

Politics and International Relations

Guide to Supervisions for Supervisors, 2022-23

This guide has been prepared for teaching officers, research staff, postgraduate students and others who would like to supervise papers offered in Politics and International Relations. The aim is to provide a general introduction to the supervision system and how it works.

Director of Undergraduate Education: Dr Christopher Brooke <cb632@cam.ac.uk>

Introduction

Undergraduates studying Politics and International Relations receive teaching in two different forms: lectures, sometimes supplemented with seminars, which are organised by the Department; and supervisions, which are formally organised and paid for by the Colleges. All students have a *Director of Studies* at their College, who has oversight of their students' supervision arrangements. The purpose of the lectures or seminars is for the lecturer to provide a general introduction to a topic. Supervisions, by contrast, are discussions between a supervisor and students about the reading that the students have completed, and (usually) the essays that they have written. Whilst lectures are delivered to all the students on a particular course, supervisions are conducted in small groups, usually consisting of the supervisor and two or three students. Supervisions do not involve formal assessments of a student's work, but are a key part of the process through which teaching is conducted.

Supervisors are expected to provide the following:

In preparation for supervisions:

- The date, time and topic of the supervisions should be set at the beginning of term. Supervisors should communicate with students and arrange supervisions for the whole term in the first week, and any time clashes should be resolved as soon as possible.
- Supervisors must provide guidance about how best to prepare for supervisions. This includes setting an essay question, a reading list appropriate for the question (which can be by directing students to a reading list within the relevant paper guide so long as it is clear in the paper guide how reading relates to individual questions), and a set of expectations about the form of the essay. Information should be provided about when and how to submit the essay.
- Supervisors must read the submitted work, and prepare written comments, *before* the supervision. These comments should be given to the student at the beginning of the supervision. Supervisors should also plan the range of issues to discuss in the supervision.

In the supervision itself:

- As far as is practicable, a full hour of teaching should be provided, provided that the students have done the work expected of them in preparation for the supervision.

- Students should be taught in a reasonably sized group in which they have the opportunity to participate fully; all students should be encouraged to engage fully in the discussion.
- The content should be relevant to the paper, help students understand the subject and prepare them for the examinations.
- There should be discussion of the students' opinions, questions and problems, with constructive comment. Students' prior opinions should be respected, but should often be challenged to help them develop or refine their views.
- There should be opportunities to discuss with the supervisor, in privacy and in full confidence, any problems they perceive in the quality, relevance, or dynamics of the teaching they are receiving.

After supervisions:

- Supervisors should submit a supervision report on each of their students by the end of term.

Students themselves are expected to:

- Complete the work set to the very best of their ability.
- Hand in work on time.
- Proof-read their essays before submitting them to a supervisor.
- Turn up on time to the supervisions.
- Contribute actively to the supervision and make their ideas known.
- Contact the supervisor in plenty of time if they are unable to make the supervision or complete the work set.

Supervisors should make sure they are registered for two different electronic resources:

- The Moodle website, for information about individual papers and access to reading material.
- The CamCORS system, to submit supervision reports and claim payment.

Training

The Department of Politics and International Studies offers its own training on supervision. Whilst this is largely aimed at new postgraduate students and postdocs who are supervising for the first time, experienced supervisors are welcomed to refresh their skills and update themselves on current developments. You should contact the Undergraduate Secretary on ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk for more information, or if you have any suggestions for further training that we could provide.

In addition, there are several resources that new and experienced supervisors can access in order to assist with supervision. The University's Centre for Teaching and Learning (<https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/>) offers training on supervision, and has an online module about effective supervising that can be completed. The Researcher Development Programme also runs relevant training workshops; more information is available at <https://www.rdp.cam.ac.uk/>

The Papers

All papers in Politics and International Relations are taught across the full academic year, although a number of papers have discrete components that are lectured on and supervised in specific terms. Most papers are assessed at the end of the academic year by means of a three-hour written exam, taking place in late May or early June. The exceptions are described in the section on *Assessed Work* on pp. 12-14 of this document.

