

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: Tips for Mentees¹

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Introduction

This third publication of the *Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience* series focuses on the experience of the mentee. This article aims to serve as a resource for mentees who are seeking tips and support as they work with their mentors in academia and beyond. Mentees may be undergraduate students, graduate students, or early career faculty. They could also be postgraduates employed within business and industry. Mentees may be assigned mentors through a formalized established mentorship program, or they may select mentors more organically through networking (Eby & Allen, 2008; Erickson et al., 2009). This publication describes the role of the mentee and provides practical tips that can be applied in any setting. This publication also provides an overview of the *Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience* series in Appendix A.

The Role of the Mentee

Mentees comprise a broad range of individuals who are in the role of “learner” in a mentoring relationship. There is no requirement for a mentee to be younger or in any particular position relative to the mentor. It is recommended that the mentor and mentee align their expectations for the mentoring relationship, determining what the mentee hopes to gain and how the mentor will support the mentee in their

development. This could include identifying the priorities of the mentee, and ways the mentor can support the mentee in their efforts. Mentees may be looking for particular resources to support their interests, potential opportunities for professional development or training, or access to professional organizations and networking prospects. A general checklist for mentees to follow is below.

- Discuss your needs with your mentor.
- Set goals and responsibilities for you and your mentor, with agreed upon methods of communication and frequency of meetings.
- Keep track of what you have discussed and check progress against goals.
- Consider a mentoring agreement. A mentoring agreement is a formal document you can use that outlines the structure of the relationship of you and your mentor, including roles and responsibilities, confidentiality, and feedback expectations (Mind Tools, 2024).

International Students and Professionals

Williams-Nickelson (2009) has noted that mentoring relationships are especially critical for navigating the complex educational and career paths throughout and after graduate

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school for women and other underrepresented groups. There are added challenges that international students may have while adjusting to a new environment and culture, so mentoring relationships and networks are a valuable addition to their academic socialization (Rose, 2005). With today's global interconnectedness, mentoring relationships can take place with an international context between mentors and mentees with widely different cultures (Vaiman et al., 2022). Some tips for successful international mentoring relationships include the following (ASAE, 2024):

- Try to understand each other's cultures.
- If connecting across time zones, be patient and work to connect regularly.
- Be honest in communication and share your needs as openly as possible.

Mentoring Path

Mentoring is not necessarily a linear process. There are steps and stages where a mentee may begin and then re-enter, depending on needs and ways they may change over time. It is important to first establish needs as a mentee. Spend some time in self-reflection, asking some of the following questions:

- What do I need or how do I find out what I need to be successful?
- When do I need it?
- Where/in what specific areas?
- Where can I find this?

Mentors may come through a formal assignment, such as a faculty advisor or senior associate. Mentoring relationships may also form when the mentee proactively seeks to expand their mentoring network. Mentoring relationships can be formed by connecting in person with someone local or by connecting virtually with someone who is hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Mentees may not know all their needs from the start, so a mentoring network can be dynamic and develop over time.

Once needs and potential mentors have been identified, mentees then need to establish the purpose of the relationship. How often should the mentor and mentee meet? What are the goals and expectations for the meeting? As the mentoring relationship continues, there should be continuous self-reflection and interactions that go in both directions between the mentor and mentee. There should also be a continuous review of goals and possible renegotiation as needs change.

Helping to Build a Mentoring Network

Mentees should seek out a network of mentors as well as resources such as books, online modules, podcasts, or videos to grow their professional and academic skills. Mentors may be local, or they may be affiliated with other institutions or organizations. In addition, some mentors may help to fulfill a more obvious and immediate need, whereas others are potential or future connections whom you might need further into your program or career. Some mentors may help support you professionally, while others help to support you emotionally. Perform self-assessments periodically and determine if you need to adjust your mentoring network. Are your needs being met? Have you outgrown a mentoring relationship? Check out an example of a mentoring map at [https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/files/Mentoring%20Map%5B1%5D\(1\).pdf](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/files/Mentoring%20Map%5B1%5D(1).pdf).

Improving as a Mentee

Reflection and consideration regarding ways to improve your mentoring relationships are important. If you have already been in a mentoring relationship, you may have identified some areas where you can improve. For example, do you have regularly scheduled meetings with your degree program advisor? If not, come up with a goal to change that. One example is to set aside one hour per week to meet one-on-one with your degree program advisor. You may already have meeting times set up, but perhaps you could be more prepared and organized for your meetings. You could create a goal to prepare an agenda for your questions and topics, and plan ahead of time for when you meet with your mentor. Both mentor and mentee should come prepared with identified topics or areas for discussion. Be proactive in asking for and graciously accepting feedback. Ask for opportunities to expand your skill set (e.g., conference attendance, leadership roles, participation in department committees). Ask for challenging assignments (e.g., write a grant, review a paper, moderate a conference session, co-teach a class). Request opportunities to mentor or supervise others and demonstrate your preparation and motivation. In all interactions with your mentors, you should commit to professional behavior (e.g., punctuality, respecting your mentors' time, and following through on responsibilities). Mentoring relationships can be mutually beneficial partnerships when both mentor and mentee invest the time and effort.

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Appendix A: Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience Series

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: An Introduction to Mentorship

This publication is an overview that provides both faculty and students with a basic understanding of the benefits of mentoring and the creation of a mutually beneficial support system.

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: Tips for Mentors

This publication serves as a resource for mentors who are seeking tips and support as they work with their mentees in academia and beyond.

Better Mentorship, Better Student Experience: Tips for Mentees

This publication is designed to help mentees, particularly those in academia, to utilize their mentoring relationships to their full potential.