

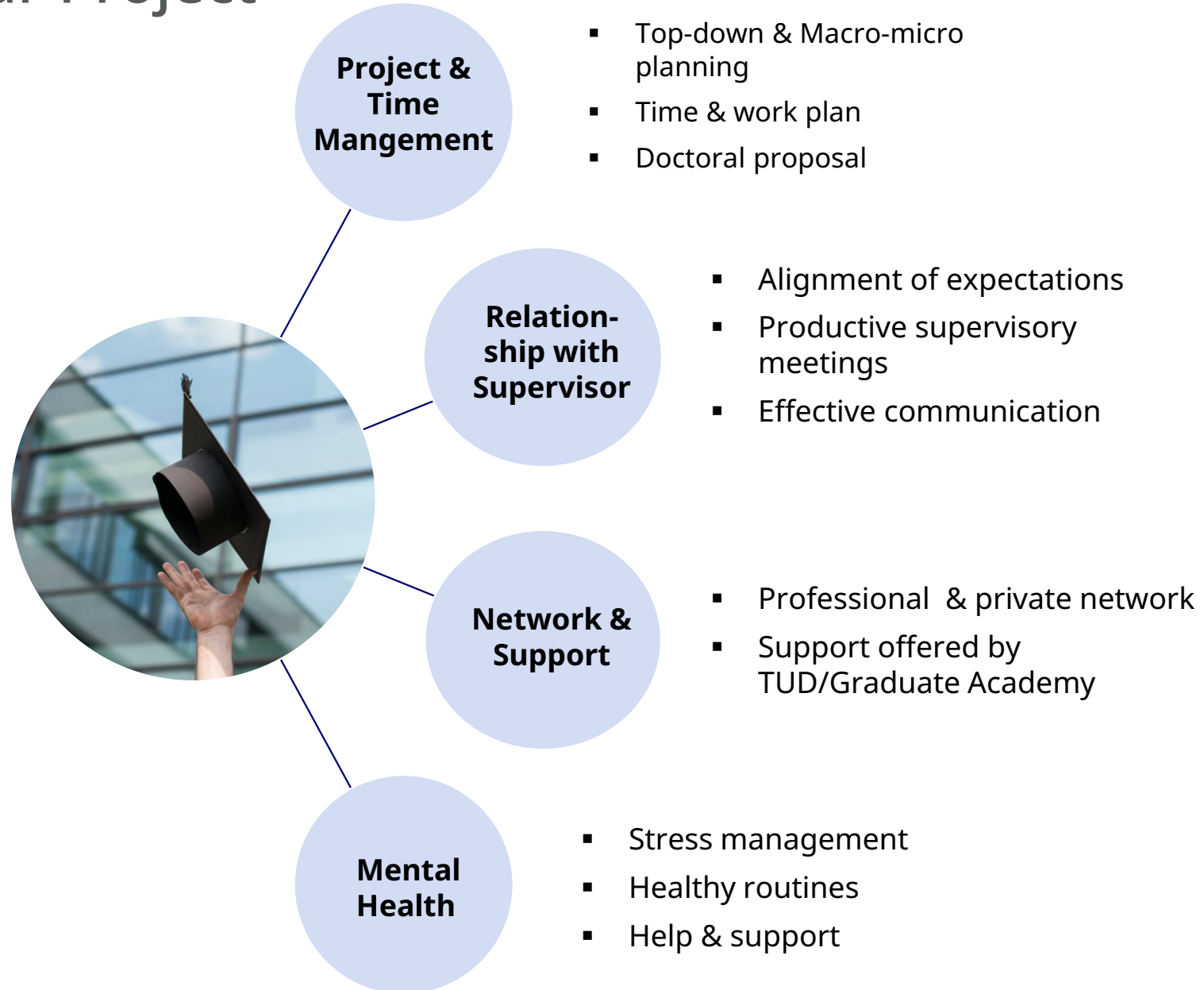
Your PhD, Your Project

Taking Ownership, Managing Time, and Working with Your Supervisor