Each paper has a *Paper Organiser*, who is the staff member responsible for coordinating a specific taught course. The paper organiser is usually also the main lecturer. They provide students and supervisors with a *paper guide* for each paper. The paper guide contains the aims and objectives of the paper, lecture titles and schedules, readings, suggested supervision and essay topics, and past or mock exam papers. These paper guides are available via <https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/course-information> and are updated every summer.

The paper guide is usually the main resource on a paper, and should contain sufficient information to enable you to judge the issues you would like to teach. Paper Organisers are happy to provide guidance and advice concerning the range of material which should be covered in supervision work for any particular paper.

For potential supervisors, the first question is whether or not there is a paper that fits your interests and for which you would like to supervise. The papers on offer in 2022-23 are listed on the next page, together with the name of the academic who is organising that paper at least in the first part of the year.

First year students

POL 1: The Modern State and its Alternatives, *Prof. Helen Thompson*

POL 2: International Conflict, Order and Justice, *Prof. Jason Sharman*

HP 1: Evidence and Argument (*), *Dr Tristen Naylor*

Second year students

POL 3: International Organisation, *Prof. Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni*

POL 4: Comparative Politics, *Prof. Christopher Bickerton*

POL 5: Themes and Issues in Politics and International Relations (*), *Dr Christopher Brooke*

POL 6: Statistics and Methods in Politics and International Relations, *Dr Pieter van Houten*

POL 7: The History of Political Thought to c.1700, *Dr Christopher Brooke*

POL 8: The History of Political Thought from c. 1700-1890, *Dr Thomas Hopkins*

Third year students

POL 9: Conceptual issues and Texts in Politics & International Relations (*), *Dr Jeremy Green*

POL 10: History of Political Thought from c. 1700 to c. 1890, *Dr Thomas Hopkins*

POL 11: Political Philosophy and the History of Political Thought since 1890, *Prof. Duncan Kelly*

POL 12: The Politics of the Middle East, *Dr Glen Rangwala*

POL 13: British and European Politics, *Prof. Julie Smith [EU]* and *Dr Peter Sloman [UK]*

POL 14: US Foreign Policy, *Dr Steven Ward*

POL 15: The Politics of Africa, *Dr Sharath Srinivasan*

POL 16: The Politics of Conflict and Peace, *Dr Devon Curtis*

POL 17: Politics and Gender, *Dr Lauren Wilcox*

POL 18: Politics of the International Economy, *Dr Jeremy Green*

POL 19: Themes and Issues in Politics and International Relations (*), *Dr Christopher Brooke*

POL 20: Politics and Religion, *Dr Iza Hussin*

POL 21: Politics of the Future, 1880-2080 (*), *Prof. Duncan Bell*

POL 22: Politics and Public Policy, *Dr Margarita Gelepithis*

HP 3: Theory and Practice in History & Politics (*), *Prof. David Runciman*

Papers marked with a () are not taught through the regular supervision format, but additional teaching support is needed for many of them. In addition, POL6 has a mixed teaching format. See the account at pp.12-14.*

When you find a paper for which you'd like to supervise, you should apply to the Undergraduate Secretary (ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk). The Paper Organiser either directly or through the Directors of Studies assigns supervisors to particular students. You should indicate whether you are able to supervise for the full year, or for specific terms only. Most papers rely upon supervisors who are able to supervise across the full year, although there are opportunities for teaching specific subjects within papers at particular times of the year. Please be aware that indicating your interest in a particular paper does not necessarily mean that you will be able to supervise, as the opportunity depends on demand. If you are not able to supervise at first, we are happy to keep you on the list of potential supervisors for further allocations throughout the year.

Arranging Supervisions

For **first year papers**, College Directors of Studies arrange supervision for their students. The Paper Organiser circulates a list of supervisors to those Directors of Studies who may then contact the supervisors on that list. Supervisors should coordinate with him or her over the number and timing of supervisions. Names of potential supervisors will not be sent to Colleges unless those supervisors have already completed any necessary training.

For **second and third year papers**, Colleges have mostly delegated the responsibility for organising supervisors to the Paper Organiser (this is known as “centralised supervision”), although a few Colleges may organise their own supervision separately. The Paper Organiser will allocate the students to the selected supervisors, linking students with the person who will supervise them throughout the paper or for a part thereof.

