

## Advisory Agreement, 2019.1 edition

### On our relationship

I'm your academic advisor. We have a professional relationship.

By **academic** advisor, I mean:

1. For info about administrative procedures and deadlines, ask the secretary. They know it better than I.
2. I'm not your manager. You're responsible for managing your own time. I don't mind if you go to the beach on a weekday, as long as you regularly show progress and good work; but I'll not work overnight to compensate for your lack of planning.
3. I'm not your technical support. You're responsible for learning to configure and use well the tools you need and for keeping up-to-date backups of all your work.
4. I'm not your copy editor. Before you hand in your work to me (and to everyone else, for that matter), review it again and again to ensure it's the best you could have done. Otherwise, don't look surprised if I ask "How dare you waste my time with anything less than your very best?"<sup>1</sup>
5. I'm not your underling. I'm here to work *with* you, not *for* you.
6. I'm not "optional". You must do nothing in your academic life without consulting me first. This means deciding which courses to take, which papers to write (and with whom), and in which projects to participate. And if my answer is something like "you decide whether you have time to do it", think really hard before you proceed.

By **professional** relationship, I mean:

7. I'm not your mother. It isn't my obligation to financially support you or to like you unconditionally.
8. I'm not your shrink. Don't tell me your childhood traumas or ask me for advice on your personal life. I'm not qualified to handle these issues. There are professionals to help you with that.
9. I'm not your buddy. If you are very proud of a photograph of yourself in some party or costume and think I'd like to see it, think again.
10. You and I need to be able to work well together. This requires mutual respect. If you don't respect me, find another advisor. To earn my respect, always strive to become a better researcher and make regular progress.
11. You should (proactively) assist me in writing project proposals, reviewing papers, organizing conferences, teaching classes, preparing class material, grading students' work, co-advising students, and performing other activities involved in the academic profession. Even if you aren't aiming at an academic career, you're expected to get ready to pursue one, should you change your mind in the future, as I did.
12. It's your duty to know the rules, requirements, and deadlines of your graduate program. If you need to resort to specific paragraphs of the bylaws to defend yourself, think carefully about how well you've been doing your job in the first place.
13. Being a graduate student is a job. And if you have a scholarship, it's a full-time job. Having another professional activity is no excuse for not doing what is expected of you in your research.

### On making progress

14. **Work hard and smart.** Progress does not follow solely from effort. Making progress involves defining a clear goal; discussing your work on a regular basis; and working proactively towards achieving it.
15. **Show up.** Research work takes time, interactions, and iterations: "The worst research is usually carried out by students who vanish from sight for months on end, and then hand in something which their supervisor has never seen."<sup>2</sup>
16. **Be proactive** in scheduling meetings and asking for my guidance, even if only via email or chat. If you disappear for more than a week, I'll assume you aren't working.
17. **Be thorough** in your search for publications to read, journals and conferences to which submit, and people whose research you should keep a constant eye on and with whom you should try to interact. Get to know your research area, its main researchers, and its main publication vehicles. Be systematic.
18. **Be prepared.** Always maintain a brief, up-to-date presentation of your work ready to discuss with a visiting professor, a colleague, or me.
19. **Be curious.** Adopt a questioning attitude towards any research results. Even your own.
20. **Be humble.** It takes maturity and courage to accept criticism, and wisdom to know when it's appropriate to defend your ideas. Judicious persistence is a virtue, but blind stubbornness is a flaw. It's important for researchers to have strong ideas and personality, but even more important to be humble, to listen attentively and to recognize where they can evolve.
21. **Be brave.** "If you want to get good at something, you need to throw yourself directly into situations that will cause pain and growth."<sup>3</sup>
22. **Become efficient.** Learn to use well the tools that may help you do your job: academic search engines, digital libraries, word processors, programming environments, etc. Cutting corners will cost you more time in the end than save it.
23. **Engage** in the department's activities. Exchange ideas with all your colleagues and professors. Attend invited talks and your colleagues' defenses, even if their research areas are not closely related to yours. Pay attention to the structure of their talks and the questions they are asked. This will help improve your own presentations.
24. **Plan** your work to produce publishable results regularly, and look for the most adequate and high-quality conferences and journals in which you should aim to publish.
25. **Learn with and from your peers,** not only scientific content, but expected work ethic and academic behavior. Your colleagues and you are all expected to be able to work together and contribute to each other's work responsibly. If conflicts arise, learn to solve them as mature adults.
26. **Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.** Perfection is unattainable; perfectionism can become self-destructive and prevent you from taking the next step or writing the next paragraph. If you were perfect, you wouldn't need me and I would be out of a job. A rejected paper is better than an unwritten paper. Re-read 14-25, especially 15-16.