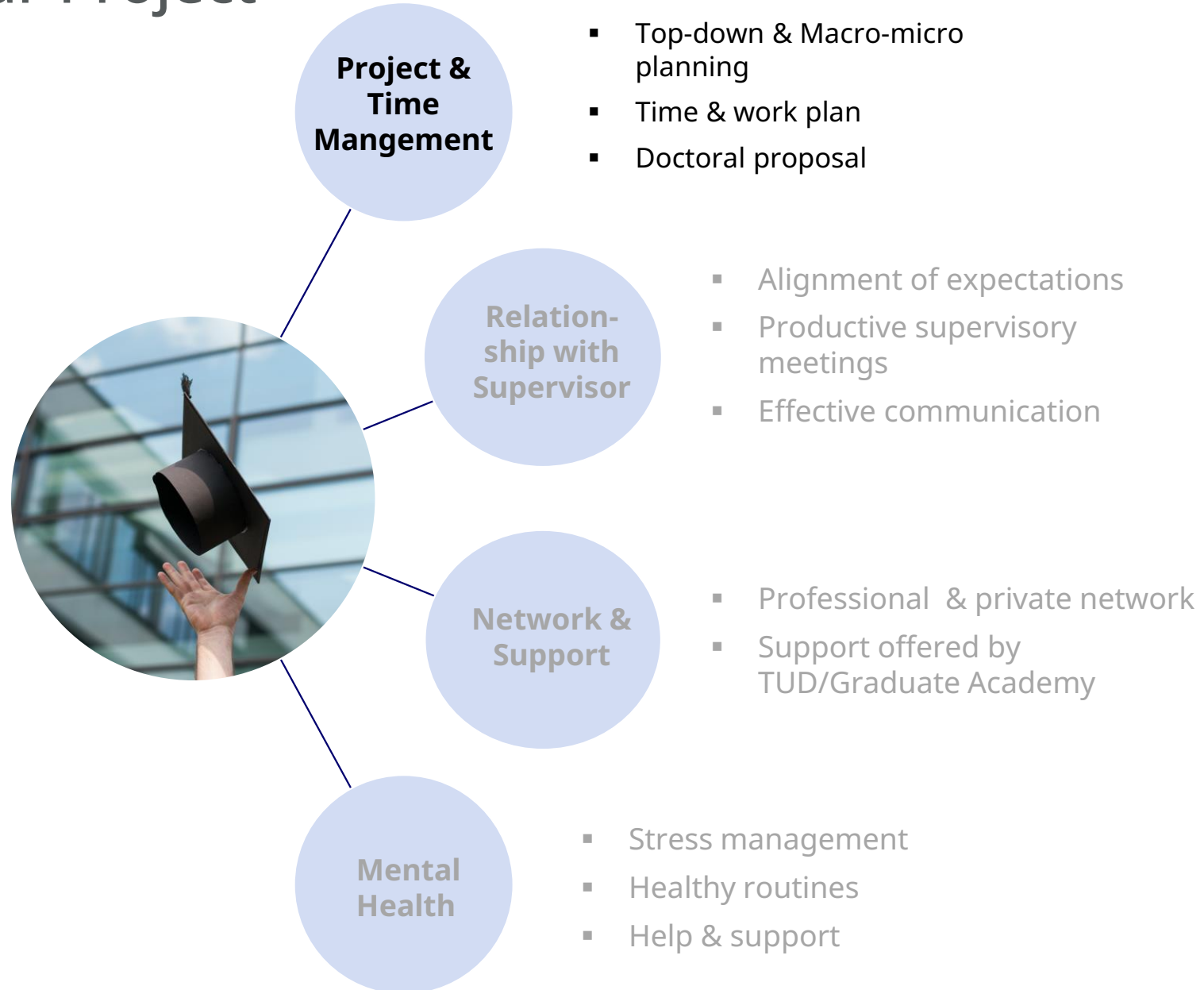
13 May 2026 | PhD Day of the Graduate Academy | Dr. Katharina Ulbrich