The number of supervisions required varies from paper to paper. Details are usually provided in the paper guide and can be discussed with the Paper Organiser. Most papers have six supervisions and one or two revision supervisions.

Timing, Location and Conventions of Attendance

Supervisors should contact the students allocated to them to arrange the dates and times of supervisions in the first week of term. Each supervision normally lasts one hour, and it is important to ensure that you are ready to begin at the scheduled times. Students in the same supervision group may be on different degree programmes, and taking different paper combinations, and so some consultation may be necessary before times can be fixed.

Supervisions normally take place at regular intervals, usually every two or three weeks. The time and place should be agreed with the student in advance. It is normal to book space in the College or Colleges for which you are supervising; it may also be possible to supervise in the Alison Richard Building, concerning which you can contact the POLIS administrators on ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk.

Students must attend supervisions, and many Colleges charge undergraduates for supervisions missed without good cause or sufficient warning. If a student misses a supervision without notice, or cancels a supervision at the last minute, **the Director of Studies should be informed**. It is legitimate to claim payment for a supervision missed without sufficient warning (generally, 24 hours' notice). If a student arrives without having submitted an essay, or without having done sufficient preparatory work, it is legitimate to ask them to return at another time having done so, and to charge for the missed supervision, explaining why to the Director of Studies by email or by a CamCORS report.

Selecting Topics

In most cases it is neither feasible nor desirable for a supervisor to try to cover the whole range of material on any paper. It is best to concentrate on a set of topics which form a sensible and well-balanced course of study. Ideally the selection of topics should take account of a student's preferences. But the aim should be to ensure that the topics form a coherent set and that they cover a sufficiently broad range of material to prepare the student well for the exam.

If you are unsure about how best to select topics for supervision, supervisors can turn to three sources of information and advice. First, there is the list of supervision topics and recommended readings in the Paper Guide. Secondly, the supervisor can consult examination papers from the last two or three years. Copies of old exam papers are available on the website (see *Examination Preparation*, below). This will give a sense of the kinds of questions and topics which form the core concerns of the paper. Thirdly, you can ask the Paper Organiser; s/he can evaluate whether a proposed set of topics represents a sensible selection.

Graduate students supervising undergraduates for a paper for the first time are expected to attend the lectures for the papers.

Many papers put information about the topics taught within them on the undergraduate **Moodle website**; it is common for lecture handouts, powerpoint slides and general information to be posted on there. This can be a useful resource for deciding the topics to teach, as well as gaining an insight into the specific issues covered in the lecture. Once you are registered as a supervisor with the Department you will be given access to the relevant Moodle site(s) and you will find the information in the individual paper folders in Resources. If you have any issues with accessing the appropriate Moodle site, please contact the undergraduate administrators on ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk.

Essay Questions

When setting a topic for a supervision, supervisors should give students a specific question which serves as the focal point for an essay. The purpose of the essay is to encourage undergraduates to reflect on what they have read and construct an argument around the

question, so questions have to be framed with some care. The Paper Organiser will provide sample essay questions in the paper guide or on request. Supervisors can also take questions from previous exam papers. But care is needed: exam questions are sometimes quite sharply focused, and undergraduates tend to prepare for the essay that they have been set. So if you give students a very sharply focused question, you should strongly encourage them to read more widely around the topic. You should also make sure that your students are aware of the range of different analytical skills, modes of argument and methods of presenting evidence that are needed to cope with different types of questions.

Students can be expected to work for around **20 hours for each supervision essay in their first and second years and 24 hours for each of their third year supervision essays**. Reading lists should be set accordingly. It is unreasonable to require students to have read everything on a reading list when that reading list cannot have been completed in the time available.

Supervisors should **not** set word limits for essays. Most students will write between 2,000 and 2,500 words, but they should not be discouraged from lengthier intellectual engagement. Of course, supervisors can in commenting on an essay make clear where a student could have made arguments more succinctly.

Reading Lists

Here you can usually draw on the paper guide. Most Paper Guides will have clear reading for the suggested essay questions. However, some may have reading lists organised around topics or have several essay questions requiring varied reading. Check the paper guide before directing students to the paper guide for reading for specific essay questions. Sometimes supervisors will need to devise a reading list from the range of material listed in the Paper Guide.

