# Formal interview
# (during the first month of the thesis)

Summary: The PhD student and her/his supervisor(s) are asked to have a formal interview at the beginning of the thesis (whether or not the PhD student did a training period at the laboratory before). This document gives some tips for having a successful interview, with advice for preparing the questions and suggestions for the topics which can be covered.

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# I. Formal interview within the thesis monitoring framework

## 1 Why having a formal interview?

On multiple occasions during the thesis and the professional life, you will need to either interview or be interviewed. Various types of interviews exist depending on their purpose (admission, hiring, clarification, negotiation, etc.). A successful interview can be conducted by:

1. identifying the goals of the interview;
2. preparing and planning it (length, topics and questions to be addressed, etc.);
3. respecting the allocated time and proposed plan when conducting the interview;
4. writing up a summary (even if short) after the interview to confirm the conclusions reached and the decisions taken during the interview.

In a more general way, the success of an interview also depends on the capacity of communicating in a clear fashion (mutual trust building, clear messages, being receptive, reformulating to avoid misunderstandings, etc.). Communication is at the heart of numerous situations (interviews, meetings, informal discussions at work…). This is a vast topic on which specific trainings are offered by the CNRS and the doctoral school.

## 2 The early-stage PhD interview

During the first month of the thesis, the Thesis Monitoring Committee (TMC) asks that you conduct a first interview. This first formal contact is important: it allows you to clarify a number of points (how the thesis will be conducted, organisation, expectations, etc.) which may often seem obvious and inherent to the supervisor but may not be known by the PhD student. The interview mainly aims at:

- establishing and clearly defining the communication channel (types of interactions and their frequency during the thesis, unavailability of the supervisor during some periods, etc.);
- explicitly laying out the "ground rules" (lab's internal rules, specific constraints linked to the thesis work, the group, the experiment or the lab …);
- assessing the current knowledge of the PhD student and the expertise that will need to be developed during the thesis;
- discussing the expectations and the motivation of the PhD student and of the supervisor;
- discussing the scientific output (publications, etc.) expected during the thesis.

In parallel to this interview, it is obviously important that the supervisor(s) introduce the PhD student to the research group and the collaborators.

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**The supervisor/PhD student interview: an overview**

- *Who*: the PhD student with his/her supervisor(s) (without the TMC!).
- *When:* during the first month of the thesis.
- *Where*: plan for a room in which you will not be interrupted.
- *How long*: typically about 30 minutes.

→ After the interview, the PhD student/the supervisor sends an email to the TMC, *indicating the main points that were discussed.*

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## II. Preparing the interview: suggestions for the PhD student and the supervisor

In order to help you prepare this interview, we propose below a list of topics and questions which can be covered. You are of course welcome to address other ones!

- Settling in
  - Is the PhD student well settled in the city: no housing, financial, language or cultural issues… (in particular for foreign students);
  - Is the PhD student well settled in the lab?
  - Lab internal rules (schedule, holidays, etc.), IT charter, specific security rules, …;
  - Support services from the lab.

- Organisational
  - General overview of the thesis calendar;
  - Clarify the thesis topic and its possible evolution;
  - Assessment of the current knowledge of the PhD student and of the expertise that will need to be developed;
  - If there is more than one supervisor, clarify the role and responsibilities of each of them;
  - Which kind of expertise does the group have?
  - How can one gain expertise outside the local working group (continuous trainings, thematic schools, …)?
  - If the PhD student wants to teach, how does this fit with the thesis calendar?

- Relational
  - values (for example ethics, deontological code …);
  - motivation (goals, specific interests, career plans);
  - expected frequency of interactions between the PhD student and the supervisor(s);
  - availability and other obligations of the supervisor during the thesis (teaching, long or frequent travels foreseen, …);
  - supervision type, expected level of independence, …

- Activities linked to the thesis (within the group, the collaboration, etc.)
  - Should a logbook be kept?
  - Are there meetings one must attend?
  - When should one present some results?
  - Are there any technical tasks to do?
  - What are the possibilities or constraints regarding geographical mobility (short or long term)?
  - Writing scientific papers, participation to conferences, …