Your PhD – Your Project



Your PhD – Your Project



Top-down & macro-micro planning



Long term plans: your
PhD project as a whole
(3 – 6 yrs)

Medium term plans:
yearly, monthly

Short term plans:
weekly, daily planing, to-
do-lists

Macro planning level: stable

Micro planning level: flexible

- Define the **scope of the project**: time-wise (overall project plan) & content-wise (doctoral proposal)
- Plan **backwards**: start with the planned date of submission of your dissertation
- Identify **project phases, tasks & milestones** – allocate time slots
- **Visualize** your time & work plan
- Discuss it with your **supervisor**
- Use it to **monitor your PhD progress** & adapt it if needed

preparation timeline with task status. It includes activities such as lecture notes and assignment analysis, create list of interests, conduct prin

	Status	Jun					
		Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
assignment analysis	• In Progress						
s	• In Progress						
search	• Not Started Yet						
research	• Not Started Yet						
questions	• Not Started Yet						
activities	• Done						
otions	• In Progress						
ement	• In Progress						
	• Not Started Yet						
ogies	• In Progress						
n skills	• In Progress						
m bags	• In Progress						
	• Not Started Yet						
ith mentor	• Not Started Yet						
	• Done						

This slide is 100% editable. Adapt it to your needs and capture your audience's attention.

<https://www.slideteam.net/dissertation-project-timeline-report-with-task-status.html>

Writing a doctoral proposal / exposé

How?

- Title
- Topic and problem statement
- State of the art / research gaps
- Research objective(s)
- Research question(s)
- Research design / methods / materials
- Time & work plan
- References
- 4 – 20 pages

Why?

- to give yourself **direction**
- to discuss your PhD project more effectively **with your supervisor(s)**
- to convince **supporters**

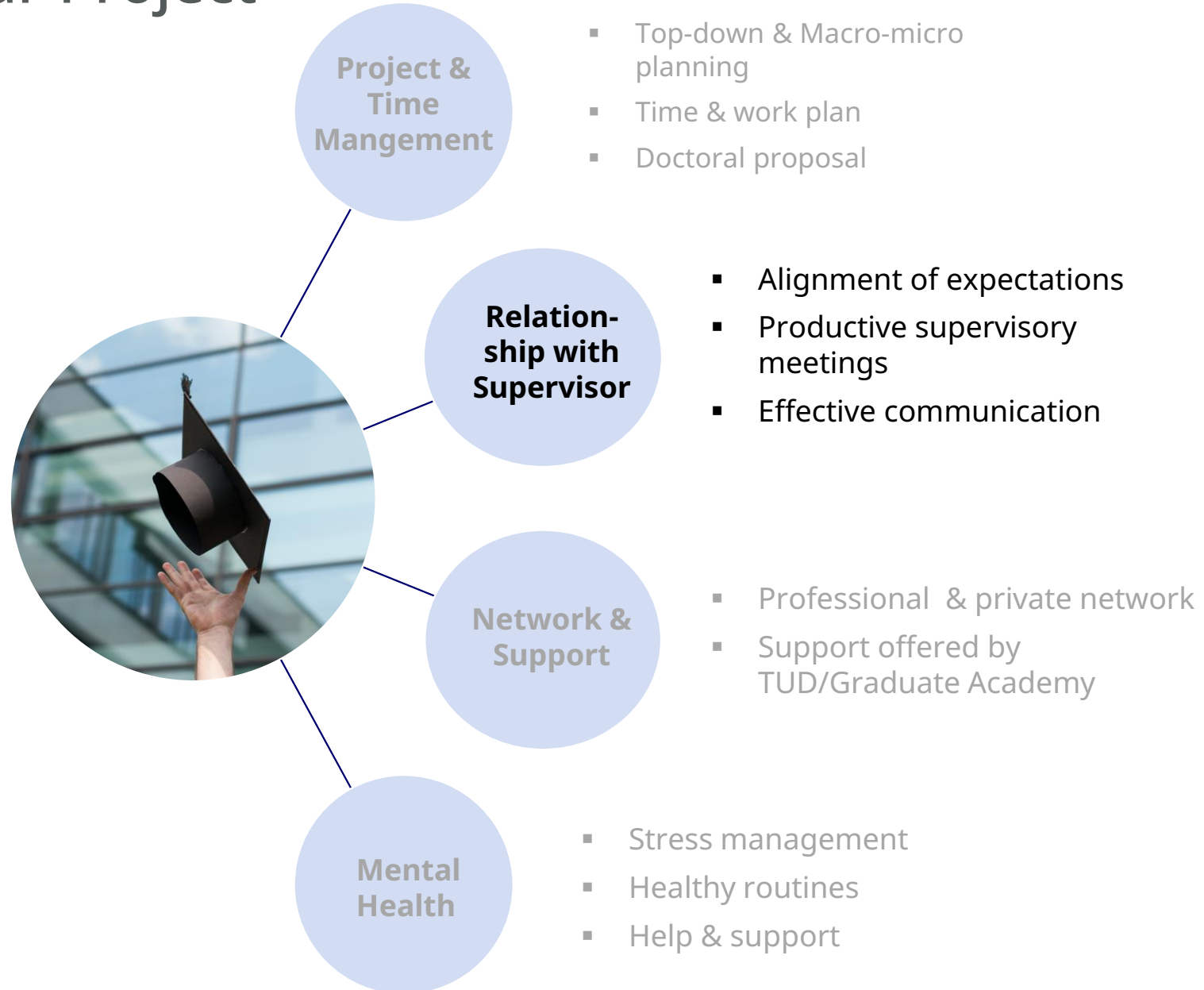
Writing exercise: **Quick fix proposal**