You may wish to supplement this with material of your own choosing, but be careful not to stray too far from the topic in the paper guide; consult the Paper Organiser in cases of doubt. When you set an essay question, you should indicate which books and articles students should try to read. There is no harm in setting a list which is longer than most students will be able to conquer in a few days, as long as you make this clear to the students; they will have time at the end of term, and during revision, to flesh out their understanding. First year students in particular may need reassurance that they are not expected to read everything on a long list before writing the essay. Often it is useful to go through the list indicating particularly important works. It is sometimes best to indicate one or two texts for them to start with. With monographs, most supervisors do not specify particular page or chapter numbers. Encourage students to work out a way of gaining a sense of the book's overall argument and of finding the relevant material.

Many of the items on the reading lists will be accessible online, through electronic journals, as ebooks, or through the **Library Moodle site**, which is accessed through the portal for the

individual paper. Students themselves are sometimes confused by the two different sites, and may need a bit of guidance. The Departmental Moodle site is for paper information, lecture handouts and past exam papers; the Library Moodle site is for copyrighted academic publications. It is often useful when recommending works to students that you ensure that at some least some of the reading will be accessible online. This is because there is a high demand for books at certain times of the year, and so not every item you recommend will be accessible in print. It can be helpful to make sure that students can complete the essay to an adequate standard even if not all the printed sources you recommend can be accessed.

The Essay

Undergraduates are required to submit essays for supervisions except for those on assessed work. The essay should be handed in well before the supervision, so that you have time to make written comments on the essay. Your written comments can be made either in the margins and at the end of an essay, or as a separate document. Either way, there should be a paragraph or two summarising the strengths of the essay and making any broader suggestions for improvement, as well as comments on specific points. It may be helpful to use the language of the marking criteria (see *Examination Preparation*, below) when giving feedback, as this can help students to familiarise themselves with what examiners will evaluate when marking. Paper Organisers or Directors of Studies can advise you if you feel you need support in deciding what is appropriate feedback.

You should make clear to the students the deadline for handing in the essay. This is at your discretion; some supervisors ask for it to be submitted by 4pm on the day before the supervision is due to be held, whilst others ask for it 24 or 48 hours in advance. You should ensure that you have given yourself sufficient time to read and prepare comments on the essays, whatever deadline you choose. Students will often have to be working for their other papers while preparing their work for you so it is important to give them a schedule for supervisions and essay questions at the start of term so that they can plan their work around it. If a student does not produce an essay in time for the supervision, you can decline to teach until it has appeared. But there will be many occasions on which it is better to persevere, especially if he or she has read some of the literature and can produce a plan full enough to make discussion worthwhile.

Supervisors should be familiar with the techniques of argument and exposition that go into the making of a 'good' undergraduate essay: clear argument, close engagement with the question, and effective use of evidence. There is no single style of writing essays, and supervisors should not instruct students to write according to a standardised 'formula'. In assessing essays, it is important to be aware that cautious and discursive approaches can be as important as the more purely argumentative and self-assertive styles of writing that some academics commend as a model. Supervisors should be sensitive to the fact that students may wish to express themselves in different ways. For example, many female students

regarded the argumentative, self-assertive style as a distinctively masculine approach that was quite at odds with the ways that they preferred to write. On occasion, discursive approaches can fall into exposition without making an argument directed at the question. Likewise, however, argumentative styles of writing may easily slip into mere assertion, disguising thin empirical knowledge.

Supervisors should give advice on grammar and syntax and make sure students understand they need to improve if they have difficulties in this area. If a student has persistent difficulties with writing, supervisors should contact the student's Director of Studies.

You should provide written constructive and formative comments on each essay. Most supervisors do not give marks. It is at your discretion to do so but graduate students should consult with the Paper Organiser before doing so.

The Supervision

There is no single way of supervising. Different approaches and tones are appropriate for different undergraduates, and at different stages of the Tripos. The intelligence, industry, and self-confidence of the student need to be weighed up in deciding how forceful, critical, sympathetic, wide-ranging and talkative you should be as a supervisor. Supervisors should always be aware that overly hostile or exclusively negative criticism can do great damage to undergraduate morale, particularly for those in the first year. Criticism is an essential part of the supervision process, but it should be done sensitively and be accompanied by suggestions and encouragement as to how the work can be improved.