### On the quality of your work

27. Before learning to write well, you should learn to read well. And you should read a lot. Critically. This also applies to writing code.
28. Learn the conventions in your area regarding publication structure and style. This also applies to writing code.
29. Spell-checkers are not a substitute for careful reading. If you need to be convinced of this, check Taylor Mali's poem "The the Impotence of Proofreading."<sup>4</sup> The more I need to pay attention to problems in your writing, the less I'll pay attention to the content of your work.
30. Be very meticulous when using related work. Always provide complete references in the required format, even in the early drafts. Don't plagiarize. Be ethical.
31. Don't try to waffle (*aka* equivocate) your way through a discussion (either orally or in writing). It insults your audience's intelligence.

### On communicating with me (and everyone else, for that matter)

32. I'm very busy, but I'll always find time to discuss good work, as long as you have prepared for it, preferably in writing. If you send me written material in advance, I'll give you quality time; if not, only a few minutes by the water cooler should suffice. If I feel you haven't prepared, I may cut our meeting short or start multitasking.
33. If we have a meeting scheduled, don't forget it, and don't be late.
34. Be mindful of what and how you write, even short emails. Remember that "people form impressions about your level of intelligence based on how you write."<sup>5</sup> Being in a hurry is no excuse for poor writing.
35. Keep me informed (i.e., cc'd) about your academic-related communications with other professors and staff.
36. If you want your colleagues to respect you, respect them. This means that you shouldn't make a presentation or discussion longer than necessary. This also means paying attention when they are making a presentation and actively participating in the ensuing discussion. Checking your phone or email while some presentation or group activity is going on is disrespectful and impolite. If you need to take notes, disable notifications in your device and keep only your note-taking application open.
37. Notify me immediately whenever a serious problem (medical, personal, etc.) disrupts your ability to perform your best work.

### Epilogue

38. Especially in the case of PhD students, Dan Berry said it best: "If you cannot get your own s—t together, you are not going to make it as a research leader".<sup>6</sup>
39. When in doubt, ask. Don't make rushed assumptions.
40. I'm on your side. But I won't condone what I believe is unprofessional or unethical behavior.
41. What you do throughout your course affects not only your reputation, but also mine. And I care about my reputation.
42. I have the right to fire you as my advisee.
43. You have the right to fire me as your advisor.

<sup>1</sup> <http://taylormali.com/poems-online/what-teachers-make/>

<sup>2</sup> Petre, Marian; Rugg, Gordon (2011-03-28). *The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research* (Kindle Locations 2198-2199). McGraw Hill International. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> <https://medium.com/thrive-global/52-reasons-anyone-can-be-successful-if-they-choose-e6d75f76d0ac#2eb4>

<sup>4</sup> <http://taylormali.com/poems-online/the-the-impotence-of-proofreading/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/sending-an-e-mail-without-proofreading-is-like-shooting-a-gun-without-aiming/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://cs.uwaterloo.ca/~dberry/FTP\\_SITE/lecture.slides/finishing.phd.talk.pdf](https://cs.uwaterloo.ca/~dberry/FTP_SITE/lecture.slides/finishing.phd.talk.pdf)