Try to answer the following questions in a quick manner and with complete sentences. Don't pay too much attention to style and spelling. If you can't think of sentences, write down questions. Take not more than 15 minutes for this exercise.

- 1. Topic:** What should my project be about?
- 2. Problem / Relevance:** Which problem, am I going to address? Why is it important to solve this problem?
- 3. Question:** What do I want to find out?
- 4. Objective:** What should be the outcome of my thesis?
- 5. Method:** How do I want to proceed?
- 6. Material:** What do I want to investigate (data, sources)?
- 7. Work plan:** Which milestones do I define? When do I want to finish my thesis?

Your PhD – Your Project



Doctoral Supervision in the German Scientific System

Traditional view

- set of **implicit** and **unexamined** processes & behaviors
- one-to-one **apprenticeship model**
- **power imbalance**, multiple one-sided **dependencies** (supervisor = superior = thesis reviewer)
- supervision behavior rather **intuitive**, based on **personal experiences**
- doctoral supervision: side focus with regard to **other priorities** (research/publishing)

Doctoral Supervision in the German Scientific System

Recent shift in perspective

- growing concerns of **improving the effectiveness & efficiency** of doctoral supervision
- expanding the supervisory relationship to a **supervisory team** including additional support for the doctoral candidate
- introduction & extension of **programs for supervisor development**
- embedding the supervisory relationship into **institutional frameworks**
- definition of **common standards** and **general guidelines** for good doctoral supervision

The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Why the supervisory relationship matters:

- ✓ **Timely, high-quality completion** of your doctorate
- ✓ **Your satisfaction** and wellbeing during the journey
- ✓ **Successful career pathways** post-graduation

Your role: You are not a passive recipient – you are an active partner. Take initiative to build a relationship that is professional, trusting, and constructive.



The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Take the first steps:

- ✓ Initiate a conversation about expectations
- ✓ Document agreements in writing
- ✓ Know your rights and the formal procedures
- ✓ Set up a Supervision Agreement incl. time & work plan

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The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Why Explicitness Matters

Most conflicts in doctoral supervision are not caused by bad intentions — but by unspoken expectations.

Core points:

- Expectations are often **implicit** and **culturally shaped**
- Early-stage doctoral researchers tend to “**wait and adapt**”
- Misalignment usually becomes visible only in **moments of tension**
- Academic culture often rewards “**independence**” — but rarely explains what it means.
- Supervisors **differ widely** in mentoring styles. The more senior the supervisor, the more implicit expectations and norms often become.