Supervisors should also be aware that there are often gender biases that creep into supervisions. It is not unusual for female students to report that they were interrupted while they were explaining a point by a male student, and that the supervisor did not adequately control the situation; or that a male student's ideas were complimented by the supervisor, while the female student's ideas were ignored. Supervisors should be aware of whether or how they address male and female students differently in the supervision, and reflect on how this affects student engagement with the supervision.

An undergraduate should come away from a good supervision with a clearer sense of three things. First, the worth of the essay submitted including comment on content, range, depth, structure and, if necessary, style (clarity, grammar, spelling). You may sometimes need to give far-reaching advice on how to improve essay structure and presentation. First year students can sometimes require help in some the basics of essay writing. Undergraduates often learn techniques (and gain reassurance) by reading other students' essays, and you can suggest to students that they share their essays.

Secondly, they should gain a sense of the topic as a whole and the relationship of this topic to the rest of the paper. This aspect of a supervision often requires some preparation on the

part of the supervisor. You will want to test students' understanding of what they have written, but you will probably also ask them about matters not covered in the essay, and to make connections between what they *have* written and what they *could have* written with more thought and/or reading. In other words, you will want to clarify and broaden their understanding. To do this, you may need to think about and plan out a range of related topics that go beyond the specific topic of the essay questions you have set and on to broader issues raised by texts in the relevant reading lists. Encourage them to have their own agenda and to ask you questions. Encourage them also to make conceptual links with other topics they have studied in the paper, and indeed in other papers. It is often a good idea to end by asking if anything is still obscure to them, or by discussing how they might deepen their knowledge of the topic, or by encouraging them to relate the topic under discussion to other areas of the paper.

Thirdly, they should have a sense of the variety of possible approaches to the topic, and the problems in reaching a clear-cut understanding of it. You might try testing their comprehension of particular arguments and what sources they have used to understand them. Sometimes it is useful to get them to make a case, and then to make a contrary case, to see which stands up better to questioning. You may wish to encourage scepticism, or deliberately to undermine some assumptions that linger from prior schooling. Be aware that some undergraduates invest a great deal of themselves in their essays, and may take criticism in a very personal manner.

Take care in such cases to suggest improvements in a friendly and constructive way, as well as encouraging the student to see that argument and debate can be an enjoyable part of learning.

In general, these three goals are best pursued by discussion; a supervision is not a lecture. Do not be embarrassed if you reduce a student to silence from time to time while forcing him or her to think.

Supervising in Twos and Threes

For non-assessed work, students should not be supervised by themselves without the permission of the Director of Studies. Undergraduates may be supervised in pairs or small groups, though usually of no more than three students. It is important to get the chemistry right; do not be afraid to change a pair at once if they are ill-matched in ability or temperament. Try to prevent one partner dominating the discussion, and make the effort to encourage reluctant students – particularly those who are avoiding eye contact – into the discussion early on during the supervision.

Greater care than usual may be needed when criticising written work in larger supervision groups, and it may be desirable to talk to each student individually about his or her progress

from time to time. But pairing undergraduates can encourage the swapping of ideas, can lighten the atmosphere, and is often more enjoyable for all participants. In particular, it may cheer up students who lack self-confidence to discover that their more forthright peers are not necessarily more acute.

CamCORS: Supervision Reports, Student Problems and Payment

Supervisors are individually responsible for sending supervision reports on each individual supervisee to the Colleges. Individual Colleges are responsible for receiving those reports and giving feedback to students, and for paying supervisors. There is an online system called **CamCORS** for reporting. On the CamCORS system, supervisors provide brief reports which evaluate students' work and note any problems arising, as well as claiming payment for supervisions given from the appropriate Colleges. The reports are usually between 4 and 12 lines long, though more may need to be written if there have been significant problems. If a student is having serious difficulties with the work, supervisors are asked to tell the Director of Studies directly by email during the term, and not to leave this until the CamCORS report has to be submitted. The name and email address of the Director of Studies (and the student's personal tutor) can be seen in the link at the top right of the CamCORS report form.

