and a chat and share their experiences!
- Department-level resources: general student mentors, head of graduate school, head of school
- University-level resources through student union, counselling services, international student centre

Top Tip

Communicate! Don't be afraid to ask questions, be honest, and send reminders when necessary