

# Finding an Advisor and Developing an Effective Working Relationship with Them

Captions



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# Link for Captions



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# Finding an Advisor



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# Exercise: Ask Faculty Member to Work with Them

- Pair up with a partner
- You will role play talking with a faculty member in their office and ask them if you can join their research group.
- Take 2 minutes to do this, and then switch roles.



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# When student, what were you trying to find out?

Funding

Project ideation

Advising style:  
hands on or  
hands off

Be systematic when seeking out potential advisors



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# When faculty, what were you trying to find out?

Funding

Project  
availability

Advising style:  
mentoring

Reflect on fit



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# What do we consider when admitting/advising students?



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# How to find a good advisor/mentor

## Get to know your potential advisor(s)

- Meet them @ conferences
- Chat virtually (but don't be offended if advisor can't meet)
- Know their research
  - read their papers (but propose your own ideas)
- Be persistent (but don't pester)

## Get to know their lab culture

- Talk to multiple grad students in the lab/research group!
  - including graduated students
  - ex-students?
- Understand expectations
  - funding structure
  - work style
  - project ideation



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# Managing the Advisor-Advisee Relationship



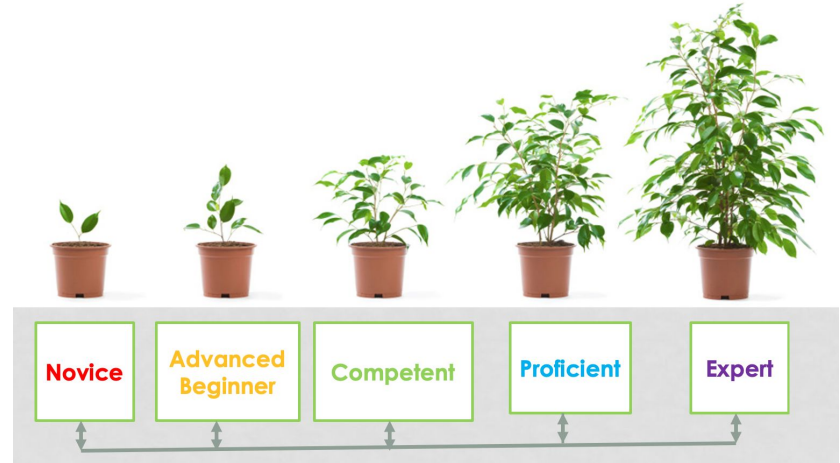
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# A PhD program is an Apprenticeship

An ideal advisor is ....

- a good research advisor
- a good mentor (as *one part* of your mentor team)
- a good fit



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# Communication is key to management

- Multiple vehicles for communication
  - Regular meetings
    - Networking
    - Group meeting - lab, research group, project
    - One-on-one - research progress, feedback
    - Multiple advisors
  - Emails
    - Keep emails short and direct
    - All messages are (should be) read → responses may be slow
    - Be mindful of response timing expectations
- Ask for more time (early) if you need it



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# Make the Most of Every Interaction

- **Outline** the meeting
  - Identify discussion points
  - Verify/validate the motivation behind each discussion point
  - Send out an agenda before the meeting
- Make sure expectations and assumptions are clear, ask for feedback regularly
- Maintain project archives
  - Take notes, organize them, and send out summaries



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# Discussing Change



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# Exercise: Hard discussions with your advisor

- Find a partner. Pick a scenario and assign roles (student, advisor).
- Role play for 2 minutes.
- Switch roles after 2 minutes.

## Scenarios:

- (1) Tell your advisor you would like to work on one of the other projects in your group.
- (2) Tell your advisor you feel you should be a co-author on a paper your labmate is working on.
- (3) Tell your advisor you are thinking about switching advisors.



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# HARD DISCUSSIONS

What was the most difficult part?

What were some successful strategies you/your partner used?



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# What if it's not working....

Sometimes, despite all your good efforts, things don't work. How to handle it depends on the situation

- poor working style fit
- poor research fit
- something more serious is wrong

Try to remember, changing advisors is NOT the end of the world:

- Often, if you feel there is a problem then your advisor likely feels that way as well
- While changing advisors may cost some time, it may be less than you think and may be made up by better results/outcomes



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# What if it's not working....

## Changing institutions

- if no other advisors are a good research fit
- if you can find a better fit

## How to prevent this from happening

- select institutions where there are at least 2 faculty members of interest
- regular check-ins with your advisor
- mutual feedback sessions



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# What if you need to add an advisor?



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# Wrap Up

- How to find an advisor?
- How to maintain your relationship?
- Discussing change with your advisor!



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# Questions?

## Resources

A site with some good tips (some of which we've adopted & adapted for this talk):

<https://greatresearch.org/2013/08/14/managing-your-advisor/>



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# Back Up Slides



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# Take home messages

Do your research! Look for

- A good research advisor
  - Productively engaged in research you are passionate about
  - Willing and able to effectively teach and guide you in research
  - Able to help fund your research
- A good mentor
  - Cares about your career & effectively supports your success
- A good fit
  - Personalities, research style & philosophy, lab structure and people
- It takes a village: You may need more than one advisor and mentor
- It's a two way street: Communicate to your advisor the support that you need & try to work out problems



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# Finding advisors for interdisciplinary research

- One, two or more advisors and mentors? Often, it takes a village.
- Do they appropriately balance breadth vs depth of research?
- Do they have a core identity that supports or overlaps with yours?
- Are they open-minded and enthusiastic about learning from other fields?
- Can they provide financial support for interdisciplinary research?
- Will you find a community of researchers that support your work?



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