Clarity creates autonomy. Vagueness creates dependency.

The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Conversation starters...

1. Setting the Rhythm

*"To help me plan my work, could we agree on how often we'll meet?
What has worked well with your previous doctoral researchers?"*

*"Between our meetings, how do you prefer I reach you if I have
quick questions – email, brief message, or save them for our
sessions?"*

2. Feedback & Communication Style

*"What's your typical turnaround time for feedback on drafts? This
helps me plan my writing schedule."*

*"If I'm stuck or going in the wrong direction, would you prefer I
send you a brief update early, or bring it to our next meeting?"*

3. Scope & Decision-Making

*"Which decisions should I run by you first, and which ones can I
make independently and just keep you informed?"*

4. Milestones & Timeline

*"Could we sketch out an overall time and work plan and define
when key milestones or review points should happen?"*

*"What does 'good progress' look like to you at the 6-month or 12-
month mark?,"*

5. The Safety Net

*"If something isn't working for me - or if I'm struggling - I want to
raise it early rather than let it fester. What's the best way to bring up
concerns?"*

The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Use this **discussion sheet** to prepare for an early conversation with your supervisor about **mutual expectations**:

https://healthsciences.ku.dk/phd/supervision/documents/Expectation_alignment_between_supervisor_and_PhD_student_-_Discussion_sheet.pdf

The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

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The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Meeting Agenda & Documentation

- **Prepare** yourself: What do I need to discuss? Which questions do I want to be answered to continue my work? Set and send an agenda before the meeting.
- Use the agenda to **structure** the conversation with your supervisor and keep it **focused**.
- Write a short **summary** afterwards (What agreements were made?) and send it to the supervisor.
- Clarify next steps and **follow-ups**: When does the next meeting take place and what should be done until then?



The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

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Doctoral Supervision at TU Dresden

Documents that regulate doctorates at TU Dresden

- ✓ The [Doctoral Regulations](#) of your Faculty
- ✓ [GSP Statutes](#) binding document:
 - **Supervisory teams** of two supervisors from the start of the PhD on
 - At least one **external thesis reviewer**
 - Mandatory **Supervision Agreement**



The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

Take the first steps:

- ✓ Initiate a conversation about expectations
- ✓ Document agreements in writing
- ✓ Know your **rights** and the **formal procedures**
- ✓ Set up a **Supervision Agreement** incl. **time & work plan**

The Doctoral Supervision Relationship

The Supervision Agreement incl. Time & Work Plan

- Use the **formal template** as a starting point & add further topics according to your needs.
- Consider it not just a formality but a powerful **monitoring tool** for a successful supervisory relationship.
- Include a detailed **time & workplan** for the overall PhD project.
- **Revise** it regularly and **adapt** according to the progress and demands of your project.



The form is titled "Memorandum of Agreement for the Supervision of Doctoral Candidates - Supervision Agreement -". It features the logos of Dresden University of Technology and GA (Graduiertenakademie) at the top. Below the logos is the URL "www.tu-dresden.de/graduiertenakademie". The main heading is "Memorandum of Agreement for the Supervision of Doctoral Candidates - Supervision Agreement -". A dark blue header bar contains the text "- Parties concerned -". The form is divided into sections for "The Supervision Agreement is concluded between", "Co-supervisor:", and "Additional members of the supervisory team, if applicable:". Each section includes fields for "Doctoral candidate:", "Primary supervisor:", "Faculty:", "Title and Name:", and checkboxes for "TUD" and "external:". The form is designed to be filled out by the parties involved in the supervision agreement.

