

How to Make the Most of Student-Advisor Relationships

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Link to captions

<https://bit.ly/3PYcqIB>



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Quick Poll

Who is currently a PhD student? (vs MSc)

Who already has a grad/research advisor? (vs in the process of selecting one)



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How to Make the Most of Student-Advisor Relationships

What is the role of the advisor?

What is your role as the student?

Navigating challenging situations



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Two (Extreme) Advising Relationships

Hands-off



Hand-holding



**Neither is ideal.
Communication and agency are key!**



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Your advisor is a guide



Guidance on:

- Research topics
- Publication venues
- Career planning
- Courses to take



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Your advisor is a teacher



Teach you:

- Research skills and strategy
- How to evaluate existing research
- Communication and presentation skills
- Professional and ethical behavior



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Your advisor is your promoter



- Foster and promote your career
- Enable career opportunities, visibility, and awards
- Support and encourage you through your job hunt and beyond

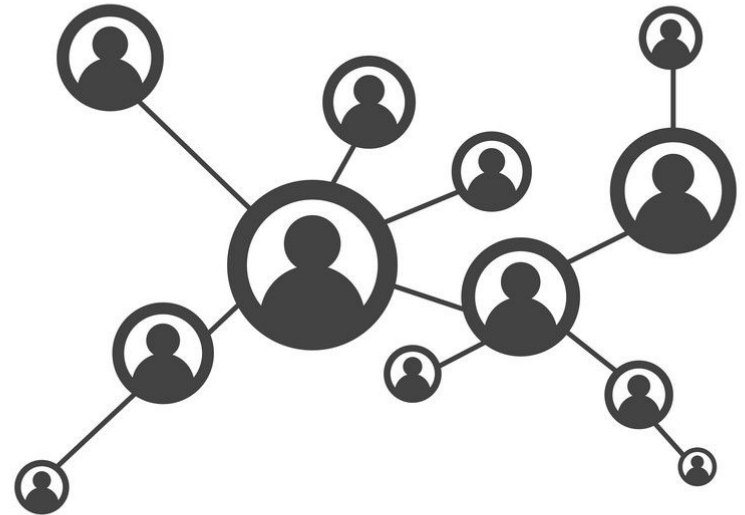


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Your advisor is your network seed

- Your advisor can expose you to opportunities for networking at conferences and other events.
- Their colleagues and your research lab peers will become important nodes in your network.



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Activity

[THINK] Work alone to make a list of your **priorities and preferences** in **what you expect from an advisor** (1 min)

[PAIR] In pairs or triples, discuss **your lists and why they are important** to you. Do you have **similarities or differences** in your answers? (4 min)

[SHARE] Volunteer one or two items you discussed to the larger group (3 min)



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What is Your Role as a Student?

- Manager of your graduate experience
- Need to be proactive and organized
- Need to effectively communicate
 - Goals
 - Areas for growth
 - What does and does not work for you
 - How advisors and mentors can help
 - Meeting cadence and preferred ad hoc communication mechanisms
- Need to seek out and take advantage of other resources
- Need to be open to your advisor's feedback and guidance



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Manage Regular Advising Meetings

- Bring a written plan (e.g., slides, agenda document)
- Start with context
 - Problem you're working on and why it's important
 - Target deliverable
 - Progress made so far
- Discuss recent accomplishments
 - New definitions, related work, insights, progress on implementation, experiments, data, proposed solutions, ...
- Discuss problems or challenges
 - Bring detailed examples



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Manage Regular Advising Meetings (cont.)

- Agree on what to accomplish next

- Propose next steps
- Discuss and revise accordingly
 - e.g., too ambitious, too limited, pursue some intermediate steps or totally new direction

- Discuss concrete products for next meeting

- Provide written summary on next steps

- Maintain research notebook

TO DO LIST

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Manage Discussions of Longer Term Plans

- Discuss longer term goals and strategies for achieving those goals
 - Paper submission
 - Acquisition of skills or experiences
 - Career goals
- Review your overall progress
 - Ask if you are making adequate progress
 - Discuss your strengths and weaknesses
 - How you can build on your strengths
 - How you can address your weaknesses
 - Ask about specific opportunities
 - Internships, workshops, fellowships, teaching opportunities



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Navigate Your Own Path



- Find and explore opportunities to develop your skills
 - Take courses on research methods, statistics, data visualization, etc.
 - Attend workshops on specific technology needed for research
 - Attend writing workshops
 - Attend teaching workshops
 - Give talks (including practice talks)
 - ...



