

PGR Tips on being assertive

This issue is on a life skill rather than concentrating on an aspect of your doctorate or career. Being assertive is an attitude that takes practice to adopt. Try to incorporate the following tips in your response to any future situations, whether in your doctorate (for example negotiating with your supervisor) or the rest of your life. Being assertive fits into B1 (Personal qualities) and D1 (working with others) of the [Researcher Development Framework](#).

An assertive approach to any problem is one which values the views of all people involved and works towards a solution. When you are assertive, your frame of mind will be 'I'm okay, you're okay'. This in contrast with either an aggressive approach, which is characterised by an 'I'm okay, you're not okay' mind set or with a passive one which says 'I'm not okay, you're okay'.

Tackle any issues as they arise

It is easier as issues tend to escalate with time and any bad feelings may well intensify with time. It is probably a good idea to practise being assertive on smaller issues before using it to good effect on ones more important to you.

Be aware of your body language

Most communication is non-verbal, so adopt body language that is open and positive. In addition make sure your spoken language is constructive.

Listen

It is vital that you listen to the other person to understand their perspective and to jointly work towards a solution. Active listening is more than allowing others time to speak, it can involve asking for clarification and elaboration and the use of nods and silences.

Show you understand

This can be done by rephrasing what has been said and showing empathy with the other person's point of view. Do this without undermining your own position. For example 'I understand that you are very busy and that you have limited time.'

Say what you think and feel

If you don't express what you think or feel, you can't expect the other party to know. Concentrating on feelings has the benefit that people can't disagree with how you feel. For example 'I am feeling worried whether I have adopted the right framework for this section, and really need your input to get on with this.'

State what you want to happen next

How would you like to go from here? Check how that tallies with the other party's wishes. For example 'I would really need you to read this so I can work on it while you are away.'

Work on a common solution

By listening to each other it may well become obvious that your positions are not at all mutually exclusive. Otherwise a mutually acceptable compromise may well be viable. See also the [PGR Tips on negotiation](#).