 Dresden University of Technology

 GA

www.tu-dresden.de/graduiertenakademie

Memorandum of Agreement for the Supervision of Doctoral Candidates - Supervision Agreement -

- Parties concerned -

The Supervision Agreement is concluded between

Doctoral candidate: _____

Primary supervisor: _____

Faculty: _____

Co-supervisor:

Title and Name: _____

☐ TUD ☐ external: _____

Additional members of the supervisory team, if applicable:

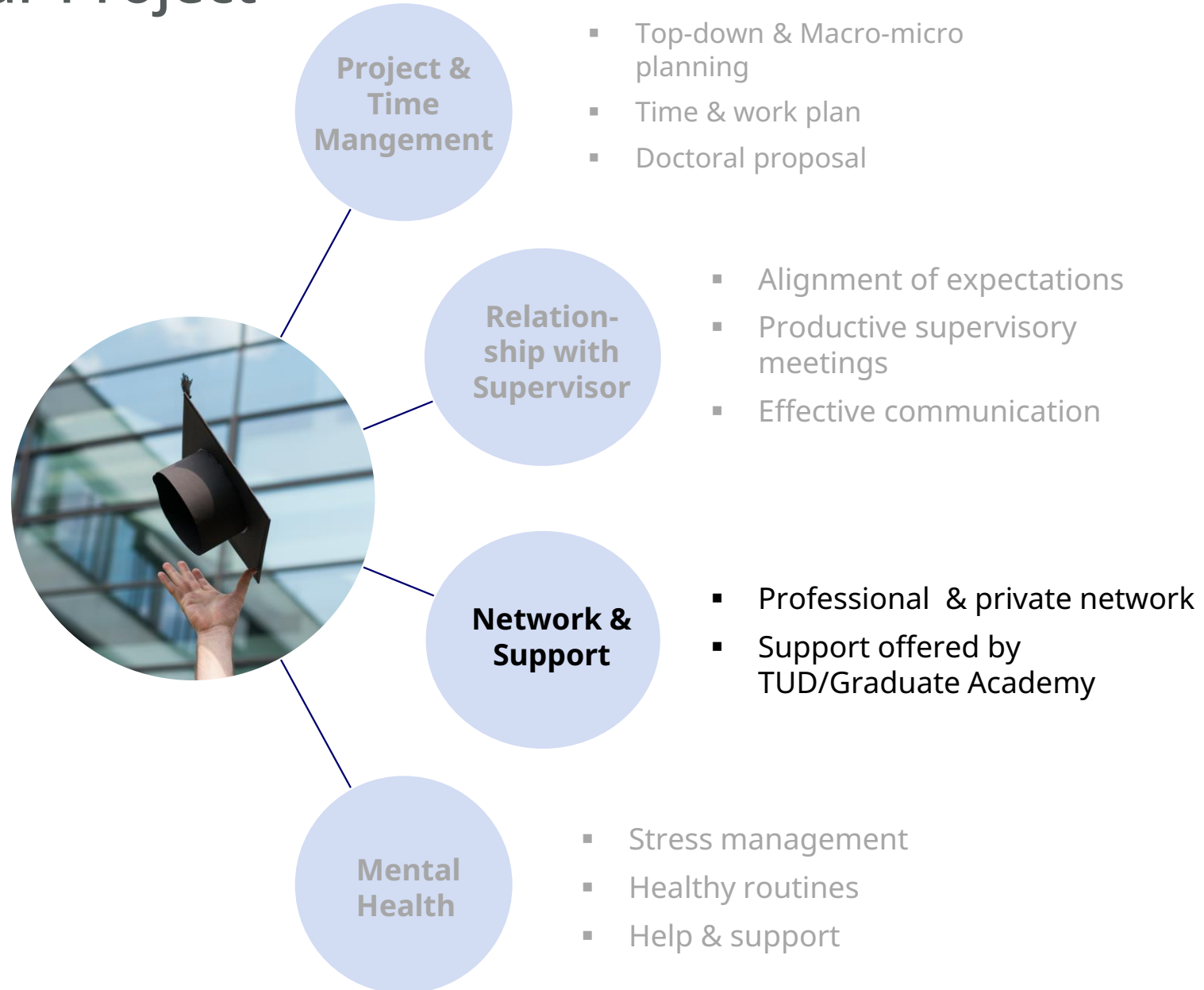
Title and Name: _____

☐ TUD ☐ external: _____

Title and Name: _____

☐ TUD ☐ external: _____

Your PhD – Your Project



Networking & Support

Diversify Your Support Network

Your supervisor is not your only resource.