It is useful to register your students on CamCORS early on during the term, as you will then have access to the contact details of their Director of Studies (and, equally, their Director of Studies will have access to yours). If you are not already registered to login to CamCORS, please contact the department on < ugradadmin@polis.cam.ac.uk >. Supervisors report once per term on each student they supervise; you should not complete a report for each supervision. A week or so before the end of Full Term, supervisors must send supervision reports, via CamCORS, to the Colleges. They usually form the basis of the discussion between the undergraduate and the Director of Studies and/or Tutor, to evaluate progress over the term and to consider opportunities for improvement. All students have automatic access to the reports submitted on CamCORS. Supervisors should receive a cheque in payment within a few weeks after the end of Full Term (or a direct bank transfer, if registered for this); if not, you should contact the relevant College's Tutorial Office. Supervisors must complete CamCORS reports in order to receive payment for supervisions, unless prior agreement has been made with the College.

Full information and an online introduction to CamCORS are at: <http://www.camcors.cam.ac.uk>

Assessed Work and Papers with different teaching formats

In addition to the papers taken by students through the regular supervision system leading to an exam in Easter term, there are a number of papers that are taught differently, usually with components that are formally assessed through means other than an exam:

- First year students on the History & Politics Tripos take the compulsory paper **HP1: Evidence & Argument** for which they submit one long essay rather than take an examination. This paper is taught largely through a mix of lectures and seminars, not by supervisions. Instead of supervisors, there are opportunities to act as seminar leaders or graduate teaching assistants for the seminars.
- **POL5** (for second year students) and **POL19** (for third year students) are papers for which students submit two 5,000-word essays, on questions selected from a long list provided at the start of the year by the Department. Supervision is generally only done by staff members (including postdocs, but usually not including PhD students). Students are entitled to three supervisions per essay, each of which is up to an hour in length. Generally the first supervision is to talk through the topic broadly and to encourage students to find a focus. For the second supervision, students should be encouraged to send you an essay plan in advance, which provides the basis for the discussion in the supervision. For the third essay, students should send you a full draft. The supervisor should review this draft in advance of the supervision, and should provide written comments to assist with the discussion in the supervision. Supervisors should not review more than one full draft of a long essay.
- **POL6** (statistics and methods) has a mixed teaching and assessment format. The first part of the paper involves regular supervisions on statistical techniques and methods, and is taught in Michaelmas Term and the first half of Lent Term. This material is assessed through the end-of-year exam. The second part is a data analysis project, submitted early in Easter Term, and which counts for 50% of the overall mark. Supervisors are needed for both components of this paper, although generally the data analysis project can only be supervised by staff (including postdocs).
- **POL9** and **HP3** are taught through seminars, leading to an examination. Students may have a couple of revision supervisions, usually early in Easter term. See the relevant paper guides for details.
- **POL21** (Politics of the Future) is assessed through two 5,000-words essays. The general structure of supervisions is similar to POL5 and POL19, although there are accompanying lectures and seminars for this paper as well as supervisions.
- **Dissertations** can be taken by students in their third years. There is a lot of variation in how dissertations are supervised, and it is useful to talk over the process with an experienced supervisor before committing to supervise one. In general, students should find a supervisor before they leave Cambridge for the summer, and so you can expect students who share your interests to approach you in or before June with a view to supervising their dissertations. It is often helpful to have a brief meeting with the student before deciding whether you would be a suitable supervisor for the topic

they intend. Students are entitled to a maximum of six supervisions over the course of a year. A supervisor should read no more than one full draft.

Although there is variation between these different papers, there are a few general guidelines. All supervisors should remind students for assessed work that where there are a significant number of grammatical, spelling and syntactical errors in the submitted work a candidate cannot receive a 2.1 mark for the piece of work in question.

POLIS discourages supervisors of assessed work from making predictions as to what mark they expect it to receive. It is very common—even with very experienced supervisors—for long essays and dissertations to receive lower marks from the Examiners than the supervisor expects, and supervisors' over-optimistic forecasts often lead to disappointment later, and to complaints. Instead of making these predictions, supervisors should concentrate on helping students to improve their work, and, if they ask at what standard they are working, refer them to the marking criteria so they can see on what their work will be judged.

