

FINDING AND DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR ADVISOR

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PhD Advisor Relationship

Advisors apprentice PhD students in research



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Apprentice relationship

Advisor explains, shows, and helps you do research

They teach you

- Research skills
- Tactical planning
- Strategic planning

Foster your career development



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Apprentice relationship

Finding research problems

- Starter problems to develop skills
- Problems worthy of PhD
- Tackling big problems by dividing them up

Background

- Reading literature: critical reading and understanding

Research skills

- Proofs, implementation, data analysis, statistics, etc.
- Organizing research meetings
- Organizing and writing papers and proposals
- Giving talks



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Advising and mentoring are not exactly the same

Research shows that those who are mentored achieve greater career advancement and higher satisfaction than those who are not mentored



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What is a Mentor?

- Acts as advocate for your professional and personal development as well as research
- Relationship develops and lasts over an extended period of time
- Helps you navigate problems, advice, contacts, and information
- Encourages you
- Advocates for you when you aren't there



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You need a village

A research advisor who is also a mentor is ideal, but you should also develop mentors

- You need mentors in addition to your advisor
- Could be in your department
- Could be in research area but in different university or in industry



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The nicest person?

A woman?

The only person matching your research interests?

Anyone who will have you?

A great teacher you just had in class?

FINDING YOUR ADVISOR

The oldest and wisest person?

The youngest and most energetic?

Someone you get along with?

Someone you share non-research interests with?

True/False Self-Reflection

1. The nicest faculty member in my research area is the best advisor for me.
2. My research advisor needs to give me lots of positive feedback and not upset me with negative feedback.
3. My advisor should be the most well-known, high-powered faculty member in my research area, despite being too busy to meet with me.
4. My advisor needs to be knowledgeable, active, and well-respected.
5. I'm willing to change my research area so I have financial support and a strong advisor to help me succeed.
6. I prefer only one advisor/mentor to avoid conflicting advice from different perspectives.



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The Process of Finding an Advisor

Identify your department's typical process.

At admission time each faculty member admits students specifically to work with them.

Once enrolled students admitted without assigned research advisors, then some combination of:

- Faculty identify potential students from classes
- Faculty use trial period via independent study project
- Students identify preferences and approach faculty



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Do Some Research!

- Talk to several potential faculty research advisors
- Talk to students who have worked with them
- Take classes from them
- Do a small independent study project with them
- Consider funding consequences (RA, TA, ??)
- Consider your research interests and career goals
- Full versus Associate versus Assistant Professors as Advisors



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Considerations



- Is the person in a research area you like?
- Is their work current and relevant? Funded? Publications in top venues?
- How many students do they supervise?
- How long does it take students to finish?
- What is the placement of past students?
- How responsive are they?
 - How long to return written materials?
 - How accessible?
 - How helpful?



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More Considerations



- Are students given responsibilities?
- How much freedom do students have?
 - Learn to do research, find problems
- Does the advisor publish with students? What is the order of names?
- Who presents the papers that are coauthored?
- Do they take students to conferences and help with networking?
- Are their work habits compatible with yours?



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DEVELOPING A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR ADVISOR

Kathryn

Interacting With Your Advisor

Listen

- They aren't always be right, but they have research experience, earned a PhD, and successfully navigated the academic job market

E-mail

- Answer your advisor's e-mails, in a clear and timely fashion. If your advisor hasn't replied to your e-mail in a few days, remind them you need a reply.

Meet with your advisor

- Meet regularly – don't cancel meetings, but have something to say!

Feedback

- Ask for feedback directly on all aspects of your career. At least once or twice a year, discuss long and medium term career goals and progress

Keep it professional

- But if life intrudes and you are in a situation where this doesn't seem possible (illness, etc.), also seek additional advice and mentorship.



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Research Meetings

Agenda

- Make an agenda for every meeting with your advisor. Outline topics, identify their importance and prioritize.

Summary

- Start each meeting by summarizing the previous meeting. Remind them what you agreed on as next steps, summarize what you've done and haven't done since then, and review your agenda.

Results

- Try to bring results (graphs, tables, theorems, proofs, figures, demos) to every meeting. Discuss problems and alternatives, ideally based on explicit examples and counter examples, data.

Next steps

- propose the next steps
- revise / refine with advisor
- agree on goals for the next meeting

Write up meeting notes and share with advisor/group



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Research Meetings

Agenda

- Make an agenda for every meeting and identify their importance and prioritize.

- Go prepared.
- Lead the meeting discussion.

Summary

- Start each meeting by summarizing the previous meeting. Remind them what you agreed on as next steps, summarize what you've done and haven't done since then, and review your agenda.

Results

- Try to bring from your advisor may change your plan! (s) to every meeting. That's ok – you're looking for their feedback! explicit examples

Next steps

- propose the next steps
- revise / refine with advisor
- agree on goals for the next meeting

Write up meeting notes and share with advisor/group



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Activity: Groups of two

1. What are you doing right in advisor-advisee meetings?
2. What can you do better?
3. Do you have a role model? Who is she/he? Why is she/he your role model?



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GETTING WHAT YOU NEED OUT OF YOUR ADVISORS AND MENTORS

Ayşe

DID YOU KNOW...

**FACULTY OFTEN *NOT* TRAINED ON HOW TO
BE GOOD ADVISORS or MENTORS**

Who is Least Mentored?

- Students
- People working in jobs considered atypical for their gender, race, etc.
- First-generation professionals
- and more...



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Helping People be Better Mentors

- Discuss longer term goals and strategies
- Discuss your strengths and weaknesses
- Ask for information and resources – classes to take, how to find a topic,...
- Ask for specific training: elevator talk, reviews
- Ask to go to conferences and workshops
- Ask to be nominated for appropriate awards
- Ask for meetings when more needed
- Ask for introductions to key people



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**WHAT IF THE ADVISOR
RELATIONSHIP IS NOT WORKING?**

What If It's Not Working Out?

1. Help your advisor to be the mentor you need:
 - ask for what you need: more feedback, career options, discussion
2. Keep advisor, but find mentors elsewhere
3. Ask for a meeting with advisor to discuss situation frankly and agree on alternative approaches
 - clear objectives with timeline, agree on what each will do, evaluate how it went
4. Consider changing research advisors
 - easier to do earlier
 - talk to graduate advisor and other faculty about alternatives and funding impact
 - fresh start with lessons learned vs. time
 - don't bad-mouth your advisor even if you switch



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Activity: In groups of two

Select a scenario and **act it out** as advisor and advisee

1. Advisee is not happy with the research topic assigned. There is another professor in the same department whose research seems to be a better fit, and it seems that positions may be available in their group.
2. It seems like advisor-advisee meetings are generally not productive: advisor is not happy with the outcomes, student is often confused about next steps.
3. Advisor would like to submit a paper to a conference and the deadline is soon; student is worried that it is impossible to finish the paper on time and a missed deadline will impact the working relationship poorly.
4. Advisee is late in delivering some tasks agreed upon in the last meeting with the advisor, and she is not responsive to advisor's emails and she is rushing to finish the tasks.



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Advisors and Mentors

- Very special people in your life with lasting effects on your career and your life
- Mentor relationship(s) grow over time – and may find you in unexpected places
- These are important relationships and making a match takes time and self reflection

Invest in these relationships!



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