There are also co-supervisors, mentors, doctoral representatives, peer groups, and transferable skills programs. This reduces the pressure that *one* relationship must be perfect.



Networking & Support

The Graduate Academy offers support and networking opportunities:

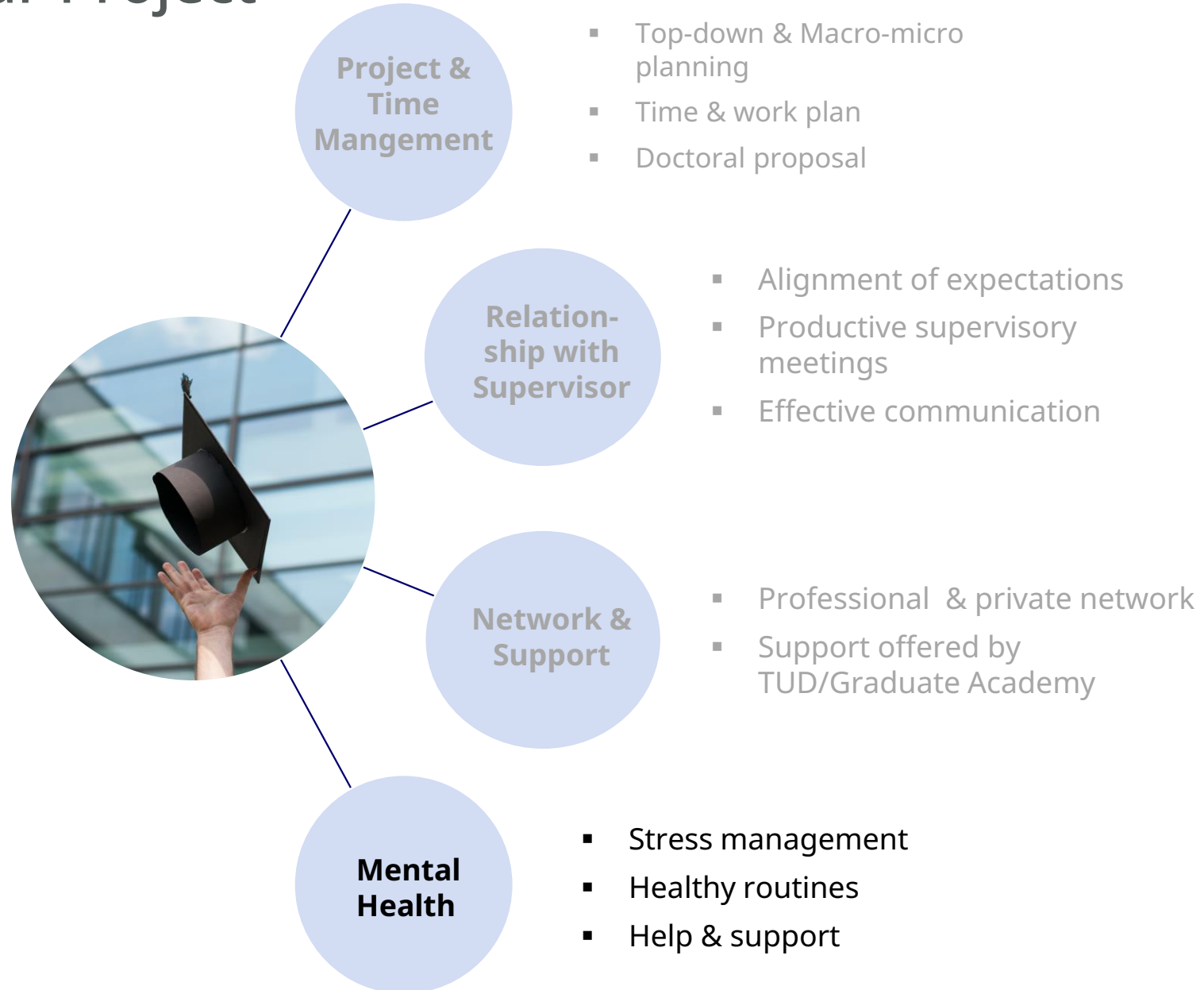
- Attend our workshops, writing weeks & events and network with doctoral candidates across disciplines
- Get one-to-one support
- Join the TUD Doctoral Council