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Activity

[THINK] What are some **areas of growth** for you regarding **your responsibilities** in the adviser-student relationship? (1 min)

[PAIR] Discuss your responses and how you plan to work on making improvements. Do you have **similarities or differences** in your answers? (4 min)

[SHARE] Volunteer one or two items you discussed to the larger group (3 min)



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Navigating challenging situations

What to do when the relationship has ups and downs?



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Relationships Have Ups & Downs

- Conflict over
 - Mismatched working styles
 - Mismatched expectations
 - The relationship is one-sided
 - Lack of funding
- When problems become acute
 - Communication is breaking
 - Frequent arguments
 - Lack of interest from at least one side
 - Inconsistencies and contradictions

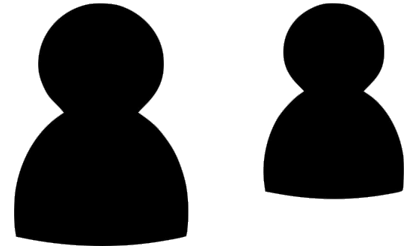
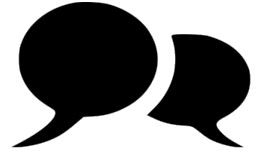


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How to repair a relationship

- Open/frank communication
- Setting up boundaries
- Define common and realistic goals and expectations
- Define contingency plans
- Balance the effort
- Find a co-advisor
- Talk to your peers in your research lab
- Talk to your peers in other labs
- Learn about campus resources such as counseling center, ombuds office, etc.



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Activity

In pairs, one of you play the student and one the advisor.

Consider a scenario in which you are discussing **how much to work over the upcoming holiday** to meet a **paper deadline**.

>> As the **advisor**, you are junior faculty, and this submission is extremely important to your tenure case.

>> As the **student**, you are going home to see family for the first time in 3 years.





**Despite all intentions, the
relationship can still fail**



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How to break up with your advisor

- You don't need to stay on an unhappy situation
 - Find another advisor on your same department
 - Switch programs/universities
- The way in which you make your exit matters!
 - **Best case scenario:** your old advisor is an ally, participates in your committee, writes a recommendation letter
 - **Worst case scenario:** you made a lifelong enemy, whose only goal in life is to ruin your career
- Do NOT burn all the bridges
 - Communicate, be polite, be helpful



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How Do You Find Additional Support?

- Create or join peer networks
 - Paper reading group
 - Qualifying exam study group
 - Thesis writing group
 - Online student groups
 - Conference student groups
- Find additional mentors
 - Senior research member of group
 - Research group alumni
 - Industry researcher in your area
 - Former research mentors
 - Teaching faculty mentor
- How do you create connections?
 - Volunteer to present your work
 - Ask for feedback on preliminary research
 - Ask questions after a talk
 - TA for a faculty member
 - Do an internship
 - Participate in “Meet a Senior X” programs



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Questions?

- Come talk to us or email
 - mrm@cs.princeton.edu
 - mcakmak@cs.washington.edu
- More advice on student-advisor relationships
 - [UW Allen School Advising Guide](#)
 - [Brown Graduate Advising and Mentoring](#)
 - [Y. Kohno's "Advice on advice"](#) (and more)
 - [N. Feamster's "Managing your Advisor"](#) (and more)
 - [D.A. Patterson's "Your Students Are Your Legacy"](#)
 - [J.D. Ullman's "Advising Students for Success"](#)
 - [M. DesJardins's "How to Succeed in Graduate School: A Guide for Students and Advisors"](#)



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