Where there are supervisions for the papers listed above, supervisions with more than one student are the preferred format where possible. For POL5, POL19 and POL21, if students are answering the same essay question, it is generally expected that the first two supervisions will be held in groups of 2 or 3, and only the final supervision – to go over a draft essay – is held on a one-on-one basis. The main exception is dissertations, for which solo supervisions are necessary. Payment for these supervisions is made through CamCORS, as above.

Examination Preparation

Supervisors play a crucial role in helping students to prepare for the end-of-year examinations. It is therefore important that in preparing and conducting supervisions, supervisors have a clear knowledge and understanding not only of the paper, but also of the expectations regarding examination performance.

The paper guide will contain a general summary of the content of the paper as well as indications of the format of the examination paper. There is also a general guide to examinations on the POLIS website that it may be helpful for you to review before giving advice; this document includes the marking criteria by which students are assessed.

Supervisors should know that students are expected to have a broad knowledge and understanding of the paper as a whole, which they are able to apply to specific questions. These expectations are reflected in both the limited number and conceptually-focused nature of questions in many examination papers. In particular, students must be advised that for most papers not all topics covered during the year

will appear on the examination paper (the exceptions are the examinations for papers in the history of political thought, on which there is always one question per author or historical topic). Students should be strongly discouraged from relying on a narrow range of prepared topics or trying too hard to 'question-spot'. Instead, they should be encouraged to revise a wide range of topics in a general manner and to make links between different topics.

Copies of previous years' examination papers are available on the undergraduate Moodle website. Supervisors should familiarise themselves with past examination papers and examiners reports as well as the marking criteria. The material taught for papers does however change from year to year, with new topics introduced and old ones dropped. This may be clear from the paper guide, but do clarify this with the Paper Organiser in cases of doubt.

Examination answers should demonstrate knowledge and understanding, be analytical and critical in approach, and focus on the question asked. One of the most persistent problems in examination answers is that students try to replicate the essays that they wrote for supervisions in the exam, even if the exam question is asking them something subtly (or even explicitly) different from their supervision essay question. This makes it particularly important for students to be able to discuss not just their essays but the topic more broadly, to adopt a variety of perspectives on it, and to be able to apply their general understanding of the topic's themes to particular examples.

In the Easter Term, you may be contacted by an undergraduate whom you have supervised, or by a Director of Studies, to see if you would give a revision supervision before the examination. It is usual to get the undergraduate to write some timed essays from past exam papers, and to go through them, and then to field general questions. No more than one revision supervision should be given without permission from the Director of Studies. Claim payment for these supervisions in the normal way, via CamCORS. Students will often ask for explicit information about the content of the exam paper, sometimes under the misconception that all supervisors will have seen the exam paper; it's often worthwhile to inform them that this is not necessarily the case, so that comments you make are not interpreted as hints as to the questions that await them in the exam room.

Students with Disabilities

Some students taking papers in Politics and International Relations will have registered with the Disability Resource Centre and will need additional support in some areas. Directors of Studies or Paper Organisers will contact you with regards to students for whom they have received support assessments; these assessments outline what supervisors can do to improve the learning environment of these students. In most cases, this will involve providing specific types of feedback (for instance, on grammar or spelling), or providing feedback in specific

ways (such as written instead of verbal feedback, or directed reading). If you have any queries regarding what is suggested, or need advice on implementing this, please contact the Undergraduate Secretary, or the Disability Resource Centre <https://www.disability.admin.cam.ac.uk/>.

Students may also disclose disabilities to you directly, without having contacted the DRC. If this happens, you should notify the student's Director of Studies so that appropriate support can be implemented throughout all papers the student is studying; you should tell the student that you will be doing this.

Problems or Complaints

Supervision is an integral part of teaching and learning at Cambridge, and so although most supervisions will run smoothly, if problems do occur they must be rectified immediately. You should notify the student's Director of Studies as soon as possible if you encounter any difficulties with supervision. S/he and the Paper Organiser can work with you to fix the problem. If unsure what to do, please contact the Director of Undergraduate Education, who is Dr Christopher Brooke <cb632@cam.ac.uk> for the academic year 2022-23.