GA Offers | Advice and Coaching



Your PhD – Your Project



Stress Management – Recognizing & Responding

Know Your Stress Signals

- **Physical:** Sleep disruption, tension headaches, fatigue, changed appetite
- **Cognitive:** Difficulty concentrating, negative self-talk, catastrophic thinking
- **Behavioral:** Procrastination, isolation, irritability

Evidence-Based Strategies

- **The "Good Enough" Principle:** Progress beats perfection; "done" is better than "perfect"
- **Time-blocking:** Protect deep work hours; batch admin tasks separately
- **Boundary setting:** Fixed hours, "no email" evenings, learning to say "not now"

Immediate Calming Techniques

- **Box breathing** (4-4-4-4) before supervisor meetings
- **5-minute walking breaks** every hour
- **"Worry time" journaling** – contain rumination to 10 minutes/day

Healthy Routines – Sustainable Energy

Sleep Hygiene

- **Regular** sleep/wake times (even on weekends)
- 30-minute **wind-down routine**; screens off one hour before bedtime
- Sleep is **productivity**: memory consolidation happens during rest

Movement as Medicine

- Establish „**tiny habits**“: 10-minute walk > overwhelming gym plans
- **Movement breaks** during writing sessions (stretching, stair climbing)
- **Nature exposure** when possible (even 10 minutes reduces cortisol)

Social Connection

- Schedule **friend time** as seriously as lab meetings (research isolation is real)
- Find "**PhD buddies**" outside your cohort/competition circle
- Maintain **non-academic identities** (hobbies, communities beyond the university)

Help & Support – You Don't Have to Do This Alone

Mental Health Support@TUD

- **Occupational Health Service:** psychological counseling (for employees)
- **Studentenwerk:** psycho-social counseling (for students)
- **Graduate Academy:** coaching, conflict counseling, mental health first aid

Further Services

- **Therapist search** of the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians of Saxony
- **Dresden crisis hotline**
- <https://enhance-university.de/enhance-en/> Mental Health support for students

Mental Health Maintenance Plan

Name:

Date:

Review date (optional):

1. My "Doing Okay" Baseline

When my mental health is generally stable, I usually notice:

Mood:

Energy level:

Sleep:

Focus / motivation:

Social connection:

Other signs I'm doing okay:

.....

.....

.....

2. Regular Maintenance Habits

These are the things that help keep me well when done consistently (not perfectly).

☐ Sleep routine:

☐ Movement / body care:

☐ Mental or emotional care (meditation, therapy, journaling, etc.):

.....

- ☐ Social connection:
- ☐ Rest / joy / creativity:
- ☐ Other supports (structure, nature, meds, etc.):
.....
.....

3. Early Warning Signs

Signals that tell me I may be drifting and need to adjust:

- ☐ Changes in sleep
- ☐ Irritability or emotional numbness
- ☐ Increased anxiety or rumination
- ☐ Withdrawal / avoidance
- ☐ Loss of motivation or pleasure
- ☐ Other personal signs:
.....
.....

4. If I Notice Warning Signs, I Will...

(Simple, realistic steps—not punishment.)

- Reduce or pause:
.....
- Increase support (support network):
.....
- Recommit to key habits:
.....



Self-talk reminder I want to hear:

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5. My Support System

People and resources I can lean on:

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.....

People I trust:

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.....

Professionals:

.....

.....

Helpful resources (apps, practices, places):

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.....

6. Notes to My Future Self

(Encouragement, perspective, or reminders.)

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Thank You!

Contact:

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Graduate Academy

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